

Jan. 31, 2017

# Emerging impacts in using a systemic approach to enhance youth employment



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All blogs

## **HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation's experience of applying a systemic approach to labour markets.**

Currently, about 73 million youth worldwide are looking for work. Those who succeed in finding employment are typically hired into low-skilled, low-productivity positions, often in the informal sector. For those who don't find work, the impact of long-term unemployment can be devastating and have long-lasting impacts, putting social cohesion at threat.

In many instances, solutions proposed to tackle youth unemployment do not work or have a limited impact. This is largely because many development projects do things by themselves and therefore become part of the labour markets system. Projects in development need to be thought of as temporary 'think-tanks' rather than mere implementers to facilitate large-scale and durable impacts in youth employment. In addition, solutions proposed should focus on different dimensions of labour market systems – from supply (skills) to intermediation (labour market information and matching services) and demand (investment in job creation).

HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation has been trying to apply a systemic approach to labour markets in the Western Balkans, and have commissioned three case studies (see below) to share some of the lessons. We are hosting a BEAM [grab the mic webinar](#) on 23 February 2017 to discuss the case studies.

Here, I will share some lessons from two youth employment initiatives of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) in Albania (Risi) and Kosovo (EYE) that focus on intermediation, a key part of the labour markets system, alongside supply and demand sides.

## Why are so many young people unemployed?

In Albania, while official statistics place youth unemployment at around 30%, actual rates are much higher. And Kosovo has the lowest employment rates in Europe. There are a number of reasons for this. For example, there is an oversupply of certain skill profiles, and often the skills sought by employers are substantially undersupplied. However, even when jobseekers have the right skill-sets, potential employers seeking to fill jobs cannot identify them. There are two underlying reasons for this problem.

First, appropriate matching and job search services do not exist or perform poorly. Few employers use the matching services, they prefer to reach out to family and personal networks. Furthermore, there is a lack of support to job matching service providers for positioning, profiling and marketing through the development of demand-based and value adding services.

Second, the media has little content on employment, entrepreneurship or more generally on business sectors. The media focus is predominantly on entertainment and mainstream politics, and not unemployment even though this is a hot political and social topic. One reason is that the media sector lacks the know-how or skills to report on labour market information in a way that is profitable.

## Proposed solutions

The EYE Kosovo project facilitated a new business model for the job matching service through marketing and new value-added services. It targeted commercially sustainable operations within the few promising private job-matching firms (KosovaJob and PortalPune). They were selected through analysis of all existing market players, a concept note and a formal application with a business plan. The project and the two online portal providers collaborated to ensure job matching services became a potential for growth and the main channels for young people to access information about job vacancies.

EYE Kosovo supported the providers by increasing awareness among private sector employers on the value of the job-matching services. The key to the success of the new business model was to ensure the willingness of private sector employers to pay for such services. The project shared the experiences and evidence with other potential providers to stimulate expansion of the market, which had limited scale through more service providers. Although the market was 'thin', the analysis and

design indicated that it was large enough to sustain a few players in a competitive environment in terms of number of users (job seekers and employers). The project monitored additional opportunities and stimulated further actions; it also monitored and documented any independent initiatives by other providers without its support.

RisiAlbania intervened for changing the way the mass media system operates; it did not use the media as a tool, nor did it sponsor or pay for media airtime and space to deliver information. The ambition for media system change was to embed employment in the mainstream media with programme line-ups, reporting and online portals. RisiAlbania highlighted the opportunity for the media to develop employment-focused content (programmes, publications and online platforms) and then open competitive calls for proposals for new innovative media products. The winning proposals would receive cost sharing and capacity building support to pilot and launch the new media products. The aim was to reduce entry barriers to launching new content approaches while avoiding any reliance on finance from the project. The intervention since 2014 has had six main stages – ranging from initial media sector research and baseline data collection to awareness raising and call for proposals; proposal development; support to a pilot season (season 1); awareness raising for season 2; and a second round of support to media products

## What was achieved?

On scale and sustainability, the two projects have had positive results. The EYE Kosovo study shows that the job matching service intervention addressed the underlying constraints. There are now nine job matching service providers compared to three in 2012, and the job matching service market continues to grow and diversify.

The scope of media content stimulated by RisiAlbania's work is substantial. Initial indicators show strong signs of sustainability. Three key factors influence the sustainability of media products: popularity of the content and therefore audience levels; profitability and revenue generation; and buy-in and ownership among the production and most importantly the management of media houses. There is strong evidence that a good proportion of the media products will continue after the intervention ceases and that interest from media professionals is likely to result in employment related issues being mainstreamed into new programmes and future content.

The results of the two projects show that applying a systemic approach to the labour markets system works. Specifically, the projects designed the interventions in labour markets intermediation to shift the behaviour and practices of players such that the expected changes last beyond the lifespans of the projects.

To find out more about applying a systemic approach to labour markets, please [join the webinar](#) on 23 February 2017 or read the case studies on [EYE Kosovo](#) and [RisiAlbania](#).

- [BEAM Programme Index: EYE: Enhancing Youth Employment](#)
- [BEAM Programme Index: Risi Albania](#)

Printed from <https://beamexchange.org/community/blogs/2017/1/31/emerging-impacts-using-systemic-approach-enhance-youth-unemployment/> on 04/26/2024 at 13:26