

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

Mid-term evaluation of the project “Aligning education and training with labour market needs – ALLED Phase II”

Country: Kosovo

EU Contract Number: IPA/2018/402-911

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I. Executive Summary

Background and context

The purpose of this mid-term evaluation was to review content and activity to date, gather stakeholder perspectives and establish clear indications towards evidence-based conclusions and identified lessons learned.

The overall objective of ALLED2 is to reduce poverty through increased labour market participation and improved employability for the population in Kosovo, by placing the focus on strengthening the quality and relevance of education and training programmes for the labour market and supporting adaptation of the legislative context to drive increased employability. A comprehensive range of actions with associated indicators sit beneath five expected results, targeting strategic change alongside capacity building and practical implementation and using an innovative triple helix-based approach to connect public sector, business and academia.

ALLED2 Expected Results	
ERI	Study programmes in public HEIs serve as a competence hub for the industry and VET: curricula, diploma supplement and faculty management are enhanced, labour market-relevant and lead to increased employability
ER2	Professional qualifications and occupational standards meet NQF criteria for validation, Quality Assurance (QA) arrangements are further improved and are elaborated at the policy level and the link to progression pathways between HE and VET is defined
ER3	Vocational Education Training (VET) schools and Vocational Training Centers (VTCs) offer qualitative programmes based on Labour Market Needs, including Training of Trainers (ToT), sustainable quality assurance mechanisms and provision of relevant equipment.
ER4	Education and training system related governance procedures support the alignment of education and training with labour market needs
ER5	The link between VET and business sector is more structured; certain planning tools for VET are sustainably in place and incentives identified and piloted

Kosovo faces pervasive and significant educational challenges amid ongoing reforms of the education and training system. Successive reports by international bodies have highlighted the huge gap between labour market needs and the knowledge and skills acquired through both higher education (HE) and vocational education and training (VET), alongside a lack of effective infrastructure to inform and support change. During the COVID19 pandemic, the labour market situation in Kosovo has worsened¹ and political instability negatively impacted on effective responses to these and other issues at national level. ALLED2 has had to flex in the face of these rapidly changing circumstances, pivoting to place higher focus on supporting digitalisation while adapting to online engagement with stakeholders and prioritising actions in light of national and international restrictions.

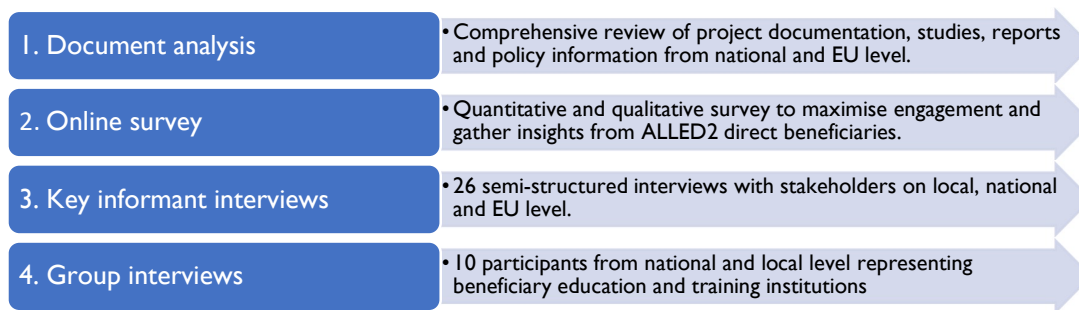
It is a complex project, working within a complex environment with limited existing infrastructure and issues of capacity, with direct engagement to a high number of stakeholders. The ambition and vision within ALLED2 are both highly relevant and vitally needed in the

¹ Kosovo Education, Training and Employment Developments 2020, European Training Foundation <https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document/Country%20Fiche%202020%20Kosovo%20Education%20Training%20and%20Employment%20Developments.pdf>

Kosovo context, with real potential of creating tangible and recognisable impact on the education and training ecosystem.

Methodology

The methodology is both formative and summative, based on established OECD-DAC principles of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and coherence with ADA evaluation guidelines and followed a three-phase road-map of inception, data collection and analysis. To produce this report, four channels of data collection were used:



In total, 75 stakeholders (22 female, 51 male and 2 preferred not to share the information) responded to the invitation by the evaluation team to participate in the evaluation. The evaluation respondents represented the following stakeholder groups: VET schools, VTCs, and MEDs on local level; national institutions (MESTI, NQA, KAA); participants in the occupational standards interventions; business support organizations; international experts engaged in project interventions; ALLED2 project team; project donor representatives; other VET related projects in Kosovo.

The evaluation team conducted the evaluation process in Covid-19 time as the main limitation related to the implementation of the mid-term evaluation. The original timeline for the field work envisioned most of the activities to be completed by early June was delayed, and to keep the envisioned deadline for completing the evaluation process as in the TOR, the working days for field work were significantly reduced. The month of June in Kosovo is the time when the school year concludes, meaning busy period for the evaluation respondents. The evaluation team tried to overcome these risks by accommodating the requirements from the respondents to use the most convenient method for data collection. Focus groups as method were canceled due to participation of evaluation respondents in other methods of data collection, but also because of non-responsiveness of invited participants.

Findings

The views shared through the evaluation are in the majority very positive about the implementation and results of ALLED2, with credit given to the project team who have implemented an ambitious work plan with enthusiasm and commitment, illustrating adaptability, innovative approaches, good practice approaches to stakeholder engagement at all levels and strong commitment to seeking solutions to emerging challenges.

Relevance:

ALLED2 is highly relevant to the Kosovo context, with expected results and sub-activities that are both ambitious and practical. The project is well-defined with clear stakeholder audiences and target actions that can have the potential to create impact at the strategic and implementation levels. The challenge emerges when the project is seen as a whole, which shows a huge scope seeking to address multiple challenges within the Kosovo education and training ecosystem. It is working in 17 municipalities, across three national government institutions² with multiple direct beneficiaries at local and national level, through areas of actions seeking impact across both VET and HE environments. Despite this large scope, the project team are praised for their commitment and openness to collaboration, and for the high-quality approach to stakeholder engagement at all levels. Engagement and consultation is seen as valued and meaningful, with clearly illustrated use of stakeholder inputs into the final design of actions.

Findings:
1. ALLED2 objectives are highly relevant and valid for Kosovo, as the existing and new relevant strategic documents highlights the need for continuous interventions to improve the quality of education including the vocational education and training
2. Stakeholders involved in ALLED2 interventions confirm the relevance of the project for Kosovo
3. ALLED2 interventions have been consistent with the original project documents
4. The lack of measurable indicators and associated targets creates difficulties in assessing the contribution toward Kosovo strategic development (also discussed in Finding 7)
5. ALLED2 is practicing regular consultation of all relevant stakeholders providing a platform for everyone to provide input and feedback on the processes and solutions
6. ALLED2 offered innovative solutions to beneficiaries by developing tools, e-platforms that provide regular and updated data to be used for planning purposes and developing strategic national documents

Effectiveness:

Overall, the effectiveness of ALLED2 is good. The challenges of adapting to the COVID19 pandemic are apparent in the project implementation with a number of actions delayed or not initiated, and this is compounded by four changes of government since March 2020. However, the programme has risen to the challenge of responding to new circumstances by adapting to online engagement with stakeholders and working hard to maintain communication with technical colleagues across government ministries and agencies. There is a clear need for a no-cost extension to mitigate the risk of objectives not being fully achieved and to support efforts towards sustainability of results.

Findings:
7. ALLED2 Results Matrix is lacking performance indicators and targets that allow it to monitor progress against project objectives and results
8. Almost one third of ALLED2 planned activities remain at an early stage or are yet to be initiated raising concern over the likely achievement of results within the current project lifetime
9. ALLED2 positive relationship with the stakeholders enhances the likeliness of achieving the results and objectives
10. ALLED2 proactively pursues the participation of wide range of stakeholders enhancing the prospects for achievement of the results

² Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI) and former Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (MLSW), respectively Employment Agency of the Republic of Kosovo (EARK)

11. Covid-19 pandemic influenced the postponement of interventions thus extending the time needed for achieving the results
12. ALLED2 interventions related to higher education are directed toward providing support that will have benefits for the vocational education and training
13. The interventions in HE are more broad related to priorities that need to be addressed in VET
14. ALLED2 engages relevant stakeholders in the interventions and in the consultation processes in different forms
15. Private sector engagement is mostly visible through the collaboration with KCC

Efficiency:

Delays to implementation and challenges in project design mean that efficiency has been difficult to fully achieve, despite positive efforts by the project team and feedback from stakeholders. These delays have been caused by COVID19 and successive changes of government resulting in decision-making bottlenecks. The team has made efforts to push through delays, to mitigate the complexity of the project by defining sub-activities and to communicate effectively with the necessary stakeholders and direct beneficiaries involved. However, there is a lack of clarity on measurable targets attached to the indicators within the logical framework matrix and work is needed to develop the additional detail needed to map progress towards results.

Findings:
16. Large number of activities combined with numerous targeted stakeholders slow down the dynamic of implementation
17. Covid-19 pandemic and government changes due to early elections affected the efficiency of project implementation

Sustainability:

Already at the mid-term stage, the results produced are well-regarded. However, there are significant concerns about the sustainability of strategic actions developed by ALLED2 after the project lifetime. Continued efforts are needed to seek clear roadmaps towards sustainability for key actions, and to support the new government in efforts to map and coordinate donor interventions towards defined priorities. A follow-up project, ALLED3, is advocated by diverse stakeholders, with the emphasis on a narrower focus on vocational education and training to target efforts and impact towards a smaller number of defined outcomes, such as the recently developed VET financial funding formula where potential has been well-recognised through this MTE.

Findings:
18. Identification of partner institutions and their involvement in the development of the tools contributed to opening the process of institutionalization of ALLED2 tools
19. Support given to the VET schools regarding the self-assessment process strengthen the capacities of the schools and increase the possibility for sustainability
20. Wide consultation processes created by ALLED2 increases the potential for lasting benefits from ALLED2 interventions
21. Limited interest of key government institutions jeopardizes the long-term contribution of ALLED2 interventions toward the ownership of the achievements

Coherence:

As with the high level of relevance of the ALLED2 programme of actions, the coherence to local, national and EU policy, strategies and priorities is clearly seen. Ongoing efforts are needed to maintain this, particularly in light of key national strategies being revised in the coming period.

Findings:
22. ALLED2 is coherent with Government objectives and national frameworks and policies
23. ALLED2 is complementary with EU policies and to some extent with other projects as the risk of overlapping is present due to lack of coordination

Conclusions:

Section 6 of the document brings together these findings into 11 conclusions, and the reference to the OECD-DAC criteria is highlighted in section 6 of the document.

1. ALLED2 strategic objectives identified at the concept stage remain relevant and valid.
2. There are concerns over the significantly large scope of the ALLED2 interventions.
3. Excellence in stakeholder engagement has enhanced the relevance of ALLED2 by directly impacting on project implementation and potential to achieve results.
4. Urgent work is needed to address a lack of measurable project indicators impacting on clear understanding of progress and impact.
5. Much credit for practical and innovative adaptations to project implementation in response to the COVID19 pandemic and the continued positive engagement with stakeholders at all levels lies with the constructiveness and adaptability of the project team and well-informed support from the coordination office in Kosovo.
6. More work is needed to support effective private-sector engagement.
7. There is strong coherence between ALLED2 and EU policy priorities and latest trends, evidenced within project actions and supported by commissioned studies and research.
8. Continued collaboration with government actors can ensure continued relevance and build stronger potential for sustainability.
9. There is a role for ALLED2 to support national efforts to map practical donor interventions and tools.
10. High quality tools and engagement channels have been developed in collaboration with key stakeholders in Kosovo, but their sustainability depends on the ability for institutional actors in Kosovo to integrate, sustain and maintain what has been developed through ALLED2.
11. There is strong support for a follow-up project to ALLED2.

The recommendations resulting from these conclusions address three different contexts:

Operational recommendations

1. Maintain close collaboration with government to ensure relevance with emerging government policy priorities and revised national strategies (Target group: PIU working with government institutions)
2. Update the Logical Framework Matrix to include linkages between results and measurable targets for relevant indicators. (Target group: PIU working with Coordination Office and Head Office)
3. Prioritise the roll-out of education and learning equipment for schools and centres (Target group: PIU working with VET institutions)

4. Continue integration of career guidance support into adapted VET curricula and support with capacity building at school level (Target group: PIU)
5. Enhance visibility and sustainability by adapting selected ALLED2 tools as school management tools at local level (Target group: PIU working with VET Schools)
6. Expand use of ALLED2 online engagement including through the Community of Practice (CoP)(Target group: PIU)
7. Use the ALLED2 CoP to actively signpost teachers to engage in wider European networks related to VET and higher education (Target group: PIU)
8. Review future needs for occupational profiles in light of COVID19 and updated knowledge gained through ALLED2 Barometers (Target group: PIU working with KCC and VET schools)
9. Extend activities to further engage private sector actors (Target group: PIU working with KCC and wider business networks)

Strategic recommendations

10. For the approval of a non-cost 12-month extension for ALLED2 to mitigate COVID19 delays and increase human resource allocation for remainder of project (Target group: ADA, European Commission)
11. Support government-led mapping and coordination of donor interventions (Target group: PIU, ADA, MESTI, Wider government departments)
12. Optimise the sustainability potential of ALLED2 actions and tools (Target group: PIU, ADA, MESTI, MSLW, EARK, KCC, Others)

ALLED 3 recommendations

13. Narrow the scope of interventions in future projects to focus resources and sharpen results (Target group: ADA)
14. Place future priority on identifying, mainstreaming and scaling existing good practices and results (Target group: ADA)