

Final Report

“Communication Expert to Support the Development of Communication Platform for the Public Employment Service, Albania”

Reference number:039-018

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BACKGROUND

Employment and Social Affairs Platform (ESAP)

The *Employment and Social Affairs Platform* (ESAP) is a regional project financed by the European Commission and jointly implemented by RCC and ILO in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo¹, Montenegro, Serbia and The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The project, which began its implementation in 2016 and lasts for 3 years, aims to strengthen regional cooperation and institutional capacities of national administrations, employers' and workers' organisations, enabling them to develop and effectively implement labour market and social policy reforms in their EU enlargement process.

Within this overall objective, the ESAP project provides technical assistance to support national processes related to the preparation, monitoring and follow up of national employment, labour market and social affairs strategies, action plans and/or measures. Ministries of Labour and Public Employment Services are the main beneficiaries of this assistance.

The Albanian Public Employment Service has recognised the need to enhance its communication and visibility efforts in order to better reach out to major target groups and ensure that its programmes are well-known and utilised. Better strategic communication involves informing the general public about new service features, improving service accessibility for the target groups and increasing the user pool, improving the recognisability of work and the role played by PES and improving the image of PES among beneficiaries and the general public.

The National Employment Service (NES)

The National Employment Service (NES) is an autonomous public service, with the status of central state administration. It operates through a network of employment institutions and Regional Directorates for Vocational Training.

The National Employment Service is led by the Director General, who has Deputy Director and relevant departments such as the Department of Employment and Immigration Services, Department of Programmes and Integration in the Labour Market, Department of Labor Market Information and Information Technology and the Support Services Department.

At the national level, there are 12 Regional Employment Directorates and 24 Local Employment Offices that provide services for jobseekers and employers, including the provision of information on vacancies; mediation and employment counseling and guidance to employment and profession.

On the other hand, through the Vocational Training Directorates, the NES offers short-term (up to 2 years) training in the occupations required by the labor market, through various vocational training courses (vocational training and retraining). In total, there are 10 Directorate for Vocational Training, within which these activities are held, while the provision of training courses in these centers is free of charge.

¹ *This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence*

Employment in Albania is still considered a serious challenge. According to INSTAT in the second quarter of 2018, the employment rate of the population aged 15-64 was 59.2%. According to INSTAT data, in this quarter, the number of employees grew by 3.3% compared to the previous year. In terms of quarterly data, compared to the first quarter of 2018, employment increased by 0.1%. This is a challenge at the national level, and besides NES, the Prime Minister's Office, relevant ministries and other relevant institutions at the national level deal with that.

On the other hand, the National Employment Service faces specific challenges within its activities. From the point of view of communication with stakeholders, the main challenges are the low use of services by employers, where only 30% of active businesses are registered in the NES and the low use of services by jobseekers, where only about 35% of unemployed use services provided by the Labor Force Survey.

In dealing with most of these challenges, communication and promotion have been identified as crucial elements. But even in this area, NES faces challenges that need to be overcome in order to increase the public relations efficiency as a useful tool in this regard.

PURPOSE

The objective of the consultancy was to support the Public Employment Service of Albania in developing a communication platform in order to increase the visibility of the work of Public Employment Service, employment offices and vocational training centres among key stakeholders and the general public in Albania.

OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE OF THE ASSIGNMENT

The overall objective of this assignment was to support the Albanian PES with expertise that will help develop the communication platform (communication strategy and action plan), in order to increase the visibility of the work of Public Employment Service, employment offices and vocational training centres in Albania.

Summary of Specific Tasks

In order to achieve the above objective, the main task of the communication specialist was to support the *Albanian PES* in the following activities:

- Review the PES communication procedures at all levels under the applicable legal basis. Prepare a communication platform and an action plan for 2018-2019 in coordination with PES staff at all levels;
- Review all printed materials, communication products produced by PES and other donors and ensure that they comply with the communication platform;
- Draft and group the communication materials according to various communication channels (social media, newsletters, PES website) in accordance with the communication platform;
- Train the Public Relations Specialist of PES on how to manage information on the website shkp.gov.al and how to interact with the media in Albania;
- Conduct field trips to meet beneficiaries in order to gather compelling visual and written content (interviews, pictures and video footage) for a clear presentation of PES activities at all levels.

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

Public Relations

Public Relations is considered as one of the main activities of NES. Although not mentioned as an activity by itself, communication is clearly a follow-up activity and important for the activities defined in Article 6/1 of this Law, namely: Information on vacancies, employment mediation and counselling and job and profession orientation. All these activities involve individual communication with stakeholders, but mass communication can also significantly contribute to increasing their efficiency.

Public Relations at the National Employment Service are organised within the Directorate for Information, Labour Market and Informatisation, where the PR Unit is managed by only one person who, under the guidance of the department director, works on the implementation of all the activities that NES has in this area.

For the moment, communication with the media is mainly conducted through the Ministry of Finance or the Office of the Prime Minister. According to a public relations specialist, this is the situation, as the Ministry and Prime Minister have a much greater chance of attracting media attention.

At the managerial level, the Deputy Director is a person who communicates with the media, but this communication is too rare.

The issues that needed to be addressed in this regard were as follows: Increase the intensity of direct communication with the media, the lack of a protocol and internal procedures for media communication, the lack of a dedicated person who would be able to speak in front of the camera when needed on behalf of PES, the knowledge and coordination skills of the public relations specialist in this regard and methods to promote NES activity in the media by producing articles that are also interesting to the public.

Result

In order to address the above-mentioned issues, the communication expert has *reviewed all PES communication procedures at all levels in accordance with the applicable legal basis*. Following this, the expert *conducted field trips to meet beneficiaries in order to gather compelling visual and written content (interviews, pictures and video footage) for a clear presentation of PES activities at all levels*. In addition, the expert had meetings with PES staff at the central level.

Based on the findings from these activities, and based on the professional methodology, the expert developed a communication platform and an action plan for 2018-2019 in coordination with PES staff at all levels, which were approved by the management of Public Employment Services in Albania.

During the field visits and meeting at the central level, the expert also collected and reviewed *all printed materials, communication products produced by PES and other donors*. He identified that all current materials do not include the logo of PES and other necessary elements. It has also been identified that there is a need for visibility guidelines for PES. Therefore, this topic has been addressed as part of the *communication platform in order to ensure that in the future all materials and communication products produced by PES are in line with the communication platform*.

Social media and web presence of NES

The NES has launched the **Facebook page** at the organisation level, and also a significant number of Regional Directorates and Local Employment Offices have Facebook pages. The NES home page has 18,000 followers and on average is visited three times a day by various persons via NES website. Contact may be a search for information on how to find a job, or sometimes complaints about the staff at the central, regional or local level.

At the moment, at least three posts per week are posted on the page of newly recruited employees thanks to the employment services provided by NES. The posts include photos of the employee and a short text.

So far, the NES has not used the sponsoring method, which is done through payment, to raise the visibility of posts. So far, it has used the organic reach method only. From time to time, videos are also posted on the website that are mainly produced by the Ministry or the Prime Minister's Office.

The issues that needed to be addressed in this regard were as follows: quality of photos in posts, the content of accompanying texts in order to increase the attractiveness, possibility of posting more videos, creating a management protocol that would enable much more strategic coordination between the main page and the pages of Regional Directorates and Local Employment Offices, the possibility of financial sponsorship of certain posts and efficient use of all available resources (including 433 employees) to reach as many viewers through FB mail.

The National Employment Service communicates through two different **websites**. The first (shk.gov.al) has an informative and promotional character and communicates institutional information and information of a legal and administrative nature. This site works on the word press platform. The second (puna.gov.al) is an interface of employment services and serves as a portal for registration and coordination of jobseekers and employers and has more practical and technical dedication.

In the context of the web site, a few years ago a system was created to stimulate a direct interaction between jobseekers and employers.

At the time of writing this report, the NES is at the stage of outlining the elements to be included, in the initial stage of the analysis of the situation, where a field specialist is working on compiling this analysis and identifying the detailed needs.

The issues that needed to be addressed in this regard were as follows: pages are static and should be much more dynamic, *availability of* information on the labour market and increased visibility of this information and increased attractiveness of pages for visitors and stakeholders.

Result

In order to address the above-mentioned issues, the expert provided a clear guidance through the communication platform and other documents that were produced as part of this mission for drafting and grouping communication materials through various communication channels (social media, newsletters, PES website) in accordance with the communication platform;

In addition, the expert has produced a communication manual for managing social media and web content which was submitted along with other materials, and provided a basic guidance and training to the Public Relations expert on how to follow the guidance from this manual and on how to manage information on the website shk.gov.al and PES Facebook pages.

Employment Fairs

Until last year, a state-level employment fair was organised in Tirana. This fair was organised at the end of March and lasted for three days. This year 12 fairs were planned in 12 regions of Albania. Due to various reasons, a total of 10 fairs have been organised. At the request of the Prime Minister, the fairs were organised within the framework and at the time of government meetings, so it would be easier logistically for the Prime Minister to attend these fairs. Participation was free for employers as well as for job seekers, including billboards and other logistical needs. Fairs were not accompanied by professional campaigns involving channels and main means of communication. Being an important communication tool for the PES, the expert, in agreement with the PES management decided to treat fairs as a separate activity within this mission.

The issues that needed to be addressed in this regard were as follows: the lack of a professional information campaign, lack of a promotional campaign, lack of a unique visual identity for communication, for all fairs, low level of involvement of the central level in fairs promotion activities.

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Results

In order to address the above-mentioned issues, the expert has drafted a separate communication platform and action plan for the promotional campaign of the fairs. The expert has also developed a draft Terms of Reference for contracting additional services proposed on the communication platform for fairs. This ToR is also intended to serve as a template for contracting communication services for other campaigns that are planned to be implemented in accordance with the Communication Platform.

CONCLUSION

As a result of the activities undertaken within this mission, the expert provided the following products and services

- Communication platform and action plan of the PES for 2018-2019
- Manual for managing Social Media and Web Presence and additional support(training) for reading and understanding the guidance from the manual and interacting and utilising social media
- Communication Platform and Action Plan for a campaign for promotion of Employment Fairs
- Guidance on making the promotional materials in line with the brand book and communication platform

All activities recommended in the Communication Platform must begin and end in 2019. Therefore, as a result of these activities, at the end of 2019, a considerable number of citizens must be informed that the National Employment Service is the main address for mediating employment in Albania. The first quarter of 2019 perhaps will be the most important period regarding the implementation of the communication platform and other activities proposed as part of this mission. This is because, the funds needed for implementation of activities included in the platform and detailed preparations for implementation of these activities, must be finalised during this first quarter.

Therefore, the preparatory actions for the implementation of activities from the Communication Platform should start as soon as possible. On the other hand, the Communication Platform and other activities provide an opportunity of partial implementation. Therefore, if there is a lack of funds for full implementation of the activities, then the NES can implement only those that are affordable in terms of funds and human resources. In this way, the substance of the idea will not be lost, but the NES will be able to communicate and raise awareness of a lesser number of citizens.