

MAKE IT WORK

Quality Processes within the Service Triangle of Active Labour Market Policies

Final Report – Findings
and Policy Recommendations

GEWAK • Hochschule Fulda •
IWAK – Institute for Economics, Labour and Culture,
Goethe-University Frankfurt

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The most important points in brief

- 1 The successful implementation of an active labour market policy (ALMP) under the German Social Code, Book II (SGB II, basic income benefits for adults at working age and their families), involves the reliable cooperation of Jobcenters, private providers of training and employment services (third party actors), and benefit recipients, who each see themselves as part of a community of responsibility, despite their different roles and legal statuses.
- 2 An open, transparent, and results-oriented communication culture forms the basis of this collaboration. It requires mutual transparency regarding goals, commitment to the processes of coordination at all levels, and a shared responsibility for results and impacts.
- 3 Cooperative attitudes and collaboration-oriented professional self-conceptions do not arise by themselves, but have to be developed through active leadership and secured by appropriate temporal, personnel and organizational parameters.
- 4 Clear understandings of roles and responsibilities within and between organizations, as well as between beneficiaries and service providers, increase transparency and knowledge flow, reduce friction, and strengthen the confidence of all involved.
- 5 Measures of Active Labour Market Policies (ALMP) under SGB II should be conceived as a continuous chain of services – from initial consultation through the implementation and execution of ALMP-measures to an appropriate graduate management. The goal is to create a seamless workflow with defined tasks, smooth transitions, structured communication channels, and continuous learning loops.
- 6 Sustainable improvement of collaboration quality requires institutionalized dialogue and stable communication formats, as well as inter- and intra-organizational coordination of cooperation among all participants.
- 7 The service triangle of ALMP operates within a framework of local and regional networks with partners in companies, economic institutions, social service providers, civil society organizations, and public administrations, forming an ecosystem of regional labour market policy. This system requires a framework of good governance and reliable political support.
- 8 Within its area of responsibility, the state of Hesse is recommended to support and accompany the shaping of the ALMP-service-process and to include cooperation, dialogue and the idea of shared responsibilities, for example in funding decisions, reporting requirements and planning discussions, in order to sustainably improve the quality and effectiveness of employment promotion.

1

Introduction

Public employment Services, Jobcenters, and private providers of employment service face, like all public administrations, the challenge of managing a threefold transformation of the economy and society: the ecological transformation, the digital transformation, and what can be described as the social transformation of society. This encompasses migration, the pluralization of life situations and lifestyles, and, not least, demographic change, which is already clearly evident in both the economy and the administrative bodies themselves. All of this requires swift and proactive action, continuous development of the service portfolios of public administrations, the adaptation of service formats, and a significantly more systemic and interconnected way of thinking and working compared to traditional bureaucratic models. Cooperation between different administrative bodies, and especially close collaboration with private service providers and civil society organizations, are becoming increasingly important in an environment characterized by rapid and often turbulent change, in order to pool expertise, accelerate processes, and make services more efficient and effective. The professionalism and attitude of employees, managers, and decision-makers are, as relevant research has repeatedly emphasized, critical success factors for the effective design of services in the labour market. A “post-bureaucratic” setting for the production of public services requires, in addition to the still essential skills of correctly applying the law and treating citizens as customers with respect, a particular openness to innovation and to the continuous development of service products. Furthermore, it requires a willingness to engage in cooperative problem-solving across organizational boundaries – not just in an ad-

hoc or situational mode, but within a long-term, strategic perspective.

The state of Hesse has for a long time played a particularly active role in the area of labour market promotion – as it is responsible for the work of the municipal providers of the SGB II (zkt), which constitute a particularly high proportion of Jobcenters in Hesse, and with a number of programmes for labour market promotion, training and qualification in the regions, which place particular emphasis on innovative approaches and holistic support for the target groups.

Active labour market policy (ALMP) and the practices of service-provision within the framework of minimum income support for job seekers (SGB II) have faced a series of challenges in quick succession over the past five to six years. The COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences necessitated rapid adjustments of the Jobcenters’ service model and the deployment of new, digital communication channels with clients and partners, as well as new formats of services and new skills for Jobcenter staff and providers of activation measures. The Russian war against Ukraine triggered a large influx of refugees to Germany and a surge of intakes at the Jobcenters (SGB II), which severely strained their capacities. The reform of SGB II, which came into effect in two stages in 2023 with the introduction of the basic citizens’ income (“Bürgergeld”) by the coalition government of the parties of SPD, the Greens, and the FDP, had a substantial impact on the practical implementation of the law in the regions. In particular, the significant reversal of regulations sanctioning violations of the duty to cooperate by employable benefit recipients (eLb)

has made the question of the need for new approaches in advisory practice-placing greater emphasis on strengthening their intrinsic motivation—more urgent.

However, the new federal government consisting of the CDU, SPD and CSU, which came into office at the beginning of 2025, has announced to reform the SGB II again, to reverse some of the innovations of the citizens’ basic income reform and to make further changes – this too with foreseeable far-reaching effects on the implementation of the SGB II.

The labour market outlook has become gloomy due to the downturn caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, and the slowing growth of the German economy in the aftermath of the pandemic. The number of job vacancies declined, and the number of unemployed rose noticeably again after a long period of decline.

In this situation, the Jobcenters’ work was further restricted by a reduction of the budgets for ALMP under the SGB II.

At the same time, problems within the service system of the SGB II were also apparent. Services aimed at bringing benefit recipients into employment declined significantly at times. Furthermore, it was also observed that support programmes were often underutilized and existing (limited) budgets were not being fully used up.

Against this background, it was only logical that the State Ministry for Labour, Integration, Youth and Social Affairs of Hesse, has initiated considerations for the development and further optimization of ALMP-programmes at the regional level.

For these activities, the state envisioned a conceptual framework, for what it labelled as “Arbeitsmarktpolitisches Dreieck” (service triangle of ALMP) with particular emphasis on a partnership-based strategy. This triangle connects Jobcenters, federal agencies of public employment services (PES), and municipalities, with private providers of employment services (and complementary social services), as agents of implementation of ALMP-measures, and—last but not least—the target groups of the measures, not only as consumers of services but as active co-producers of their outcomes. Effective cooperation among the stakeholders in this triangle is considered a crucial prerequisite for the success of regional ALMP under German Social Code, Book II (SGB II), and beyond.

Within the framework of the programme “Impulse der Arbeitsmarktpolitik” (IdeA, Initiatives for Labour Market Policies), the state of Hesse initiated the research and transfer project “Make it Work: Quality Processes in the Service triangle of ALMP” to take stock of the current situation as well as to develop ideas for further improving the effectiveness of cooperation among the actors. The Institute for Economics, Labour and Culture at Goethe University Frankfurt (IWAK), Fulda University of Applied Sciences, and the Society for Economics, Labour and Culture (GEWAK) formed a consortium to implement this project in three coordinated sub-projects, each focusing on a specific topic within the thematic range of the project.

The project aimed, on the one hand, at gaining a better understanding of the dynamics and quality of relationships within the service triangle, to identify challenges and key problems,

and to find starting points for improvements. On the other hand, the project was intended to initiate a dialogue among stakeholders during its implementation, to present interim findings for discussion, and to develop shared elements of a future strategy for regional labour market promotion in Hesse. This was achieved through a mix of various qualitative social research methods and different dialogue formats.

The focus was

- the reconstruction and analysis of the attitudes of the various stakeholders in this triangular constellation at the different organizational levels,
- the processes of preparing and implementing ALMP-measures,
- the communication between the actors in the labour market policy triangle and the blockages and communication problems that may be associated with it.

Finally, recommendations for the further development of practice were derived from the findings. These recommendations are based on the process steps involved in implementing ALMP-measures at agencies commissioned by Jobcenters, as well as on the organizational levels and those that frame these processes. The recommendations address both the organizational level—that is, leadership, management, and governance—and the operational level of counselling and support, particularly attitudes, professional skills, and communication competence.

The attitudes and perspectives of the actors involved in service triangle during the study period, from approximately May 2024 to

autumn 2025, were shaped by structural and technical issues, but also by current developments in the area of the German Social Code, Book II (SGB II). These included the reform of the “Citizen’s Income”, the transfer of responsibilities for vocational training to the SGB III legal framework and the employment agencies (Arbeitsagenturen), the critical discussions surrounding the budgets of Jobcenters, and the intense public debates about the appropriate balance between supportive and demanding elements in a system of activating basic income support. A spectrum of assessments emerged, along with a differentiated, and in some cases quite critical, evaluation of the recent reform steps in SGB II from a practical perspective. However, the surveys and discussions with stakeholders also made it clear that, beyond the current reform debates and implementation problems within the German Social Code, Book II (SGB II), there is a persistent set of structural challenges that are affected, albeit gradually, but not fundamentally, by the discussions and shifts in social policy and legal frameworks. The central question is how to develop and sustainably establish best practices within the structural tension between mass administration and quality counselling, between activation and holistic support, between welfare and employment promotion, and the oft-cited poles of support and demand of activating welfare policies (“Fördern und Fordern”). This also concerns the resilience of a system that, in a rapidly changing economic and regulatory environment, must develop and stabilize a robust professional approach with a long-term perspective, one that is context-sensitive and situationally responsive. Sustainable cooperative relationships within a regional “ecosystem” are of paramount importance in

this regard. Therefore we can speak of a transition to a “relational labour market policy” that organizes itself beyond the silo thinking of the classical understanding of administration and brings co-productive forms of problem-solving to the center of professional self-understanding.

The authors of this project report would like to thank all participants: the staff and managers of the Jobcenters and sponsoring organizations, the experts on the project’s sounding board, and, last but not least, the job seekers participating in the measures, who took part in interviews and dialogue forums, for their contributions, their expert comments, suggestions, and ideas. Thanks are also due, of course, to the Hessian Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration (HMSI) and its experts for the trust placed in the project consortium through this funding, as well as for their highly competent support throughout the project.

2

Results of the three sub-projects

2.1. Cooperation in the service triangle of ALMP: Attitudes, stances, communication – findings of GEWAK

2.1.1. Methodological Approach

In order to capture the complexity of the research field “service triangle of ALMP” as effectively as possible within the framework of the available personnel and material resources, a mix of methods was chosen, consisting of various interview formats as well as data and document analyses.

The analysis of secondary statistical data on active labour market promotion within the framework of the German Social Code, Book II (SGB II), served to elucidate the labour market policy situation as well as current developments and structures in the market for labour market services (see Engler/Schulze-Böing 2024, pp. 3-16). Two online questionnaires, one addressed to the managers of Jobcenters and the other to service providers, provided an initial overview of the current problem situation

at the start of the project from the perspective of the stakeholders, as well as the collection of structural data on cooperation within the field of study (Engler/Schulze-Böing 2024, pp. 23-28 and 45-53). The results of the online surveys were used to prepare the structures of the interviews for the focus group interviews.

The semi-structured focus group interviews, conducted with homogeneous group compositions (managers of Jobcenters and service providers, middle management staff of Jobcenters, operational specialists from Jobcenters and service providers, and jobseekers/participants in training programmes), served to capture experiences and perspectives on problems from the respective viewpoints of the stakeholders within the service triangle. Key findings of the interviews are presented in sections 2.1.2 to 2.1.3.

Document analyses and supplementary participant observations provided partial insights into the real process of the business of implementing ALMP-measures and thus also served to a certain extent to validate the findings from the focus group interviews (Section 2.1.4).

The following overview provides a summary of the research instruments used in the GEWAK sub-project.



Figure 1

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Data basis and collection methods
Inventory and process analysis, own illustration

2.1.2. Self-Images and Role Perceptions in the Service Triangle

How do our interviewees define their roles and positions in the field of cooperation? The group interviews we conducted as part of our project with managers and operational staff of Jobcenters and providers, as well as with employable benefit recipients under SGB II (eLb), reveal the different perspectives and understandings of roles held by the participants.

Managers and operational staff of the Jobcenters

In the positioning of Jobcenters and their employees within the service triangle of ALMP, tensions and dilemmas are evident in their relationship with the jobseekers, inherent in the nature of the specific services offered by the basic income support system. On the one hand, there is the dilemma between support and control, a characteristic of social work

since its inception (Böhnisch/Lösch 1979; Bähr 2023, pp. 168-169). On the other hand, there is the tension specific to the SGB II system between a focus on participation and placement. The interviewed managers clearly recognize that a Jobcenter, as a “social welfare agency,” is responsible not only for providing labour market services in a narrow sense, but also for offering “practical support for individuals” (JCL16).¹

Others, however, also see the limits of a participative approach and emphasize what they consider the continuing primary task of job placement. They are critical of what they see as the strong adherence of operational advisors

1 Explanation of the abbreviations used in the citations: JCop = Jobcenter operational staff; JCM = Jobcenter middle management; JCL = Jobcenter management; Top = sponsoring organization staff in the operational area; TL = sponsoring organization management; TN = clients/participants in the programme; H = observation during group information/programme.

and case managers to social work-thinking and advocate a stronger “sales orientation” that pushes for quick results, whether in the form of assigning someone to a programme (activation) or, even better, placing them in a job on the general labour market. “You have to be able to sell a refrigerator to an Eskimo” (JCL01), one managing director succinctly expresses his expectations of the advisors, meaning that they should not get bogged down in providing social support to clients, but rather get people into work or offer them a perspective for integration through appropriate ALMP-measures. Unfilled programme slots and disappointing integration rates seemed to be caused, among others, by the excessively social work orientation of many advisors.

The task of managers and supervisors is to ensure an optimal mode of service delivery that balances the poles of participation and placement orientation, as well as partnership-based cooperation and the enforcement of obligations—a mode that is both suitable for the regional setting of the Jobcenter and its target groups, and for the prevailing labour market situation. Leadership is thus understood as principle- and rule-based, but also situational and flexible.

Jobcenter counselling staff recognize the challenge of finding a good balance between partnership and adherence to regulations. More so than management, however, they emphasize their desire to be seen primarily as supporters and “authentic” contacts who deserve the trust of their clients. They strive for “mutual cooperation” (JCOp07), want to “engage in dialogue with clients on equal terms” (JCOp02), and be perceived as “partners” of their clients (JCOp15).

Regarding their relationship with service providers, the vast majority of managers describe themselves as clients who purchase specific services from third parties, but who retain ultimate responsibility for what happens to clients within these third parties’ programmes. As one team leader at a Jobcenter explains, their communication with service providers is “collaborative,” but they are “tough” when “things aren’t right” (JCM01). The managing director of another Jobcenter states: “Competition is competition” and that service providers cannot be “coddled” (JCL03).

The operational advisors tend to view the service providers more as partners, offering a service that complements their own work. Within the framework of the commissioned programmes, these providers have significantly more time per client because they operate with considerably lower caseloads. It was critically noted that at the Jobcenter, counsellors would be unable to optimally advise and prepare their clients for these programmes because their organization provides them with insufficient and often unsuitable information about the programmes they have commissioned to private providers. One counsellor, who previously worked at an insurance company before joining the Jobcenter, reported that in her previous organisation, employees received intensive training when a new product was launched, enabling them to effectively explain its benefits to clients and sell it. She sorely misses this kind of training at the Jobcenter. It seems to be crucial to comprehensively prepare and empower advisors, especially as intermediaries between job seekers and support programmes, because: “If you want to ignite passion in others, you must first be on fire yourself.” (JCOp22)

Managers and operational staff of the service providers

The private providers of social and employment services commissioned by Jobcenters (providers) exhibit a certain diversity in terms of legal form, status (profit-oriented or non-profit), organizational history, and their integration into larger networks of associations, corporate groups, or social communities. Correspondingly there is a broad variety within the spectrum of organizational “identities” and the understandings of managers and staff regarding their professional and social mission, their position within the governance structures of ALMP, and their relationship to the Jobcenter as the commissioning body. However, what they all share in the field of work under the German Social Code, Book II (SGB II), is the legal framework for their services according to Section 2 of the German Social Code, Book III (SGB III) and Sections 16 et seq. of SGB II, their adherence to the procedures of the German Procurement Ordinance for Services (VOL), and, not least, the respective budget framework for integration services at the Jobcenters, which is subject to fluctuations that can cause considerable uncertainties for business-planning. Often, providers are heavily reliant on refinancing from these budgets and have little recourse in the ALMP-sector when contracts are lost due to exclusion from tendering processes or reduced budgets. When implementing programmes, providers depend on effective collaboration with Jobcenters, from the selection and allocation of participants through support during the programme to its completion and, if necessary, follow-up care. At the same time, these programmes are usually highly specialized ser-

vices where the specific circumstances of each case play a significant role. Establishing a functioning working relationship between teachers, coaches, or counsellors and the participants is a crucial prerequisite for the programme’s success.

As far as we can tell from our interview material, the understandings of managers of providers can be subsumed under three types of basic attitudes or self-images²: (1) “professional-political autonomy”, (2) “collaborative expertise”³ as well as (3) “loyal service provider”, where the “autonomy” type is indicating an understanding of being an actor with a claim actively participating in the shaping of regional integration and employment policies, the “collaboration” type is demanding a true partnership mode on the level of operational case work and the “service provider” type tends to accept the rules of the game as a given and put the focus on optimizing the delivery of services according to the standards of the Jobcenter as the principal of ALMP.

2 The following is a generalized version of the terminology presented in detail in Schulze-Böing/Engler (2025, p. 162).

3 “Collaboration” here in the sense of Beinhocker (2025, p. 181): “Collaboration can then be thought of as a subset of cooperation that occurs when agents align behaviors in mutually beneficial ways, but where the structure of the game is not given and static; instead, the players themselves are inventing, co-creating, and evolving the structure of the game over time.”

Perceptions of Benefit Recipients

In the interviews, the participants of various programmes mostly appear reflective and actively position themselves with a desire for vocational qualification or integration into the labour market.

Communication with the Jobcenter is generally associated more with control than with support, as exemplified by the comment: “Always letters – all control” (TN21), from a father participating in a vocational training programme specifically designed for people with a migration background. Here, the Jobcenter appears as a bureaucratic administrative body rather than an advisory or proactive force. Other participants highlight positive experiences with Jobcenter contacts, reporting on dedicated and well-informed counsellors. However, as the participants usually add immediately, these experiences are not the norm. They were simply “lucky” with their current contact person at the Jobcenter (TN11). Furthermore, some participants provide examples of successful initiatives in communicating with the Jobcenter. The Jobcenter’s adoption of their own suggestions is described as an example of successful communication, and a counsellor who is open to arguments and persuasion can be considered a good advisor from the perspective of benefit recipients.

The relationship with the respective provider is consistently rated more positively in the interviews with participants than the relationship with the Jobcenter. Critical comments sometimes relate to the content of the measure, which is described as not being a good fit (e.g.,

undemanding, no differentiation according to qualification level). Insufficient or ineffective language support is also a topic in some interviews. In rural areas, complaints arise about difficult transport connections or logistical problems with the provision of online services. The support with personal problems and the more holistic counselling that participants receive from the provider are mentioned positively. Furthermore, the structure and stability of the measures are emphasized. Participants also acknowledge positive effects of their participation, such as improved well-being and sense of self-efficacy, regardless of their assessment of the content. Participants say that taking part in the measure is better “than just sitting at home” (TN16). They participate primarily to, for example, “not become lazy” (TN23) or “not be alone” (TN78).

Unlike the Jobcenter, which merely “sends” people to the programme, the service providers are seen as approachable and highly effective in providing advice. In summary, there is a differentiated perception of the Jobcenter and the service providers as two distinct institutions that, ideally, complement each other within a support system.

2.1.3. Practical cooperation in the service triangle of ALMP

Perspectives of Jobcenters and providers

How do the stakeholders involved perceive the interaction within the service triangle? What constitutes good cooperation, and which issues are relevant to the participants?

Our overview tables show the factors that promote or hinder cooperation in the service triangle, firstly in the mutual perspectives of Jobcenters and providers (Table 1) and secondly in relation to cooperation with clients or participants in employment promotion measures (Table 2).

	Enabling factors	vs.	Inhibiting factors	Motto or slogan
Jobcenter staff and managers on cooperation with service providers	Personal contact		High employee turnover at the organization, impersonal communication	"Personal contact cannot be replaced by 20 emails."
	Shared social/public-interest ethos		Unfair competitors in the enforcement business	No "quantity over quality"
	Knowledge of ALMP-measures and the range of measures offered		No sales orientation among employees, inadequate training of consulting specialists regarding the measures	"Those who want to ignite others must first be on fire themselves."
	Social space orientation		Generalized problem definition at the desk	"We then look on site to see what's there."
Provider staff and managers on cooperation with Jobcenters	Willingness of Jobcenter employees to impose sanctions		Conflict avoidance of Jobcenter employees	"We need concrete support"
	JC-MA's knowledge of measures		Lack of knowledge regarding measures, employee turnover at JC-MA	"Bring consultants into the measures"
	More intensive case management, needs assessments and target group orientation of the JC		Lack of knowledge on the part of the Jobcenter regarding participants	"I believe many Jobcenters don't know their customers and don't understand their needs."
	Partnership-based cooperation, regular strategic exchange, transparency of goals		Competition and marketing pressure	"Learning to work with the carriers on an equal footing."

Table 1
—
Enabling and hindering factors for cooperation from the perspective of Jobcenters (JC) and service providers

Table 2
—
Enabling and hindering factors for cooperation with clients and participants from the perspective of Jobcenters (JC) and service providers, respectively

	Enabling factors	vs.	Inhibiting factors	Motto or slogan
Jobcenter employees and managers on cooperation with clients	Good advice and customer service.		Formal and subjective communication barriers	"Speak in the language of the customers".
	Customer willingness to cooperate		Refusal	The possibility of reducing performance is important as a "threat gesture".
	Outreach counselling		Unreachability of clients	Getting to know specific problem situations better
	Personal contact and approachability of the advisors		Contact restrictions (during the pandemic), working from home, hotline instead of direct dial	"Significant difference" between remote consultation and personal contact, as was observed during pandemic times.
Provider staff and management on cooperation with participants	Increased efforts to reach participants (marketing and acquisition, home visits, follow-up phone calls)		Declined participation, lack of reliability among participants	"How can we reach people?"
	Tailored job placements by Jobcenters		Untargeted allocation of participants by Jobcenters	"The participants then go home again" if they have not been prepared by counsellors, who they have often never met before.

Interaction within the service triangle from the perspective of benefit recipients

In group interviews with benefit recipients, participants discuss their experiences with the Jobcenter, their contact with Jobcenter counsellors, and the role they attribute to the Jobcenter in the creation and implementation of the programme they are currently attending. The question of why they are participating in the programme is often answered very simply,

with a reference to the Jobcenter's assignment: "I was just sent there" (TN14) can be considered a typical response in this context. Participation in the programme is described here as a consequence of an official directive and does not appear to be the result of effective counseling. Similarly, participants frequently report that they were insufficiently informed about the programme's content and objectives before starting the programme and that, in their opinion, Jobcenter advisors themselves possess insufficient knowledge about the programmes offered and their content.

Participants in training programmes often perceive their interactions with the Jobcenter as distant or standardized, and the counseling as formalized, impersonal, and lacking in focus on their individual needs. Interestingly, this is rarely criticized. It seems that participants view this type of contact with the Jobcenter as natural and appropriate for a government agency. In contrast, the relationship with the training provider is often described as approachable, supportive, and providing structure, and the providers are associated with needs-based, holistic counseling. Criticism of the programmes tends to focus on content or teaching methods, not on the attitude of the staff. At the same time, only a few of our interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with the Jobcenter's communication, for example, regarding the low frequency of contact during the programme. Although explicitly positive experiences with Jobcenter employees are considered a stroke of luck, this is rarely lamented overall; instead, the strengths of the training provider are praised.

In the vast majority of cases, participants in the programmes do not perceive any further communication or professional collaboration between the provider and the Jobcenter. From the perspective of the interviewed participants, communication between the Jobcenter and the provider often appears uncoordinated, reactive, and incomplete. In the participants' accounts, the Jobcenter and the provider seem like two separate worlds that interact only sporadically, and then only through the benefit recipients they are supporting.

2.1.4. In-depth exploration of patterns of interaction

The design of seamless handover and intake processes, as well as the management of case-related communication during the execution of assistance measures, were identified as important interface issues within the support chain. But how does the transition of Jobcenter clients into a programme actually take place in practice? And how is inter-organizational interaction specifically designed by the client in the case of contract award procedures, and which communication methods are stipulated? Following the findings from the surveys, further in-depth investigations were undertaken to address these questions.

Handover Modes in the Take-In Process

To collect qualitative data on the interaction patterns of the actors, observation visits were conducted at various service providers and Jobcenters, and the method of participant observation was applied to group events. The observations primarily focused on introductory group sessions for newly initiated active ALMP-measures – so-called information or introductory events⁴. Based on this, two basic handover modes can be distinguished, according to which the events take place.

⁴ In total, nine visits to various organizations and Jobcenters in Hesse were carried out between October 2024 and March 2025, including information events and course units of various measures.

1. The process involves a linear transition for participants from initial consultation at the Jobcenter to a specific support from the provider within the framework of the respective programme. Participants receive a written invitation from the Jobcenter to an informational meeting and, ideally, have already been informed about the programme and persuaded to participate in a prior consultation. However, the final persuasion rests with the provider and is the responsibility of the information session. Accordingly, formal enrolment in the programme occurs upon attendance at this event. The crucial factor in whether a benefit recipient referred by the Jobcenter (H1) actually participates in a programme is generally their acceptance of the invitation: Participants who attend the informational meeting, with few exceptions, also enrol in the programme. Providers place corresponding emphasis on the invitation process, in which they participate to varying degrees.⁵ In these cases, according to our observations, the information event only partially serves to promote a programme, but largely functions as a planning instrument for the later implementation in practice: Only after the preliminary information event can it be estimated who and how many of the participants reported by the Jobcenter actually need to be scheduled for a programme.

⁵ For example, written invitations are also sent by the provider (H1). In H2, the invitation is sent in writing, by telephone, and by email, and follow-up is made three times if necessary. In H3, the provider sends a new telephone invitation to those who were announced by the Jobcenter but did not attend the initial information session.

2. A second transfer mode describes a back-and-forth movement between the service provider and the Jobcenter. An example of this in our study is an information session about a programme, which took place in presence of representatives from the Jobcenter. During and after the session, participants' interest in participating was assessed so that this information could be forwarded to their respective counsellors. A similar procedure was applied for a course session or the programme itself. According to the service provider, there were no separate information sessions for groups. Instead, potential participants contacted the service provider on their own initiative, either through individual consultations or on the recommendation of Jobcenter advisors (as reported by participants during our observation), and then approached their counsellors with a funding request.

Interaction requirements in the specifications of procurement measures

Public tendering, alongside project collaboration (grants) and the issuing of placement and training vouchers, is a significant "transaction mode" between employment agencies in Germany and "third parties," namely training and qualification providers and independent providers of employment services (see Knuth 2018, pp. 348-350). For the area covered by the German Social Code, Book II (SGB II), Jobcenters procure services of providers through competitive tendering, often mediated by the Regional Procurement Centers of the Federal Employment Agency (REZ), and issue public tenders for this purpose. A key component of a tender is the service description of the adver-

Cooperation	Service descriptions Municipal Jobcenters (zKT) N=15		Service descriptions Joint Facilities N=23		Total service descriptions N=38	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
minimum	3	20	5	22	8	21
low	4	27	13	57	17	45
extended	4	27	2	9	6	16
Intense, personal	3	20	2	9	5	13
Other	1	6	1	3	2	5

Table 3
—
Which collaboration models are represented by the service descriptions? Absolute and relative frequencies

tised programme. This outlines the requirements for the service to be offered by the provider.

As part of the “Make it Work” project, specifications from current tenders for programmes were evaluated in a structured content analysis.⁶ The study examined the extent of communication and interaction between service providers and Jobcenters during the implementation of training programmes. Three levels of cooperation were identified: (1) minimal cooperation, (2) limited cooperation, (3) extended cooperation, and (4) intensive, personal coop-

eration. These levels reflect the degree of coordination, the exchange of information, and the frequency and commitment of contact. (see Table 3)

In many cases, communication remains limited to a structured, participant-oriented reporting system, in which providers primarily provide final reports after completion of the measure and operational data to the Jobcenter (minimal cooperation, see Table 3). Regular or personal coordination is not provided for.

Approximately 45 percent of the examined service descriptions envisage a low level of operational collaboration.⁷ In addition to reporting, this also includes ad-hoc exchanges as needed or in response to special developments. However, this form remains limited to exceptional cases and does not envision continuous cooperation throughout the course of the programmes.

6 The tenders were published between April and August 2025 via the eHAD procurement platform or the federal government’s procurement platform. 38 tenders from 18 Jobcenters, predominantly in Hesse, were evaluated (see Table 3).

7 Two service descriptions in the sample refer to one-day event measures and are considered special cases outside the scheme.

Only in a few cases an extended cooperation is stipulated in the requirements profiles of the tender. This includes regular coordination regarding the progress of the programme, for example through the joint creation and updating of support plans as well as through case-conferences or debriefing conversations.

Finally, we recognize the model for intensive personal cooperation in service descriptions that provide for case-related exchange between provider and Jobcenter staff in the form of regular, personal meetings (handover meetings, case or support plan discussions, final meetings) and thus aim for closer professional and organizational integration between providers and Jobcenters.

Overall, the results show that the vast majority of service descriptions only provide for minimal to limited cooperation. Requirements for a systematically designed and regularly maintained cooperation structure are the exception.

**2.1.5. Interim summary:
Defining problems and solutions**

To a large extent, the quality of cooperation among the stakeholders in the service triangle is determined by the framework conditions – law, procedural standards, overarching business policies, financial resources, etc. At the same time, we see significant areas of action in which the stakeholders involved can become active in conjunction with framework and policy-setting. These areas touch upon, firstly, the development and formation of professional attitudes and patterns of behavior within the network of relationships in the service triangle, and secondly, the concrete interaction and communication among the stakeholders in the context of support practices.

The qualitative interviews with stakeholders revealed differing perspectives and understandings of roles among staff at Jobcenters and service providers in their support practices. These perspectives largely complement each other productively. However, it also became apparent that inherent tensions exist within these cooperative relationships, for example, regarding how workloads are distributed, how contractual relationships lead to perceived hierarchies in casework, and to what extent the practice is perceived as an equal partnership working towards shared goals. The question of whether service providers are, and are perceived as, independent actors or contractors also plays a role here.

These tensions are inherent in the objectively and legally defined roles of Jobcenters and service providers, and their relationship, and are difficult to resolve. However, reflective practice

and an open communication culture can ensure that these tensions are managed productively and do not degenerate into self-serving behaviours focused on short-term gains. Developing and maintaining appropriate communication formats at all levels of collaboration, from planning and allocation to practical casework, can lay the foundation for this.

In the light of the problem descriptions provided by our interviewees, the triangular relationship between Jobcenters, service providers, and clients and participants in programmes takes shape. This service triangle can also be described as a functional working relationship. The process of programme-implementation can be perceived as a chain of interrelated actions (see Figure 2). Based on the inhibiting and facilitating factors of cooperation identified by both service providers and Jobcenters, the following critical points and optimization opportunities can be determined for this process chain within the Jobcenters and the agency commissioning the programme, respectively:

1 Planning of Programmes

- Provision of knowledge on the foreseen programmes to the counselling- and front-line staff of Jobcenters (which is more than simply information about a programme but comprehensive knowledge of the objectives, content, implementation-concepts and the ability to communicate the expected effects in a manner fitted to the target group in terms of requirements of participation but also in terms of an explanation of future benefits)
- Sufficient and at the same time appropriate assignment

2 Handover / receipt at the service provider

- Preparation and preliminary information for participants
- Transparency of objectives
- Precise and flexible use of ALMP-instruments (e.g., through community-based approaches)

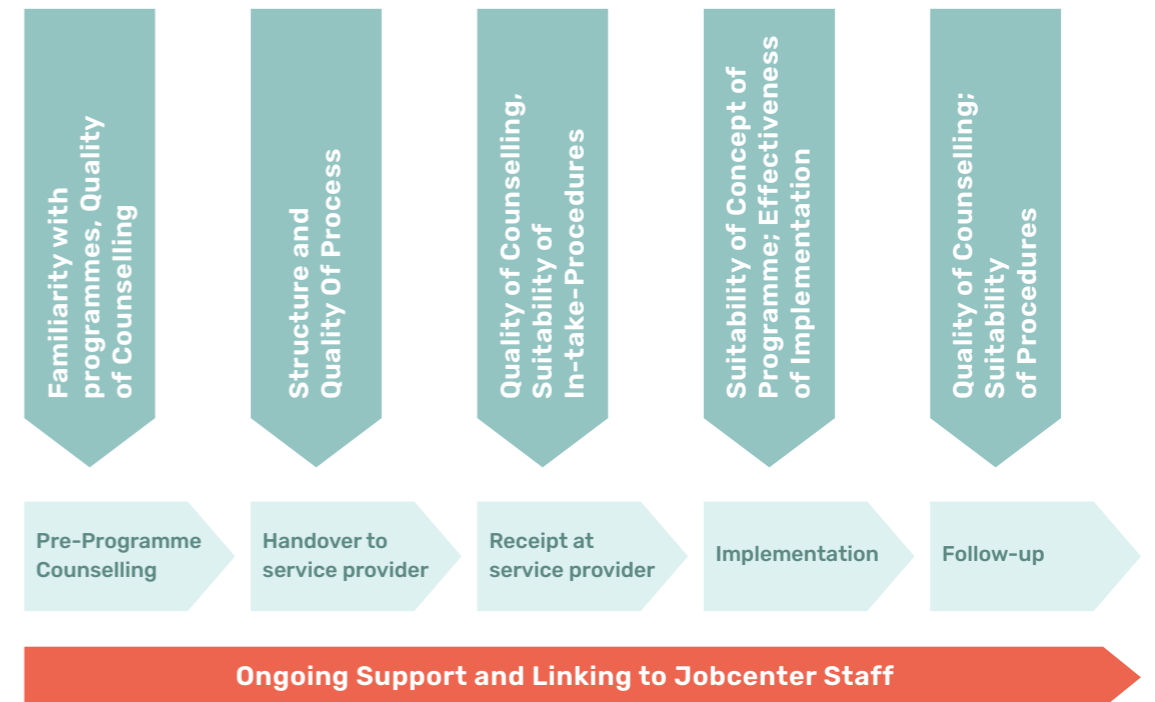
3 Implementation of the programme

- Support during the programme by counsellors from the Jobcenter
- Mutual accessibility and structured communication among operational staff of Jobcenter and provider

4 Service to leavers (after programme completion and drop-out)

- Enabling a seamless transition, in which results and experiences, taking into account the perspective of the participants, “flowing back” from the provider to the Jobcenters and can have an impact both on the further support of the cases concerned and on the design and improvement of general support practices and cooperation

Figure 2
Service chain, own illustration



2.2. Reflection of perspectives of those involved and mutual understanding – findings of Fulda University of Applied Sciences

2.2.1. Methodological Approach

In stage two, four “regional labour market laboratories” were conducted, bringing together representatives from Jobcenters, sponsoring organizations, and recipients of basic income benefits (jobseekers, clients) as key actors in the so-called service triangle of ALMP (“Arbeitsmarktpolitisches Dreieck”, Berzel/Mittermüller 2024) in a moderated exchange. The methodological approach was based on a combined approach incorporating elements of the 360-degree feedback concept, focus group methodology, and co-creation techniques (Bloor et al. 2001; Breitenfelder et al. 2004; Keller 2011; Przyborski/Riegler 2020; Knaut et al. 2023). The aim was to systematically reflect role perspectives, facilitate perspective-taking, and derive practical impulses for the further development of collaboration and for effective labour market policy interventions (Bloor et al. 2001; Breitenfelder et al. 2004; Keller 2011; Przyborski/Riegler 2020; Knaut et al. 2023). This methodological approach enabled participants to reflect on their own positions as well as on others’ perspectives, developing a deeper understanding of the different roles and interests within the work environment. Furthermore, the co-creation elements promoted the participatory development of feasible recom-

mendations for action. The focus group approach also made it possible to visualize group dynamics and interactive learning processes, thus enabling the systematic evaluation of both individual and collective insights. In this way, not only are theoretical insights deepened, but concrete approaches for optimizing collaboration and developing effective labour market policy programmes are also derived.

The deliberately heterogeneous composition of the dialogue groups—comprising employees from different Jobcenter departments, various levels of service providers, and people affected by long-term unemployment—ensured an open and independent discourse, which served as both a research approach and a solution-finding tool (Keller 2011; Bührmann/Schneider 2012; Kühn/Koschel 2018; Przyborski/Riegler 2020; 2021). In this way, different perspectives and experiences could be systematically brought together, and both organizational and individual viewpoints could be made transparent. The basis for this was the contact hypothesis (Allport 1954), which assumes that interaction on equal terms has the potential to reduce prejudice, as well as a strong focus on lived experience, which incorporated the specific everyday perspectives of all participants. The aim was to make barriers to thinking and communication visible, to identify challenges and success factors in the context of labour market policy programmes, and to unlock potential for sustainable cooperative collaboration (Schöpf et al. 2025; Fischer et al. 2018; Unterhofer 2022). Creating an atmosphere of trust was crucial for addressing critical issues, recognizing hidden areas of tension, and developing collective problem-solving strategies.

Methodologically, in addition to classic facilitation techniques, elements of motivational interviewing, self-determination theory, and mediation were employed (Unger et al. 2024a; 2024b; Unger/Sann 2023). The integration of self-determination theory principles particularly strengthened the experience of autonomy and competence, as well as social relatedness, leading to more sustainable participation and a higher quality of contributions (Unger/Sann 2023). Motivational interviewing supported the constructive exploration of ambivalent positions without pressure or judgment, while mediation helped to moderate diverging perspectives and ensure a solution-oriented discussion culture.

A total of 100 people participated in the four labour market laboratories (43 Jobcenter employees, 22 employees of service providers, and 35 recipients of citizen’s income support resp. jobseekers/clients). The dialogues were conducted in two rounds led by trained moderators. In the first round, homogeneous groups discussed topics based on the guiding questions: “What’s going well?”, “What’s going badly?”, and “What are our three most important issues?”. A special discussion grid with moderation cards systematically documented who raised which topic and to whom it was addressed; this grid was also expanded to include other relevant stakeholders such as politicians, employers, the media, and the public. This structured documentation enabled transparent tracking of lines of argumentation as well as a quantitative analysis of topic frequency and target audience.

In the second round, heterogeneous groups worked on jointly translating the benefits and developing solutions based on the previously collected results. This composition fostered a change of perspective, leveraged the synergies of diverse knowledge and experience, and facilitated the constructive handling of differing viewpoints. As a result, realistic, viable solutions that were perceived as effective by the participants were developed.

Two analytical perspectives were central to deriving policy recommendations: one focused on the needs, life circumstances, perspectives, resources, and problems of the target group, along with their corresponding ideas for solving the problems; the other one revealed power relations, knowledge systems, and their effects on individuals and social practices, thereby promoting better cooperation and effectiveness within the context of the service triangle (Bührmann/Schneider 2012; Keller 2011; Unger et al. 2024b). Combining these two perspectives increased the validity of the results and ensured that the policy recommendations were theoretically grounded, empirically sound, and practically applicable.

2.2.2. Key Findings

In all labour market labs, the participants showed a strong interest in this form of exchange and collaboration. They appreciated that communication took place in a respectful and collaborative manner, rather than simply talking about each other. In the first round, all three homogeneous groups showed a tendency to externalize problems – that is, difficulties and reasons for the lack of integration progress were frequently attributed to the other actors.

However, this was not limited to the service triangle; employers and political decision-makers were also viewed critically. All groups also expressed the feeling that their own efforts – sometimes even exceeding expectations – were not sufficiently recognized. From the second round of dialogues onward, a genuine effort to change perspectives and understand the other actors became significantly more apparent. The statements increasingly reflected a mutual recognition of roles and viewpoints. This clearly demonstrates that this behavior can be facilitated by appropriate moderation and facilitation that is appreciative, motivating, and simultaneously promotes dialogue and participation.

A comprehensive examination of the interface problems makes it clear that reducing the issue to three groups within the service triangle is insufficient. At a minimum, employers and regional/national policymakers (and to some extent, the media/society) must be considered as well. Employers repeatedly cite a shortage of skilled workers (Berbée/Stuhler 2023), while at the same time, the willingness to offer longer internships or other forms of gradual reintegration into the workforce for benefit recipients is rather low or even nonexistent.

Despite many critical assessments, several positive examples of successful collaboration between stakeholders are cited. Appropriate framework conditions are necessary to enable such an approach in a psychologically safe environment (e.g., mutual trust among participants, as well as trust in and support for leadership – both at Jobcenters and service providers, comprehensive communication and counselling skills combined with sound self-reflection, and individualized solutions). These findings

largely align with the results of the “rehapro” project (Sann et al. 2024). They illustrate that sustainable promotion of work-integration should be characterized more strongly by cooperation, participation, and a resource-oriented approach, in which even the smallest steps forward – even if they appear to have little to do with the goal of integration at first glance – should be given far greater significance within the overall objective. The current system of often short-term, integration-oriented programmes can only partially meet the challenges of the future labour market (Schöpf et al. 2021).

Overall, the labour market laboratories reveal one thing: it all comes down to people! Implementation and success depend significantly on the individuals involved. Both service providers and Jobcenters need people who are able, willing, and permitted to support and implement the individually necessary aspects. This requires appropriate organizational conditions (including clear frameworks, processes, and responsibilities), skills (including communication and counselling abilities), and good relationships (e.g., with the client, cooperation partners, and management).

Results of the exchange among the individual stakeholders.

In the first round of the labour market labs, the interface between recipients of basic income support, Jobcenters, and service providers was explored and discussed in homogeneous groups, focusing on the categories “What’s going well?” and “What’s going badly?” The topics encompassed structural and content-related statements, which were emphasized differently within each group. For basic income

support recipients, the focus was on the categories of relationship quality (interpersonal relationships), communication (the availability of various communication channels, such as face-to-face and written communication), programme content (specific activities, learning content, and goals), and the organizational structure of the Jobcenters (including aspects such as task allocation, responsibilities, and transparency). Jobcenter employees focused on the categories of accessibility, communication, programme content, programme organization (planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of programmes), organizational structure, and framework conditions (regulations that influence the situation and are generally unchangeable). For the staff of the implementing organizations, the most important topics were exchange formats (standardized formats for exchanging information between the participants), cooperation (purposeful collaboration in which a common goal is pursued), programme organization, organizational structure, and motivational, emotional, and psychosocial factors (motives, influences such as social conditions, language, culture that influence the decisions and actions of the programme participants).

Summary from the perspective of clients

Looking at the feedback from benefit recipients to Jobcenters, service providers, and their respective staff, it becomes clear that personal and individualized support has a significantly positive impact on their experience. The relationship with Jobcenter staff is valued when these staff members are genuinely interested in the recipient and maintain an open and

communicative atmosphere. Conversely, benefit recipients criticize superficial and unhelpful interactions with the Jobcenter when they experience treatment that adheres to standardized procedures and leaves no room for individual needs or flexible adjustments. A lack of transparency regarding responsibilities and the work assignments of individual Jobcenter employees is also perceived negatively. Long processing times and unclear procedures lead to uncertainty among benefit recipients, leaving them feeling like they are begging for help. This highlights the ambivalence between personal and written communication.

In addition to the positive and negative factors described above that recipients of basic income support perceive within the service triangle of ALMP, further topics were mentioned in the discussion, touching on overarching themes. This highlights that institutions have a significant influence on the success of measures, and that the measure itself is not the sole determining factor in its evaluation. Furthermore, consistent contact persons and transparency of information were identified as key factors.

Summary from the perspective of the Jobcenters

The staff of municipal Jobcenters highly value good communication with benefit recipients and service providers. Various service formats, tailored to the needs of benefit recipients, help to reach as many recipients as possible and obtain necessary background information. The focus on sustainable labour market integration is successful. Staff also positively assess the freedom of choice and autonomy they experience in advising benefit recipients.

Jobcenter staff are critical of the punctuality of benefit recipients and the lack of recourse when they are uncooperative. They also criticize the accessibility and cooperation with case workers and related departments. Regarding the content of the programmes, Jobcenter staff would like to see more comprehensive and challenging components, including health-related services. They argue that high-quality counselling requires a lower caseload and fewer administrative tasks. Finally, Jobcenter staff criticize the lack of a strategic direction within the Jobcenters and the absence of defined, realistic sub-goals in their work with benefit recipients.

Summary from the perspective of the service providers

The staff of the service providers rate the exchange with Jobcenter staff positively. Well-established dialogue formats, such as the “Marketplace of Opportunities,” where providers can network with all stakeholders, are cited as best practice examples. They value the collaboration with Jobcenter staff due to the focused and solution-oriented approach. Regarding the content of the programmes, the staff of the service providers recommend more content-focused offerings that prioritize individualized support for recipients of citizen’s allowance. Even though the organizational structure between service providers and Jobcenters is well-established and based on defined processes, they see a significant risk in the reliability of planning, coupled with the high administrative burden associated with the tendering process. With regard to motivational, emotional, and psychosocial factors, the staff of the service providers repeatedly encounter

motivated and grateful jobseekers/clients who, however, face multiple obstacles and anxieties.

Key topics from the first round of discussions

Through an evaluation system, the topics for discussion in the second round were identified at the end of the first round.

The most important issues for clients: Interest of the Jobcenter staff, the range of measures offered does not fit my situation, maintaining successful initiatives/associations, transparency/accessibility of the Jobcenter and providers, hierarchy (written communication), communication with the benefits department, the problem of the lack of childcare, actively supporting customer inquiries about measures, ending those measures regarded as unproductive and mainly coercive.

The most important topics for Jobcenter employees: Health barriers receive too little attention, anxieties of those receiving citizen’s benefits, support in coping with burdens (Jobcenter and service provider staff), identifying and reducing obstacles to participation for clients, making quality work in the Jobcenter decent and measurable, lack of language courses for motivated clients, lack of budget for good measures, quality/impact in advice – autonomy of the advisor.

The most important topics for the staff of the sponsoring organization: Planning security, making successes measurable, no measures for single mothers, dialogue-based communication between provider and Jobcenter, reduction of obstacles (addressing and enduring the right

issues), measure management (from planning to implementation), transitions after measures, more individuality instead of group (measures).

Those topics that were selected for closer examination were highlighted in the second rounds and addressed with regards to the translation of future benefits and tangible solutions.

On some topics, the perspectives of Jobcenters, recipients of citizen’s benefits, and service providers overlap significantly. These include communication and transparency, individual suitability, the content and organization of measures, success criteria, and dealing with personal challenges.

Advantages and Solutions

In the second round, the question “What if it were really good?”—that is, reflecting on a contrafactual ideal scenario—was posed to the discussion of advantages and solutions in heterogeneous dialogue groups. The resulting advantages and solutions are examined in detail below based on overarching categories.

Communication

To approach the ideal of clear, respectful communication, processes should be visually represented. This type of structure provides orientation in everyday life and facilitates the quick clarification of questions.

Another element is technical assistance. Chatbots, websites, and digital systems should answer standard questions, freeing up employees to have more time for personal conversations. Another approach is to provide informa-

tion about processes or available measures and their content through explanatory videos, and to avoid misunderstandings, for example, with clear manuals/instructions.

Transparency regarding available programmes also needs improvement. Jobcenter's front-line staff should be informed about all programmes offered by providers, both general and additional. Furthermore, it is proposed that systematic feedback be made available to all involved parties.

ALMP-Measures

Providers suggest designing measures modularly. This would allow existing services to be used more flexibly without having to develop entirely new programmes.

The demand for sustainability translates into the approach of making follow-up care more mandatory. Such follow-up solutions can be integrated into existing programmes.

One working group advocates replacing mandatory measures with individualized offerings. These approaches demonstrate that further development lies primarily in the modified implementation of existing measures.

Furthermore, specific formats that have already demonstrated positive effects could be supported. These include individual coaching sessions. Innovative programmes are also a focus. Another pragmatic approach is improving transparency regarding existing ALMP-measures, for example, through short videos providing insights into programme content and introducing the trainers. This will allow

for more informed decisions regarding specific measures – a step towards a tailored and motivating system.

As a solution regarding the allocation of measures, those involved suggest changing the allocation practice: The decisive factor should not be formal membership in a target group, but rather the question of what goal is pursued with a measure and whether this fits the individual situation.

Success indicators and success measurement

The discussion centers on how to make progress of cases more visible. One approach is to systematically incorporate intermediate goals.

Some organizations advocate using qualitative interviews as feedback tools. This would help to keep track not only of the final result but also of intermediate steps. Such steps can be integrated into success measurement, even if they are often not currently visible.

Specifically, it is proposed to introduce additional dimensions, such as skills development. This demonstrates a way to differentiate the current measurement of success based on placement figures by introducing a variety of criteria for success.

Dealing with personal challenges

One proposal from the Jobcenters focuses on specific counselling for a variety of issues e. g. through health coaches. Addressing individual obstacles should be given greater emphasis.

This includes proposals such as making housing advice a mandatory service and systematically considering childcare options.

Another approach is to strengthen relationship building through time resources and the motivation that both sides bring to the conversations.

From the staff's perspective, the solution lies in a significant reduction of bureaucracy and better resource allocation, for example, through the use of a shared platform for Jobcenters and service providers. Caseloads must also be realistic to ensure high-quality counselling.

Solutions for dealing with specific challenges for individuals affect not only clients but also the working conditions of professionals. Relief, specialization, and structures that allow time for relationship building are key components.

2.2.3. Recommendations for Action

Based on the findings, several recommendations are derived below. It should be emphasized that many of these are already known or similarly practiced approaches. Here, too, it becomes clear that the focus is less on new insights and more on enabling sustainable implementation:

The following recommendations, which are comprehensively addressed in the joint recommendations for action in chapter 3, have been deliberately greatly shortened here and are accompanied by a clear reference.

Establish a shared communication culture

Trusting, transparent and dialogue-oriented communication between Jobcenters, providers and recipients of citizen's allowance is a key prerequisite for successful cooperation (see section 3.1, "Shared responsibility and results-oriented communication").

Improve transparency and accessibility

Clear information on responsibilities, procedures and contact persons increases orientation, reliability and trust of all involved (see section 3.1, "Creating transparency through clear responsibilities").

Increase the accuracy and individuality of programmes and ALMP-measures

Measures should be more closely aligned with individual circumstances, skills and needs, e.g. through an individual measures integration plan (IMIP) (see section 3.2, “Processes of Service Delivery”).

Further develop the content and organization of programmes

The content, formats and organization of measures should be designed to be flexible, modular and learning-oriented (see section 3.2, “Processes of Service Delivery”).

Systematically design follow-up action after ALMP-measures

The transition from a measure requires clear follow-up strategies and coordinated responsibilities (see section 3.2, “Processes of Service Delivery”).

Expand the range of success indicators and make qualitative progress visible

Success should not be defined solely by figures for placement of clients in the labour-market, but should also take into account qualitative development steps (see section 3.2, “Processes of Service Delivery”).

Strengthening the capacity to cope with personal challenges

The labour market labs clearly demonstrate that personal challenges such as health limitations, psychological stress, lack of childcare, or unstable housing situations have a significant impact on the progress of measures and integration success. These obstacles are currently often addressed only sporadically, rather than systematically. A stronger institutional anchoring of relevant support services is recommended, for example, through specialized counselling services (e.g., health coaches), mandatory consideration of childcare, and clearly defined interfaces with external support systems.

Introduction of case management

as a structured, needs-based procedure to support people with multifaceted or complex problems that require more intensive and coordinated support (see section 3.1, box: “Case management as a potential implementation tool”).

Build local network of doctors and psychologists,

This could improve support for clients with health-related issues and offer immediate assistance when needed (e.g., psychological counselling or referral to therapy). Depending on the Jobcenter’s financial resources, this service can be implemented as a separate unit within the Jobcenter, available to both citizen’s benefit recipients and Jobcenter staff, ensuring a high degree of flexibility. Alternatively or additionally, a system of referrals to external,

independent physicians and psychologists with specific cooperation agreements can be established.

Based on the recommendations and approaches already mentioned, further action recommendations can be developed that specifically address structural and management levels, such as regional forums or multilateral regional development workshops (see Section 3.3, box: “Suggestions for Exchange Formats”). The entire process can be accompanied by scientific monitoring and impact evaluation. Participatory research involving all relevant stakeholder groups will be used to collect qualitative and quantitative data at the individual, organizational, and systemic levels, particularly within the regional context. The results of these evaluations will be continuously incorporated into the further development of the concepts and ensure that ALMP-measures can be adapted in an evidence-based and needs-oriented manner. Following pilot projects to be conducted, this can be integrated into the Jobcenters’ evaluation system.

Conclusion

Changing human behavior—for example, regarding employment, motivation, or lifestyle—is far more complex than is assumed by the concepts of many programmes and ALMP-measures. Whether people initiate and implement changes depends on an interplay of psychological, social, and structural factors. Simple, formulaic solutions or linear support strategies therefore fall short. Successful integration processes combine strengthening individual resources with addressing systemic framework conditions—for example, through networking, milieu-sensitive approaches, and the reduction of structural barriers in the labour market. Isolated measures otherwise remain ineffective.

This requires a paradigm shift: away from control-oriented procedures and towards dialogic cooperation and jointly responsible, process-oriented integration strategies – also with stronger political support. Sustainable integration succeeds particularly where trust, coherence, and self-efficacy are fostered at both the individual and institutional levels.

2.3. Reconstruction of Drop-Outs programme (Case Studies) – Findings of the IWAK

2.3.1. Methodological Approach

The IWAK case studies aimed to reconstruct the mechanisms and reasons for programme dropouts within the service triangle, i.e., the interplay between Jobcenters, providers, and participants. The central question is at which points in the process of referral, implementation, and follow-up drop-outs occur, and which communicative and structural conditions are to be regarded as relevant.

The empirical basis consists of eight comprehensive qualitative interviews conducted using a structured interview guide, from which three case histories at three different locations were reconstructed. Two cases relate to ALMP-measures under Section 45 of the German Social Code, Book III (SGB III). One case is funded under a programme of the federal state of Hesse. At each of the three selected locations, the perspectives of the participating stakeholders were incorporated: a Jobcenter counsellor, an educational specialist from the provider, and a participant having experienced a dropout before. The results of the analysis of these cases were compared to identify crucial points, information pathways, and points of failure from the different stakeholder perspectives. The data collection took place between May and July 2025.

The analysis was conducted using content analysis and was qualitative-exploratory in nature: the aim was not statistical generalizability, but rather a deeper understanding of interaction processes and the identification of recurring patterns in fit, communication, and role perceptions. To contextualize and verify the findings, the interim results were subsequently reviewed in two validation rounds with managers from Jobcenters and training providers (a total of seven Jobcenter managers and nine managers of training provider). These validation rounds served to confirm, supplement, and refine the recommendations for action.

2.3.2. Key Findings

The collaboration between Jobcenters, service providers, and participants forms the central steering element in the service triangle of ALMP. It significantly influences whether referrals are appropriate, programmes are successfully implemented, and dropouts can be avoided. The results of the case analyses illustrate that success does not primarily depend on the motivation of individual actors, but rather on clearly defined structures, coordinated roles and attitudes, and systematic communication. Communication serves as a key steering resource that only unfolds its full effect in combination with ALMP-measures tailored to the needs of the participants.

The sponsoring organization and the funding model have a direct impact on cooperation. Organizations run by the municipality, which are closely linked to the Jobcenter, benefit from established communication channels, rapid feedback, and a high degree of predictability. While external organizations often have

more flexibility in terms of programme content, they face greater challenges at the interfaces, such as needs assessment and providing feedback on programme progress.

Standardized measures under Section 45 of the German Social Code, Book III (SGB III) further restrict flexibility, while measures funded by the federal state under its specific programmes often allow for more individualized adaptation. Particularly with young people facing multiple challenges, it becomes clear that formal suitability does not automatically meet actual needs. Flexibility, modular services, and the option to address psychosocial needs separately have therefore proven especially effective.

The collaboration can be divided into three key phases: coordination and alignment before the start of a programme (Phase 1), support and communication during the programme (Phase 2), and follow-up after programme dropout (Phase 3). According to the process chain of ALMP-measures, Phase 1 includes advising participants, developing the cooperation plan, handing it over to the provider, and integrating the participants into the provider's organization. Phase 2 corresponds to the actual implementation of the programme, while Phase 3 includes management of follow-up services. Each phase is associated with specific challenges and recommendations for action, which are summarized below. A distinction is made between two central perspectives: firstly, the assessments and experiences of the operational stakeholders from the interviews are presented, and secondly, the perspectives of the managers of Jobcenters and providers from the validation rounds.

Phase 1

Coordination and alignment before the start of the programme

Match between programmes and individual needs

Even before a programme begins, it becomes clear how well its content aligns with the individual needs of the participants. From the perspective of those involved in the programme, it is evident that standardized guidelines regarding duration, content, and procedures—especially for programmes under Section 45 of the German Social Code, Book III (SGB III)—make it difficult to adapt flexibly to complex problems. Particularly for young people facing multiple challenges, a formally suitable programme may differ significantly from their actual life situation. To bridge these gaps in the short term, Jobcenters and service providers could agree on a “stabilization option,” for example, through modular entry-level components that initially focus on stabilization before transitioning to vocational or labour market orientation. Furthermore, early consultations between Jobcenters and programme providers are essential to determine whether a referral is appropriate or whether other support services are needed in preparation, such as the involvement of external psychosocial services like therapy or social counselling.

From the perspective of management, the validation rounds reveal significant differences in views on flexibility and modularity: Service provider management rejects excessive modularization, as it jeopardizes the predictability

of services and entails financial risks. Jobcenter management, on the other hand, emphasizes the need for flexible ALMP-measures to respond to the heterogeneous and rapidly changing needs of participants. In their view, preliminary modules before labour market programmes may be necessary to avoid waiting times and provide tailored support to participants. Most Jobcenters have already implemented modular approaches; however, situations arose where individual modules were no longer being used, which proved economically problematic. From the Jobcenters’ perspective, a balanced mix of flexible and longer-term programmes is therefore essential.

The managers also emphasize the importance of health and psychosocial issues, as well as the provision of language skills, which require both individual support and the availability of appropriate courses. Internal workshops at the Jobcenters could be used to identify gaps in the existing portfolio and develop new, easily accessible formats. Furthermore, most Jobcenters conduct an annual internal review of the counsellor experiences to identify changes in needs and plan the scope of ALMP-measures for the following year. However, since needs can change in the interim, programmes are often not fully staffed, sometimes leading to suboptimal matchups. Nevertheless, the Jobcenter managers strive to provide a structured programme that meets individual needs as closely as possible, for example, through coaching, small groups, and settings that promote daily routines and social interaction.

Furthermore, the programme providers emphasize that additional information sessions for clients and preliminary discussions before

the start of a programme are helpful in improving the fit and communication. Ideally, Jobcenters and programme providers should work together in this regard.

Insufficient knowledge about the content of ALMP-measures

In interviews, operational staff report that advisors often lack a complete understanding of the content, processes, and objectives of programmes, which complicates recommendations and fosters misunderstandings. From the operational perspective, it would be helpful if providers presented their services in brief in-person sessions at the Jobcenter and offered opportunities for observations. This facilitates the assessment of suitability and strengthens the professional basis for recommendations. Jobcenter and provider management generally acknowledge the benefits of such formats but point to the organizational effort involved, particularly for smaller providers. Liaisons officers at the Jobcenter can provide support by pooling knowledge, disseminating information, and systematizing communication between the Jobcenter and service providers. Additionally, short, scheduled meetings between team leaders and providers, as well as annual conferences or year-end reviews, can assess the effectiveness of existing programmes and systematically identify new needs.

Limited Time Resources

Big caseloads at Jobcenters also make individual support and direct communication more difficult from the perspective of operational staff. Standardized preliminary checklists can help to prioritize cases effectively and identify

dropout risks early on, as participants often show signs such as absences, no-show at appointments for interviews, withdrawal, or changes in behaviour. Jobcenter managers emphasize that the primary responsibility lies with the staff, who should actively shape the exchange and adjust their time management accordingly. Time resources are not seen as the primary barrier; rather, the reliable execution of regular check-ins is crucial.

Lack of binding communication structures

Often, agreements are made on an ad-hoc and interpersonal basis, and clear rules regarding timing, content, and responsibilities are lacking. Operational stakeholders recommend conducting preparatory conversations between the Jobcenter, service providers, and participants to clarify expectations, identify support needs, and build motivation. Additionally, communication guidelines could be incorporated into funding or service specifications to define who contacts whom and when, what information must be shared, and what feedback deadlines must be met. Managers emphasize that trusting relationships between professionals are more important than formal requirements. Quality assurance is achieved through existing tools such as surveys, interviews, feedback from counsellors, and complaint management. Service providers, on the other hand, desire binding communication protocols, possibly with budget support. A pragmatic compromise is to create a formal framework that signals a desire for exchange, while implementation remains voluntary and does not create additional administrative burdens.

Phase 2

Support and communication during the measure

Lack of continuous communication between service provider and Jobcenter staff

Operational stakeholders report that regular, brief consultations between Jobcenters and service providers, as well as transparent feedback to participants, can stabilize the progress of a programme. Communication should be firmly established as an integral part of the programme design. Interim reports, feedback loops, and clear escalation paths provide guidance for all involved. Three-way meetings, bringing together Jobcenters, service providers, and clients/participants, create transparency regarding expectations and progress and convey to participants that both institutions are working together. An open approach to psychosocial stress is also crucial. Professionals should allow for early discussion of issues such as feeling overwhelmed, panic attacks, or family conflicts and, if necessary, facilitate access to external support so that participants feel taken seriously and the likelihood of dropping out decreases. Personal contact between professionals also facilitates spontaneous exchange, clarifies misunderstandings, and enables situational adjustments to the programme.

Jobcenter managers and service providers generally recognize the importance of continuous communication and close coordination, but also see additional challenges. Often, participants have mental health issues or social problems such as homelessness that must first

be addressed to ensure they remain receptive to the programme content. Managers emphasize that state projects or ESF funding can support the processing of such issues, which are not normally covered, and thus enable the successful implementation of the programmes.

Inconsistent role distribution and unclear responsibilities

Another risk factor during the implementation of ALMP-measures is the inconsistent distribution of roles and unclear responsibilities between advisors in Jobcenters and the educational staff at the service providers. From the perspective of the operational actors, service providers should inform the participant's assigned advisor at the first sign of problems or unusual developments. A formal framework can be established for this purpose, signalling that communication is welcome but voluntary and does not create additional administrative burdens. Targeted incentives can systematically support communication and improve coordination between service providers and Jobcenters.

From the perspective of management, a duty to inform about an imminent programme termination is also recommended. Jobcenter and provider management agree that this duty should be included in the requirements for providers, as stipulated in tenders. This would allow critical developments to be reported early without restricting the operational practices of specialists at the provider and the Jobcenter.

High caseload and limited time resources

Interviews with operational staff indicate that standardized preliminary checklists, brief protocols, and digital templates can streamline communication even with high caseloads. Fixed, short time slots for coordination between team leaders and service providers could be incorporated into staff scheduling to ensure all relevant information is secured and collaboration is structured without disproportionately increasing workload.

Risk of participants dropping out or "no-show" behavior

During the course of the programme, it becomes clear whether participants are reliably engaged or whether there is a risk of them not showing up at all ("no-show") or dropping out prematurely. Interviews with operational staff indicate that regular communication between the Jobcenter and the service provider, as well as transparent feedback to participants, helps to identify problems early and adjust programmes accordingly. Three-way meetings should be held at the first warning signs to collaboratively develop solutions with the participants. Fixed time slots for debriefings following dropouts, the active use of final reports, and their joint reflection with participants further contribute to preparing for follow-up decisions and systematically learning from these cases.

From the perspective of the management, a more nuanced picture emerges: Jobcenter directors consider three-way meetings involving the Jobcenter's counsellors to be difficult to implement in practice. Routines and packed

schedules make flexible appointments challenging, and the counsellors' pedagogical skills are insufficient to support participants within this framework. However, it is crucial that contact with the counsellor is maintained throughout the programme so that the ongoing support from the provider can be closely coordinated with the Jobcenter.

Phase 3

Aftercare, feedback and learning processes after termination

Delayed feedback and unclear information channels

If a programme is terminated, follow-up communication is crucial for preparing subsequent decisions and systematically learning from the experience. From the perspective of operational staff, fixed time slots for debriefings of terminations could be established, for example, monthly for each programme or case group. Final reports should be actively used and, where possible, reflected upon jointly with the participants. This allows for the timely exchange of information, the preparation of follow-up decisions, and terminations to be viewed not merely as a statistical event, but as a learning opportunity from which future mismatches can be avoided.

Lack of proactive information sharing by the provider

Another problem is the lack of proactive information sharing by the service providers. They are closer to the participants during the programme and can identify potential dropouts or problems early on. Without clear regulations requiring providers to immediately inform the Jobcenter at the first sign of trouble, opportunities for timely intervention are missed. From the perspective of the operational staff, information sharing should also be implemented immediately in cases of programme dropouts. In such cases, the provider should promptly

inform the participant's assigned case manager. This allows the Jobcenter to react quickly, initiate stabilizing measures, or offer further counselling to continue providing tailored support to the participants.

Unclear roles, lack of rhythms and inadequate learning structures

Formal structures form the basis for systematic learning and include fixed debriefing sessions, binding communication channels, and clearly defined responsibilities within the Jobcenter and the service provider. Within this framework, various measures can be taken to address programme dropouts and promote learning processes. These include discussions between the Jobcenter, the provider, and participants to clarify the reasons for dropouts, resolve misunderstandings, and discuss follow-up options. Standardized surveys can also be conducted to compare reasons for dropout and identify recurring patterns. Open reflection meetings at the Jobcenter, for example, monthly for staff members who support individuals in the same programme, allow for the pooling of experiences and their structural application. Participants should be reassured that debriefing sessions are constructive and not punitive.

Jobcenter management and service providers also recognize the importance of these follow-up and learning processes. Case conferences at the end of a programme or after a programme dropout, involving all three stakeholders in the service triangle of ALMP, are considered particularly valuable. They establish a solid foundation of trust for future collaboration and facilitate systematic reflection

on experiences. At the same time, it is noted that in some cases, it can be difficult to recruit participants for such conferences. Therefore, case conferences should be strategically implemented and, where appropriate, encouraged or required in calls for tender. Jobcenter management emphasizes that reports on programme dropouts are usually submitted on time, allowing for reflection based on sound information. This systematic analysis of dropouts makes it possible to identify the causes of mismatches, modify programmes accordingly, and establish institutional learning processes.

Further results from the validation rounds with the heads of the Jobcenters and educational institutions

In the validation rounds with the heads of the Jobcenters and the service providers, in addition to feedback on the existing recommendations for action, it was emphasized that when introducing new regulations, it should be carefully examined in advance whether their implementation in practice is actually realistic and manageable.

Jobcenter directors emphasized that the needs of their target group are becoming increasingly heterogeneous and complex, which often makes the ALMP-measures costly. They therefore advocate for larger budgets and greater flexibility in selecting and implementing programmes. A particular focus is on language courses and health-related services.

Furthermore, Jobcenter managers call for stronger support and backing – especially at a time when the target group and the work of

Jobcenters are perceived negatively by society. This could help to strengthen trust in their work and the quality of the services provided.

Framework conditions for successful collaboration and communication

Successful collaboration within the service triangle of ALMP depends not only on the commitment of individual professionals. It requires reliable framework conditions that establish communication as a steering instrument, ensure the suitability of measures, and enable the systematic use of information for continuous improvement. Only in this way can programmes be effectively supported, mismatches identified early on, and learning processes institutionally secured – as the foundation for leadership, organization, and operational practice to truly take effect.

Governance and Leadership Culture

Governance and leadership culture play a central role in this. Managers of Jobcenters and service providers are responsible for establishing communication, coordination, and reflection as an integral part of professional work – not as an additional task. They create the organizational and temporal prerequisites for regular case discussions, three-way meetings, and transparent feedback. An effective leadership culture is characterized by creating commitment, supporting learning processes, and actively understanding communication as a management resource. Where managers demand clear standards based on agreed-upon attitudes, visibly promote them, and provide

appropriate incentives, quality is not left to chance but is anchored institutionally.

Anchoring communication in funding logics and tenders

Communication should also be formally supported at the level of funding procedures and calls for proposals. Clear guidelines, for example regarding feedback loops, escalation channels, and regular case discussions, can promote coordination and transparency without restricting operational flexibility.

Qualification and support of skilled workers

The demands placed on professionals are increasing, particularly in complex psychosocial situations. In addition to specialist knowledge, communication and psychosocial skills are crucial. Continuing education, supervision, peer case consultation, and networks with psychosocial services strengthen the professionals' skills and improve the support provided to participants. Coordinated collaboration between Jobcenters, service providers, and other stakeholders is essential.

Systematic use of information and learning processes

Finally, the systematic use of information is crucial for a learning organization. Data derived from ALMP-measures already implemented, in particular with regard to dropouts, should be analysed regularly and shared between service providers and Jobcenters. Standardized feedback formats, reflection sessions, and three-way meetings create transparency, enable pattern recognition, and promote targeted adjustments. Communication thus becomes a central element of proactive governance, facilitating institutional learning and ensuring the long-term effectiveness of programmes.

Interim Conclusion

The recommendations in this report aim to make better use of existing resources and avoid duplication of effort. Every cancellation not only causes disruption for participants but also additional (administrative) work, from consultation and referral to the start of the programme. Binding communication standards can reduce these inefficiencies and create greater accountability.

In changing circumstances, it is important to evaluate ALMP-measures not only based on short-term effort but also on their impact on participants. Clear communication routines, a binding leadership culture based on shared values, and a coordinated interplay between funding principles and practice contribute to providing more stable support for participants and reducing dropout rates.

The analysis shows that, despite existing state-level policy frameworks, targeted coordination and communication processes, as well as the systematic use of practical knowledge, remain crucial for improving the suitability and effectiveness of ALMP-measures. It is particularly important to support staff in Jobcenters and at service providers who are in direct contact with participants, enabling them to communicate systematically and with a focus on quality.

The validation rounds also highlight that there are sometimes significant differences in ideas regarding recommendations for action between Jobcenter management, service providers, and operational actors. Against this backdrop, it is advisable for state policymakers to first initiate a dialogue with Jobcenter management to involve them as co-producers in improving communication processes.

3

Recommendations for Action

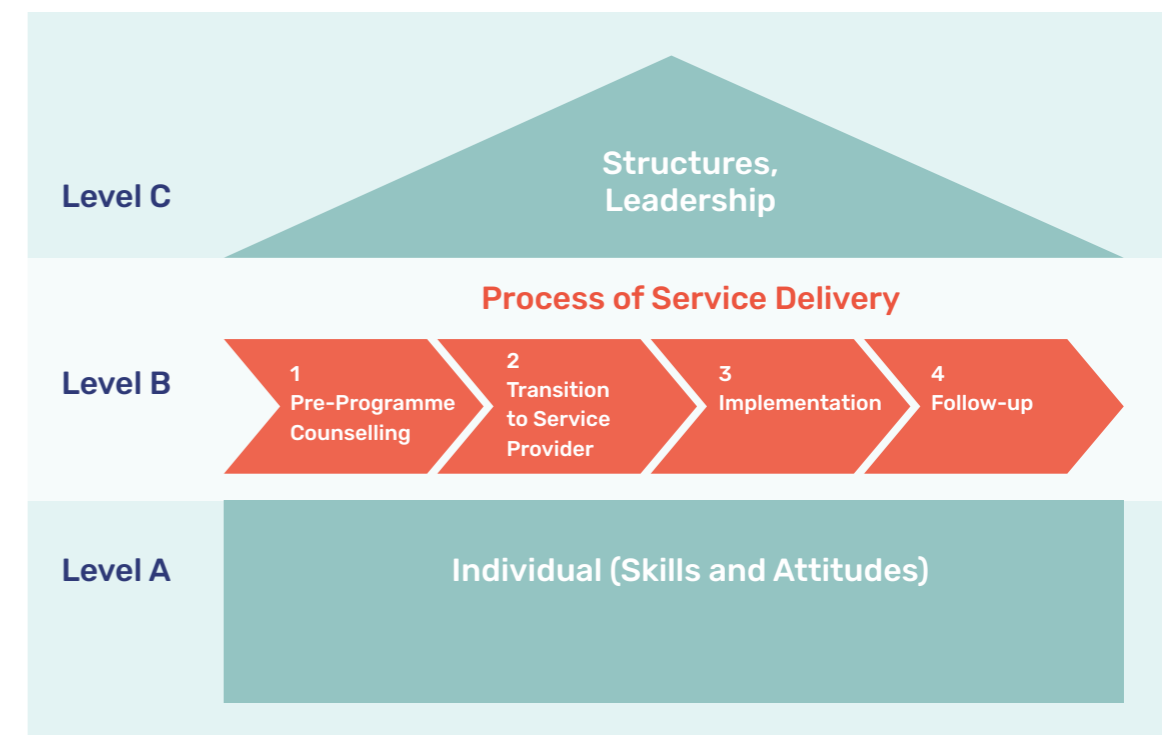
Our recommendations for action address three levels or areas of design:

- A Individual attitudes and professional self-conceptions**
- B Service delivery processes**
- C Structures and leadership**

Fundamental to interaction within the service triangle of ALMP are, first and foremost, the actions and attitudes of the individuals involved – the specialists and managers of the service providers and Jobcenters, as well as the clients resp. the recipients of support under the German Social Code, Book II (SGB II). Accordingly, the basis of our recommendations (Level A) is the development of individual competencies

and resources, which must be contributed and effectively utilized at all levels of cooperation to foster a positive communication culture. Further recommendations (Level B) focus on the processes of implementation and delivery of ALMP-services. Here, we address specific opportunities for improvement and offer practical guidance on how the interaction of the various stakeholders in the operational implementation of ALMP could be improved at every step of the service chain. Finally (Level C), our recommendations concern the structural framework for cooperation within the service triangle. Here, too, we make concrete suggestions on how the exchange between the stakeholder groups in the regions can be organized and how the development of collaborative working models between Jobcenters and service providers can be conceived.

Figure 3
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Three layers of shaping good practice (individuals, processes, structures), own illustration



3.1. Shared responsibility and results-oriented communication

The actors involved in the service triangle have different roles, different legal statuses, different perspectives on the shared task, and in some respects, potentially differing interests. Nevertheless, the shared task can only be accomplished if all parties cooperate effectively and with mutual trust, understanding themselves as part of a community of responsibility. This includes transparency regarding goals, processes, and resources, as well as accountability for the results and impact of their respective contributions and a willingness to engage in open and results-oriented communication.

Strengthening the exchange of experience – deepening a culture of communication

Developing and maintaining suitable communication formats at all levels of collaboration, from planning and awarding contracts to practical casework—for example, joint training for professionals from Jobcenters and service providers, particularly on legal and procedural issues—can strengthen confidence in daily practice and create a foundation for reflective practice and an open culture of communication. This should foster trusting, transparent, and dialogue-oriented collaboration between Jobcenters, service providers, clients, and other stakeholders involved in the dynamics of

labour market integration. Anchoring participatory discussion structures in the organizations' quality management systems or in project tenders can ease implementation.

Developing attitudes, shaping structures and processes – strengthening cooperation

Developing a strong culture of cooperation at all levels is a key leadership task in the organizations involved. Ultimately, effective cooperation also requires corresponding attitudes among the employees of the various organizations. Developing and fostering these attitudes is a core leadership responsibility, as is the ongoing monitoring of processes within the service triangle of ALMP as well as the monitoring and tracking of process standards and impacts. Furthermore, it is a leadership task to design or modify structures and processes within the given financial framework so that employees have sufficient freedom within their own organizations, including time resources, to practice cooperation systematically and according to need. This may lead to new competency requirements at all levels of operation in order to initiate and implement necessary (fundamental) organizational and personnel development processes.

It also seems important to ensure a certain consistency in the organization's public image in its dealings with clients and cooperation partners, in the sense of aligning the understanding of collaboration and practical actions between management and operational levels, as well as among the professionals involved. Therefore, efforts should be made to establish a common language regarding “sticking points,”

such as decisions on financial benefits or benefit reductions, in practical advisory work.

Creating transparency through clear responsibilities

Clarifying responsibilities and role distributions, both within and across organizations, creates mutual transparency and can contribute to structuring communication processes and strengthening mutual understanding in interactions. Visualizations or digital formats, as well as target-group-appropriate language in written communication (letters, invitations, notices), can be used to support this process, for example, by conveying information about responsibilities as well as on programmes available, their objectives and content in a targeted manner to the relevant actors in the service triangle.

Appointing liaison officers or project managers in Jobcenters is particularly well-suited for pooling knowledge and creating a central point of contact for communication between the Jobcenter and the service provider. At the same time, this consolidates responsibility for effective communication. It is crucial that the job descriptions and responsibilities of these roles are carefully considered and effectively communicated both internally and externally. In practice, such roles often involve additional tasks on top of the primary responsibilities of a counsellor, team leader, or holder of a similar position. In such cases, it is especially important to clarify in advance the specific tasks associated with the role and whether these can be reliably completed within the available time frame. It is also essential to determine how this role will be integrated into the communication

channels between the Jobcenter and the service provider: as a central relay station with a coordination function, or as a stand-in with intervention capabilities in case of coordination issues.

If Jobcenters aim to provide support and advice beyond mere job placement, the introduction of case management can be useful (*see box*).

“CASE MANAGEMENT as a potential implementation tool”

Case management (CM) is a structured, needs-based process for supporting people with multifaceted or complex problems who require more intensive and coordinated support. CM focuses on addressing the individual case and aims to improve the person's living situation and – in the context of Jobcenters – to achieve sustainable integration into the labour market.

Basic Principles

Case management follows a clear process logic that ensures support needs are systematically identified and addressed in a targeted manner. Initially, it is assessed whether a case is actually relevant for case management due to its complexity. In the subsequent assessment, problems, resources, and strengths are comprehensively recorded (in the German Social Code, Book II (SGB II), this is reflected in the concept of labour market profiling). Based on this, realistic goals are formulated together with the benefit recipients and recorded in a support plan (in the SGB II, the cooperation plan is available for this purpose). This structures the case, gives the client a key role to play in order to strengthen the commitment of the clients.

Coordination (“linking”) connects the goals with suitable support services, such as addiction or debt counseling, youth services, or labour market-related measures (e.g., three-way counseling). The task is to effectively align these services and avoid duplication of services. Continuous monitoring ensures that agreed-upon steps are implemented and remain relevant. A reassessment is conducted if circumstances change. Finally, an evaluation determines whether the goals have been achieved or whether the process should be continued in a different format.

CM is displayed when

- multiple problems and complex needs of support exist,
- different support systems need to be coordinated or
- an intensive, long-term support process is required.

CM is not displayed when

- Regular care is sufficient,
- specialized offers cannot be clearly assigned or there is no willingness to engage in a cooperative process.

Multi-level approach

At the individual level, the focus is on resource- and solution-oriented counselling that supports clients but does not relieve them of all tasks in order to avoid “acquired helplessness” and promote self-sustainability. The organizational level requires clear roles, defined processes, and structuring tools (e.g., a cooperation plan). At the network level, a coordinated approach with internal and external partners is necessary to effectively bundle support services.

The case manager bears professional and organizational responsibility for the entire support process – even when external network partners are involved (accountability). This includes the obligation to provide comprehensible justifications for decisions, weigh alternatives, and transparently document the procedure. A key component is the careful assessment of whether a case remains within the case management team or whether a referral is professionally justified.

In this context, “accountability” means finding a balance between one's own process responsibility and the targeted integration of external support services.

Case management requires a clear distinction between management (needs assessment, goal clarification, coordination) and service provision or the integration of external services. This role differentiation forms the basis for effective and responsible case management.

3.2. Process of Service Delivery

A key area for optimizing support practices lies in the careful design of the service workflow, or process chain, from the initial consultation of benefit recipients at the Jobcenter (and, if applicable, at the training provider) through the transition to a programme, its implementation and the support during the programme, to after-care management. Here, too, it is crucial to clearly define roles, structure communication, and embed continuous learning processes. The responsibility for active exchange lies with the individual staff members of the training providers and Jobcenters. Management is responsible for creating supportive framework conditions and facilitating skills development.

In the long term, this approach aims to develop an integrated quality management system for commissioning, implementing, and monitoring ALMP-measures, linking systematically both the professional and organizational dimensions of support practices. Data transparency and the use of evidence-based decision-making play a central role in increasing the suitability and effectiveness of support programmes. At the same time, a consistent focus on results is necessary, one that prioritizes sustainable integration outcomes and includes not only labour market integration but also intermediate goals such as the participants' skills development. Knowledge management tools can support this approach by enabling the systematic collection, processing, and use of

experiential knowledge and improving the flow of information between Jobcenters, service-providers, and participants.

The state of Hesse could support this by making the submission of a fully developed concept a prerequisite for funding under the various programmes, not only for the measure itself (coaching, qualification, orientation, etc.), but also for the process steps that precede, accompany, and conclude the measure.

Jobcenters could already establish suitable guidelines for structured communication within the service triangle (with cooperation partners) during the planning phase of measures and, for example, make them the subject of tenders within the framework of service descriptions.

Separate recommendations for action can be formulated for each phase of the process chain.

Phase 1

Preliminary consultation and cooperation planning

Increase transparency and practical relevance, strengthen knowledge on programmes at the Jobcenter

To ensure the most appropriate placement possible and to improve the quality of counselling in terms of effectively translating benefits, it is crucial to establish a shared and practical understanding of activation and qualification measures between Jobcenters and service providers. Providers should therefore present their services regularly and in easily accessible formats, such as short in-person meetings or videos. Jobcenter counsellors should receive ongoing training on target groups, programme objectives, and programme content. Furthermore, Jobcenter staff can observe programmes offered by service providers to help counsellors better understand the actual structure, objectives, and requirements of ALMP-instruments.

Cooperative case planning and integration of measures

Even before a programme begins, Jobcenter advisors and staff from the implementing organization should engage in direct communication – with the participation of potential participants where necessary and possible. These preliminary discussions serve to clarify expectations and support needs transparently. They help to reduce the risk of no-shows. An “individual measures integration plan” (*see box*) can serve as a joint planning tool. The use of digital platforms

“Individual Measures Integration Plan” (IMIP) as a potential implementation instrument

The IMIP is conceived as a working document, jointly created by Jobcenters, clients, and service providers. It is not binding in legal sense but serves as a visible commitment from all actors involved. The label is of secondary importance; the key aspect is the added value it may provide beyond the cooperation plan according to § 15 SGB II.

The IMIP is created, edited, and updated collaboratively through a co-design process. This process is intentionally open-ended and thrives on collaborative exploration, the acceptance of mistakes, the failure of individual approaches, and learning through the process itself. Sufficient time must be allocated to ensure quality, suitability, and clear responsibilities.

What exactly does the IMIP regulate?

- Joint goal definition (realistic, verifiable, prioritized)
- Clear roles and responsibilities of Jobcenters, providers, and participants
- Expectation management on all sides
- Modular design that allows for flexible adjustments
- Regular, bindingly agreed review dates for progress monitoring and target adjustment

The plan is updated regularly, reviewed jointly, and adapted as needed – by both the Jobcenter and the service provider. It is therefore a dynamic working tool, not a static document.

The existing cooperation plan of the Jobcenters, which would have to be further developed in the case of active labour market promotion (allocation of measures, promotion of vocational training, AVGS...) with the involvement of providers and, if necessary, other social service providers, can serve as a basis for the IMIP, but will be significantly expanded in terms of content.

The use of a shared digital platform in compliance with privacy rules for the exchange of information, progress and achievements is strongly recommended so that Jobcenters and providers can work on a single document in parallel.

The goal of the “individual measures integration plan”.

The IMIP strengthens the self-efficacy and confidence of the participants, ensures transparency, commitment and shared responsibility – and thus becomes a central implementation instrument in individual integration work.

can also provide a shared information base throughout the programme and facilitate the exchange of information among all involved regarding the successes of the individual goal planning.

Flexibility in the design of measures

To meet individual needs, sufficient flexibility in programme design is crucial. For example, participants with psychosocial issues should have access to modules for stabilization and preparation for next steps to take. Even after the programme has begun, exit and transition options should be available if necessary, without hurting the legitimate interests of the service provider.

Furthermore, open, low-threshold services have proven effective, such as “job cafés” or neighbour-hood- and community-based programmes for the hard-to-reach or target groups of particular vulnerability. External psychosocial services should be involved early on, if needed. Individual coaching formats, digital or hybrid modules, and outreach work can also be tools for personalizing support practices.

Of course, both preparatory modules and open accessible services come at a cost. However, if these contribute to a more precisely matched staffing of programmes and to preventing programme dropouts, they can also contribute to a more efficient use of integration funds.

Phase 2

Handover and reception procedure

Seamless Transitions

The goal should be a seamless handover process between the Jobcenter and the service provider, involving all stakeholders and tailored to the type and scope of the programme. Possible approaches include three-way meetings between the Jobcenter, the service provider, and participants (“warm handovers”), co-creation meetings (between the Jobcenter and service providers, and between the Jobcenter and participants), handover forms, etc. Clients may benefit from greater transparency as well: Days of orientation or introduction allow them to familiarize themselves with the programmes before they start officially. This creates a realistic picture of the content and methods, thereby strengthening motivation and clarity of goals.

Phase 3

Programme operation

Coordinate processes and make communication efficient

Targeted collaboration within the service triangle of ALMP should also be pursued during the implementation phase, and case-related communication should be firmly established as an integral part of the programme design. Various models are conceivable here – from relatively loose contact between designated representatives who are contacted by the provider as needed, to close (virtual) team structures between Jobcenter and provider staff. Different solutions may be appropriate depending on the type of programme and regional conditions. A prerequisite is that binding communication procedures exist and can be used efficiently.

Targeted Use of Three-Party Meetings

Three-party meetings (Jobcenter – provider – participant) should be used selectively as needed and as possible, taking into account time and personnel resources available. Such meetings are particularly useful when initial irregularities or warning signs of a programme termination become apparent. They increase transparency regarding expectations and progress and strengthen participants' trust in the support process.

Structuring Responsibilities

A systematic, dialogue-oriented flow of information contributes to the early identification and reduction of dropout risks and “no-show” situations. Regular feedback between Jobcenters and providers, as well as to participants, creates transparency, promotes commitment, and strengthens shared responsibility for the success of the programme. Information obligations can, for example, be incorporated into tenders and service specifications to ensure that critical developments are reported early.

Building networks and promoting collaborative practices

Personal contacts and established networks among professionals facilitate spontaneous agreements, clarification of misunderstandings, and situational adjustments to measures. Site visits or joint “team days” with staff of the Jobcenter and the service provider can strengthen trust and the flow of information.

Phase 4

Graduate management

Evaluation at the case level and targeted follow-up discussions

Continuous reflection on the successes and failures of an intervention, based on sound information, is a crucial prerequisite for effective learning processes. At the conclusion of an intervention or after its termination, a systematic evaluation should be conducted jointly with the participants, including, if necessary, the involvement of the service provider's experts (case conferences). Final reports should be actively used for structured communication among all parties involved and—where possible—reflected upon jointly with the participants to provide a well-founded assessment of progress, obstacles, and the impact of individual support components. Fixed time slots for such debriefings promote accountability and ensure timely feedback, which facilitates the planning of subsequent steps.

Update the cooperation plan and ensure knowledge feedback

The evaluation results should be directly incorporated into the cooperation plan and updated accordingly. A suitable, targeted follow-up support system is sensitive to intermediate steps in the integration process and, at the same time, enables a seamless flow of information from the service provider to the Jobcenter – without unnecessarily increasing the duties of documentation. For example, Jobcenters could use the information already collected during the profiling procedures of clients as a basis.

Service providers can include qualitative, non-measurable achievements in their standard reporting. Participants should be given the opportunity to provide qualitative feedback. This also establishes a “shared outcome responsibility,” that is, a culture of shared accountability for integration successes.

Systematize Quality Development

Beyond individual case work, follow-up care should ensure the systematic feedback of experience. Standardized surveys enable comparable evaluations of success factors, needs, and challenges. Open reflection meetings for employees who supervise the same programme create space for exchange and make it possible to consolidate positive and critical experiences and translate them into strategic or operational adjustments. The proven method of continuous improvement (CIP) could provide inspiration for this.

Make structured follow-up the norm

It is important to track follow-up activities at the Jobcenter, for example through checklists, monitoring by managers, etc., as otherwise there is a risk that these important tasks will be overlooked or delayed in daily operations.

3.3. Organization and Regional Networking: For a Relational Labour Market Policy

Ongoing quality dialogue between Jobcenters and service providers may offer the opportunity to develop common standards for the implementation of ALMP-measures and, at the same time, to identify and address organizational shortcomings early on. To secure the lasting impact of this exchange, labour market laboratories, service provider conferences, and joint value-based workshops should be established to promote regular exchange on objectives, understandings of quality, and practical experiences of implementation.

As repeatedly emphasized in the current research on the topic and as well in recommendations of the European Network of Public Employment Services (PES-Network), partnerships between employment agencies, private service providers, and civil society and third-sector organizations are essential for the effectiveness of employment services addressing the challenges of the “triple transformation” of the economy and the society (ecological, digital, and social), further on in realizing an inclusive labour market that leverages society’s talent resources and leaves no one behind. However, as also highlighted, a partnership strategy requires the development of attitudes and capabilities for productive cooperation within all participating organizations, particularly within the PES agencies. Furthermore,

Suggestions for Exchange Formats

Regional forums can provide a potential impetus for structural innovation. These forums are associations of Jobcenters, service providers, companies, and – depending on the region – political and civil society actors. They pool psychosocial and labour market-related support services and create a common framework for further developing transition models into employment and community-oriented work opportunities. A strong focus on territorial strategies is central to this approach.

The regional forums also serve as a shared space for reflection: Together, participants examine what has worked well so far, what are still challenges, and which experiences can be capitalized for the future. This fosters regional learning processes and allows for the development of approaches that will be permanently anchored in practice. In addition, (volunteer-run) community-based structures can support unemployed individuals during periods of limited access to Jobcenters or other service providers, contributing to more reliable implementation of agreements, appointments, and action steps.

In addition to the regional forums, multilateral regional development workshops can be established. While the forums provide the strategic framework, the development workshops focus on specific individual topics that are particularly relevant to regional integration work. They bring together representatives from Jobcenters, service providers, job seekers, and employers in moderated small groups to exchange ideas on specific issues—for example, transition models, target group needs, interface management, or socio-spatial approaches.

The development workshops employ participatory methods such as motivational interviewing, systemic consensus building, design thinking, and future laboratories. This makes needs, experiences, and obstacles transparent and leads to the development of practical solutions that can be directly integrated into day-to-day support activities. At the same time, the workshops promote collaborative communication within the regional environment and strengthen mutual understanding among all participating stakeholders.

the effective organization of upstream and interface processes is a crucial condition for the success of partnerships. This is a central task for the management of the organizations, but also for the entire governance structure in which employment services are embedded. In the context of municipal Jobcenters, this primarily involves the political leadership of the municipality, but as well the supra-regional structures of associations of municipalities and the federal states in their function as supervisors of municipal policies. In the area of local government, for example, it also depends on the political leadership whether a good culture of cooperation develops between the various relevant strands of action within the municipality, such as economic development, social and youth welfare, public order administration, municipal housing companies, urban development, etc., on the one hand, and the external actors such as companies, chambers of commerce, social service providers and civil society organizations on the other.

Overall, it is important to promote and institutionalize quality dialogues across the board in order to learn systematically from individual cases, strengthen the transfer of knowledge between stakeholders, and establish a common quality culture in employment promotion.

The HMSI is recommended to support and accompany the design of the action process and its regional implementation within the scope of its responsibilities.

Within the framework of the performance dialogues between the persons in charge in the regions and the Hessian Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (HMSI) and the related reporting formats, this aspect of regional implementation practice should be given particular emphasis. This will allow the HMSI to gain current insights into the practices of regional stakeholders. At the same time, it can identify potential structural support or clarification needs at the supra-regional level.

During planning discussions for regional labour market programmes, cooperation within the service triangle of ALMP and the respective activities already underway or planned to optimize cooperation should be included as mandatory points in planning documents and in the corresponding planning discussions.

In the area of implementing the state's labour market promotion programmes, the design of the implementation process should be included as an important criterion for funding decisions. The state should provide guidelines for substantiated explanations of this process in funding applications and implementation reports.

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