

# INVESTING IN AN E-HEALTH PROJECT IN A POST CONFLICT SITUATION TO HELP THE REDEVELOPMENT OF MEDICAL SYSTEMS: THE EXAMPLE OF THE TELEMEDICINE PROGRAMME OF KOSOVO

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Background: After the Kosovo conflict, the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) was established in 1999. After 15 years of conflict, the existing health information and communication system was outdated or non-existing. The main challenges were the lack of infrastructure, scarcity of appropriately trained human resources and the absence of a modern health strategy. The European Union (EU), through the European Agency for Reconstruction (EAR) provided technical assistance with a total of Euro 30 million to reform health services in Kosovo, including a modern health information system. To this end, EAR funded the first phase of the Telemedicine Programme of Kosovo by building the Telemedicine Centre of Kosova (TCK) through the Telemedicine Association of Kosova with Euro 1.2million. The first phase of the programme has been implemented through international collaboration and multiple institutions and has become a recognized model for developing countries.

Methods: The EAR together with the UNMIK Department of Health and Social Welfare conducted an analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT), to decide on the feasibility and possible sustainability of an investment into a project for telemedicine and e-health in Kosovo. The main strengths were potential improvement of, and access to health related information, commitment by the leadership of the programme, and the acceptance by all stake holders. The main weakness and the biggest threat to the programme were the absence of an overall e-health strategy, and the lack of a strong ownership by the local government at the time. Despite this, the EAR and UN saw a unique opportunity to implement the new concept in health care in the region and the EAR decided to fund the project taking a calculable risk, outweighed by the realistically assumable benefits. The EU funding covered the core activities of TCK until 2005. As of 2006 the TCK is funded by the Ministry of Health of Kosovo (MoH).

Conclusion: The high utilization of all the Centre's facilities (e-library, teleconferencing, tele-consultation) highlight the success of the project. The project has demonstrated, that given the right time and commitment of its stakeholders the establishment of advanced information technology in a post conflict situation is feasible, and sustainable and should be considered for future similar conditions. Further necessary capital investment for the Kosovo wide roll out of the project will depend on future donor funding.

Key words: 1. Post conflict situations, 2. public health, 3. e-health, 4. telemedicine