

Support Continuous Unemployed Learning (SCUL) Project

External Evaluation Report

Grant agreement No. VS/2020/0082

Implemented by: National Agency for Employment and Skills and the United Nations Development Programme Albania

Funded by: European Union, European Commission, Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Programme for Employment and Social Innovation

Executive Summary

Evaluation aim and approach

The goal of the Final Evaluation is to gain an **independent analysis of the performance and the effects that the project “Support Continuous Unemployed Learning” (SCUL) in Albania**, a project funded by the European Union, Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI), implemented jointly by the National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES) and UNDP Albania, aiming at contributing to the active participation of vulnerable low qualified jobseekers to the society and their transition to the labour market through the provision of quality, flexible, targeted trainings on basic skills. The project is implemented over the period of 30 months starting from 01st April 2020. Overall, the Final Evaluation has a formative nature and ensures the evidence-based of the external evaluation of the performance of the project. The Final Evaluation assignment is undertaken via **desk study** (home-based research, analysis, and reporting), supported by **10 in-depth interviews with project implementing partners, consultants, and other stakeholders** of the project. The in-depth interviews were conducted in November 2022. The Final Evaluation assesses the **relevance, the effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact of the project**. The evaluation follows a collaborative and participatory approach in terms of engagement with the project implementing partners.

Relevance

The project's **overall objective, scope, and implementation strategy remain highly valid** in Albania. The project's overall objective to provide flexible, quality, and targeted training on basic literacy and digital skills to vulnerable low-skilled long-term unemployed adults **remain highly relevant to the needs and priorities of the target group**. The project relevance is **well-situated and embedded in the scope and experience of the implementing partners**. The project scope and intervention logic are also in line with national strategic programmes including employment and skills, social inclusion of minorities and social and economic empowerment of women and vulnerable communities. Furthermore, the project is **embedded within the broader EU integration process of Albania**, the overarching reforming agenda of the country, as well as will be in line with the European Skills Agenda and international declarations on VET and digital skills. although highly relevant and adequate, the **theory of change is at the same time very ambitious to be achieved within the given timeframe of the project and considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and bureaucratic constraints of policymaking in practice in Albania**.

Effectiveness

The effectiveness of the project in terms of progress toward results is evaluated as partially satisfactory. The SCUL project addresses the complex issue of insufficient basic functional skills (literacy, numeracy, and digital) in adults. Specifically, the project addresses the needs of approximately 5,000 jobseekers registered in the NAES database who face long-term unemployment and belong to vulnerable and marginalized groups in society and Roma and Egyptian minorities. The project had three outputs: 1. Vulnerable job seekers are referred to tailored basic learning provisions or other social services. 2. Low-skilled job seekers benefitted from quality, flexible, targeted trainings on basic skills. 3. Training provision is constantly improved based

on collected evidence. The project has managed to achieve only partially these outputs due to the challenges posed by external factors such as the COVID19 pandemic, governmental bureaucracy, non approval of the Decision of Council of Ministers, non approval of extension for training delivery, changes in the assessment tool compared to the initial plan. Although these **external and contextual factors posed additional challenges to the project implementation and slowed down the progress** of the activities, the entire project team (NAES and UNDP Albania) were **highly committed and motivated to achieve the results** and have worked to mitigate the risks and manage change.

Efficiency

Overall, the efficiency of the project implementation and delivery is rated as satisfactory. The modalities of the project management allow for an efficient way of project implementation making use of available human, technical, financial resources, and knowledge inputs by NAES and UNDP Albania. The project management efficiency is supported by a dedicated SCUL project team assigned to take charge of the overall management, delivery, monitoring, reporting, coordination, and visibility of the project in close cooperation between NAES and UNDP Albania. The latter has supported with the project implementation NAES based on its long-standing experience in project implementation and working with governmental agencies. The project has progressed and adapted to the challenges posed by the COVID19 pandemic and government bureaucracy.

Sustainability

Overall, the progress SCUL to ensure the sustainability of the results and benefits after the end of the project is partially satisfactory. The alignment of the SCUL with national priorities and the needs of the vulnerable low skilled job seekers are major factors contributing to the sustainability of the results. The approaches and methods for cooperation between implementing partners (IPs), beneficiaries and other stakeholders in a transparent, inclusive, consultative, and consistent way also contributes in principle to the prospects for sustainability. The sustainability of the project is also supported by a clear sense of ownership of the achieved outputs such as the assessment tool (Mini LAMP), the working protocols, curriculum, and the Roadmap by NAES. The project has managed successfully to ensure external coherence and synergies with other initiatives at national level with spill over effect in policy making (New National Strategy for Employment and Skills 2023-2030). Based on evidence available to the evaluator, the sustainability of the project is hindered by the **non approval of the DCM for the official adoption of the curriculum and the non completion of the training delivery** to the target groups, thus they did not benefit from quality, flexible, targeted trainings on basic skills. **Thus, while knowledge transfer is evaluated as good for NAES capacity development, the same cannot be stated for the target group.** Although the project has made enormous efforts to ensure all results are achieved, **external and contextual factors have negatively influenced in the progress of planned outputs.** It is worth noting that **NAES is highly interested in the project outputs and intends to continue its effort for the official adoption of the curricula even after the life of the project.**

Impact

The project has generated positive impact in policy sector regarding the needs of the the vulnerable low skilled job seekers and adult lifelong learning. SCUL project adopted an adequate scope, albeit very ambitious, to tackle a very complex issue affecting a vulnerable target group with multiple needs that have not been in the centre of policy attention and that have received few opportunities for their social and economic empowerment. The SCUL project has the merit of creating a solid evidence-based framework of need assessments of the target group that served for adapting all other actions. In addition, it has the merit of testing the Mini Lamp instrument in Albanian context which can also be used in the future in other countries. Another merit of the project impact is the development of a non formal education curriculum for upskilling of the low skilled long term unemployed job seekers as an alternative to the current provision in Albania, which are not very suitable to the needs of this target group. Finally, the development of a Roadmap that assesses the policy and legal framework in Albania and identifies the pathways for the upskilling of this target group is highly relevant and has contributed already to policy development in Albania.

Lessons learned

Key lessons learned:

- Adopting a flexible approach and the ability of the Project to respond to changes in local contexts have proven essential for project activities, despite identified significant risks.
- Achieving systemic policy change is proven to be very challenging in practice in the Albanian context and when considering the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic and government bureaucracy.
- Inter-institutional cooperation and multistakeholder policy dialogue are paramount to achieving systemic and policy change. In the SCUL case, other government institutions are key stakeholders in addition to NAES, such as the Ministry of Education and Sports and subordinating agencies and the National Agency for Vocational Education, Training and Qualification (NAVETQ).
- Involvement of other government institutions in the project scope and intervention logic for achieving planned outcomes will require more time, resources, and adequate tools for Inter-institutional cooperation and multistakeholder policy dialogue. UNDP is placed well in the ecosystem to support this process, given its track record of engagement as a development partner.
- Communication, visibility, and engagement with stakeholders consistently and inclusively contribute to the Project's spillover effect in national policymaking.
- Management of direct funding from the European Commission by government agencies such as NAES comes with additional challenges related to the legal and regulatory frameworks that affect the financial management of the action and the limited institutional capacities for project management.

Recommendations

Based on the evaluation findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are made to the implementing partners:

- ⇒ It is important for NAES and UNDP Albania and relevant stakeholders to continue their efforts to deliver the developed curriculum by starting with pilot testing and delivery of training for a specific target group before rolling out and adopting officially the curriculum.
- ⇒ It is crucial for Ministry of Finance and Economy to work with both NAES and NAVETQ and the Ministry of Education and Sports as well as Ministry of Health and Social Protection and other relevant stakeholders and development partners, starting from the UNDP Albania, to make the necessary legal changes for the adaption of the curriculum as an alternative to the existing instruments in place for the upskilling of the vulnerable low skilled job seekers.
- ⇒ The needs of this target group are complex and accessing the labor market requires for them to do professional courses and for that they need basic literacy, numeracy, and digital skills that are validated and certified. So relevant stakeholders must strive to ensure the necessary legal changes for this to happen.
- ⇒ The support for this target group should be complemented with mentoring and coaching addressing individual needs but tackling the entire family as well within the integrated social services model.
- ⇒ The European Commission and other donors should consider supporting the project in the future given that the scope and intervention logic are highly relevant and positively evaluated.
- ⇒ Stronger and more efficient synergy and coordination is needed among stakeholders for evidence-based policy changes that address adult learning and lifelong learning.
- ⇒ Enhanced and strategic awareness raising is also needed for bring adult learning and lifelong learning to the plethora of policy making.
- ⇒ Cooperation with civil society, academia and private sector is also encouraged to yield positive results.

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Abbreviations/ Acronyms

AQF	Albanian Qualification Framework
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EaSI	Programme for Employment and Social Innovation
EQs	Evaluation Questions
EU	European Union
EC	European Commission
IPs	Implementing Partners
KM	Knowledge Management
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
NAES	National Agency for Employment and Skills
NAVETQ	National Agency for Vocational Education, Training and Qualifications
OECD/DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Development Assistance Committee
ToC	Theory of Change
UNDP Albania	United Nations Development Programme in Albania

1. Introduction

1.1 Evaluation Scope and Objectives

The goal of the external final evaluation is to provide an independent final analysis of the progress achieved through implementation of the Support Continuous Unemployed Learning (SCUL) Project, a project funded by the European Union, Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI), implemented jointly by the National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES) and UNDP Albania, aiming at contributing to the active participation of vulnerable low qualified jobseekers to the society and their transition to the labour market through the provision of quality, flexible, targeted trainings on basic skills. The project is implemented over the period of 30 months starting from 1st of April 2020 and up to 30 September 2022 as per the Amendment No. 2, dated 04.05.2020.

The purpose of the final evaluation is to present evidence-based analysis, objective and impartial of the performance and the impact of the project as a means of accountability, the perceptions of stakeholders, document lessons learned and provide practical recommendations for sustainability of the action. The external final evaluation through independent analysis of the project and its effects offers insights for future actions, steering and focus of project partners going forward.

The primary audience/ users of the external evaluation are the project partners: National Agency for Employment and Skills and UNDP Albania, the donor (European Commission, Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs, and Inclusion) and more broadly other stakeholders related to the project implementation and impact.

Specifically, the Final Evaluation assesses the below criteria of [OECD/DAC evaluation guidelines](#):

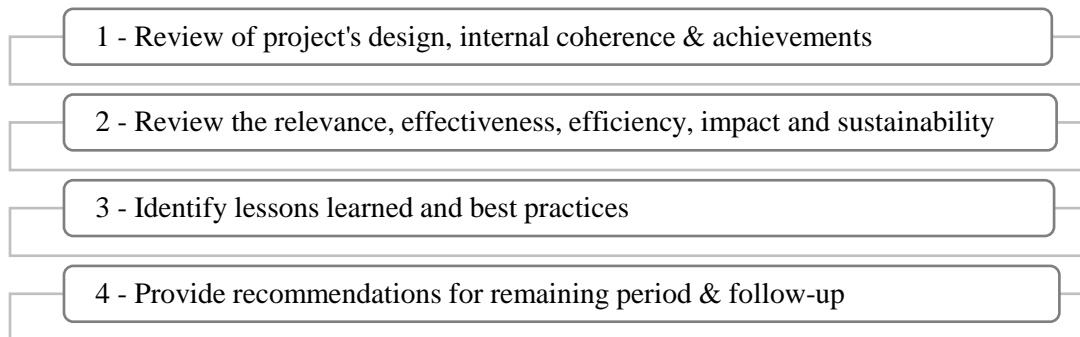
- **Relevance:** measures whether the project addresses an important development goal and whether its objectives are still valid.
- **Effectiveness:** measures whether the project activities achieve its goal.
- **Efficiency:** measures the cost effectiveness, i.e. the economic use of resources to achieve desired results.
- **Sustainability:** measures whether the benefits of the project are likely to continue after donor funding has been withdrawn. The project needs to be environmentally as well as financially sustainable.
- **Impacts of intervention:** measure the positive and negative changes produced by the project, directly or indirectly, intended, or unintended.

1.2 Evaluation methodology: Approach and data collection tools

The evaluation methodology is an evidence-based assessment. The external evaluation builds upon: (a) the review of relevant sources of project information (e.g. project document, progress reports, key project deliverables), and the review of available sector-specific context documents and statistical sources; (b) 10 in-depth interviews conducted with key informant persons undertaken during September and November 2022; (c) the detailed assessment of the project's progress versus the results framework.

The following figure presents the process of the external evaluation followed by the evaluation matrix and evaluation questions that can be found in [Annexes](#).

Figure 1: Evaluation Process



The document analysis includes project documents, progress reports, annual reports, activities, and related documents produced by SCUL.

The complete list of interviewees can be found [here](#). The specific questions per each of the evaluation criteria are presented in each analysis of the evaluation criteria and in [annexes](#).

1.3 Structure of the Final Report

The Final Evaluation Report presents analysis in terms of the following report sections: (0) Executive Summary; (1) Introduction; (2) Description of the intervention; (3) Findings (i.e. Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Sustainability, Impact; (4) Conclusions; Lessons learned; Recommendations and (5) Annexes.

2. Project Overview and Description of the Intervention

2.1 Overview of the SCUL project

The “Supported Continuous Unemployed Learning” (SCUL) project, financed by the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI), implemented jointly by the National Agency for Employment and Skills and UNDP Albania, aims to contribute to the active participation of vulnerable low qualified jobseekers to the society and their transition to the labour market through the provision of quality, flexible, targeted trainings on basic skills. The action is expected to have an impact on the literacy ratio in Albania. The action is fully in line with the National Employment and Skills Strategy (NESS 2019-2022), the long-term programmatic document with which the government of Albania committed with its citizens in promoting sustainable growth through social and economic inclusion. The project had three main outputs:

Output 1: Vulnerable jobseekers are referred to tailored basic learning provision or other social services

Output 2: Low skilled job seekers benefitted from quality, flexible, targeted trainings on basic skills

Output 3: Training provision is constantly improved based on collected evidence.

Project objectives are:

- Increase the target group opportunities for their sustainable integration in the labour market.
- Strengthen inter-institutional cooperation, including Employment Offices and Vocational Training Centres for the training of the target group.
- Set up protocols as an instrument for training the target group by expanding the services provided to low educated jobseekers and creating referral mechanisms to other institutions/stakeholders.
- Build capacities within NAES, to facilitate the transition/access of the target group to the labour market.
- Strengthen the capacities of the target group and raise their awareness to be active in seeking employment/vocational training opportunities.
- Train the target group through a dedicated curriculum which is intended to be integrated within the system of Vocational Training Centres.

The project deliverables are:

1. **Qualitative and quantitative analysis** of the target group carried out in a detailed final report on long-term unemployed jobseekers registered in Albania.
2. Assessment methodology with European standards developed and tailored to the Albanian context. **1000 jobseekers** assessed based on their skills.
3. Established methodology for the identification of the target group **sub-categories**.
4. **Working protocol** for the dedicated training of the target group depending on their categorization.
5. New **curriculum** built on basic educational skills (literacy and soft skills) and basic digital skills for the low educated unemployed jobseekers.

6. A final evaluation study **collecting lessons learnt**, challenges and best practices.
7. Creation of a **roadmap** that will function as a long-term mechanism for addressing low qualified jobseekers in the labour market.

The key activities are presented in the following table.

Table 1: Key project activities

Work Packages	Key activities
WP1: Project Management	1.a: Kick-off meeting 1.b: Project steering committee 1C: Closing Event
WP2: Target Group Analysis	2. a: Conduct an in-depth qualitative analysis through focus group discussions with the target group in the selected municipalities 2. b: Conduct a quantitative analysis and mapping of the target group throughout the country, by utilizing available sources of information 2.c: Presentation and validation of the results with the relevant key stakeholders
WP3: Skills Assessment Methodology	3. a: Create an assessment roadmap/feasibility study. 3.b: Assess the skills of the target group/ conduct the survey. 3.c: Present the results of the adaptation of the tool and response collected in an international conference.
WP4: Strengthen National Agency for Employment and Skills' Capacities	4.a: Identify the sub-target groups based on the results of the evidence collected in WP2. 4.b: Design a new service package for the employment offices, targeting the low-educated unemployed jobseekers and prepare the step-by-step procedures (operational manuals) for its implementation. 4.c: Deliver training of the new service package for the staff of the employment offices.
WP5: Develop tailored curricula	5.a: Design a new curriculum module on basic digital skills and adopt the existing modules on literacy, numeracy and soft skills. 5.b: Discuss and validate the developed modules with selected instructors of the public education and training providers. 5.c: Prepare the necessary legal arrangements for the official adoption of the curricula and for its implementation (DCM and internal regulation). 5.d: Develop and conduct a programme for the training of training (20 selected instructors).
WP6: Training Delivery	6.a: Deliver the developed and adapted training modules to the beneficiaries, identified by the employment offices and referred to the VTCs 6.b: Allocation of incentives 6.c: Regional Meetings
WP7: Evaluation	7.a: Pre-Post Evaluation 7.b: Organize a final international conference to present the results, discuss the way forward and to compare the experience of Albania with other benchmarks in the region and/or the EU 7.c: Conduct a final external evaluation of the project

	7.d: Prepare a roadmap to support the implementation of upskilling pathways in Albania
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2.2 Reconstruction of the Intervention Logic

The project focused on developing a flexible and quality instrument for offering trainings (i) literacy skills, as well as (ii) basic digital skills to vulnerable low skilled job seekers. These skills are compulsory for them to access the labour market and/or further education and more broadly to ensure their social and economic inclusion in society.

The project has strong sense of local ownership and high level of responsiveness as it is a locally driven and needs-based intervention logic aiming at increasing the basic literacy and digital skills of vulnerable low skilled job seekers in Albania managed by the relevant agency (NAES) and with the support of the development partners of the Government of Albania (UNDP Albania). The relevance to the target groups' needs and the implementation partners' appropriateness and modalities are fully confirmed by the external evaluation.

The intervention logic encompasses a relatively ambitious theory of change and links among objectives, outputs, outcomes. The overall aim is to contribute to the active participation of vulnerable low qualified jobseekers to the society and their transition to the labour market through the provision of quality, flexible, targeted trainings on basic skills. The Outputs listed are in fact complementary sub-outcomes directly linked to the objectives of the action: First, vulnerable jobseekers are referred to tailored basic learning provision or other social services and second, they benefit from quality, flexible, targeted trainings on basic skills. At the same time, a final output is the constant improvement based on collective evidence of the training provision.

2.3 Target groups

The intervention targets directly the vulnerable low skilled job seekers (29+ years) who represent the largest share in the unemployed registered in NAES, and who outside of education barrier, reflect complex socio-economic issues that lead to long-term unemployment, not being active in the labor market and engaging in informal economic activity. In addition, the project recognizes that low digital skills are an obstacle to adults' societal and economic empowerment and participation in the labor market in view also of the rapid digitalization of the economy and social activities. Specifically in this target group, women have a higher share of experiencing barriers to accessing labor market and a particular segment of the target group are Roma and Egyptian minorities. The project thus has used gender balance lenses when preparing and delivering activities, but also sensitiveness towards minorities. So far, there have been very limited tailored support provided to low skilled unemployed people, especially when it refers to the upskilling and reskilling and even more limited systematic initiatives to address the challenges of this target group. The stakeholders

The stakeholders of the project are the line ministries: Ministry of Finance and Economy, Ministry of Education and Sports, Ministry of Health and Social Protection and their subordinating agencies such as the

National Agency for Vocational Education, Training and Qualifications; European Delegation to Tirana; Other Development Agencies such as SDC, GIZ and other tackling similar issues; VET Training centers; professional schools; CSOs offering social services to vulnerable communities; human development experts, education experts, curricula development experts and digital skills experts. The final beneficiaries are citizens of Albania.

3. Findings

This section presents the findings and analysis based on triangulation of data from desk review and in-depth interviews. The section is structured as per the five criteria of the evaluation stated in the methodology approach. Each subsection presents the key evaluation questions (EQ) followed by the analysis.

3.1 Project relevance and coherence

Relevance and coherence– to what extent the objectives of the development intervention are consistent with national and local policies and priorities and the needs of the intended beneficiaries, country needs and partners' and donors' policies?

Evaluation Questions

1. To what extent are the objectives of the project still valid?
2. How relevant is the project to target groups' needs and priorities?
3. How relevant is the project to other key stakeholders' needs and priorities?
4. Was the project concept in line with the national sector development priorities and plans of the country?
5. Identify gaps in the SCUL approach not foreseen to achieve more system-wide impact.
6. How has the programme interacted and coordinated with other projects in the same sector? Is there room for improvement and closer collaboration?

The project's **overall objective, scope, and implementation strategy remain highly valid** considering Albania's current contextual social, political, and economic situation and the target group's needs. In Albania, participation in adult learning remains relatively low, even lower for low-skilled adults of the most vulnerable groups in society. Moreover, the efforts to improve the situation still need to be more streamlined systemically. As such, including adults of 29+ years with low education and qualification levels while being long-term unemployed remains a policy issue of national interest. The project's overall objective to provide flexible, quality, and targeted training on basic literacy and digital skills to vulnerable low-skilled long-term unemployed adults remain **highly relevant to the needs and priorities of the target group**. The vulnerable low-skilled job seekers (29+ years) stay outside adult education participation and face long-term unemployment. They are not active in the labor market or engage in informal economic activity. SCUL addresses the issue of insufficient basic functional skills of adults, and specifically the approximately 5,000 jobseekers registered in the NAES database, who lack professional and other soft and technical skills required to obtain a job.

The lack of lifelong learning opportunities and qualification deficit in vulnerable low-skilled adults exacerbates social and economic exclusion. Given that prospects for flexible and customized adult education

are limited in Albania and actual adult education participation rates even lower for vulnerable low-skilled adults, the SCUL project provides **a window of opportunity to tackle the complex challenges** of this target group. The informal interviews for this evaluation overwhelmingly confirm the validity of the project objective and its relevance for the target group. *"The regional employment offices are asking us about the implementation of the training curricula as they have received high interest from the low-skilled job seekers registered in our database"* (Interview with NAES representatives, Tirana, November 2022). Also, the NAES General Director emphasized the importance of the project in the framework of the agenda of reskilling and current economic developments with the most recent trends and the labor market demand for skills in his statement at the Final SCUL Conference (Final Conference Report, September 2022). Thus, the project's overall objective is entirely in line with the needs and priorities of the target group.

The project relevance is **well-situated and embedded in the scope and experience of the implementing partners**. The lead partner (NAES) is the adequate public institution to implement policies for the active participation of vulnerable low qualified jobseekers in society and their transition to the labor market through the provision of quality, flexible, targeted training on basic skills. As an institution, NAES's pivotal role is to take charge of active participation in the labor market of vulnerable low-skilled job seekers, which is confirmed by NAES's leadership (Final Conference Report, September 2022). Also, informant interviews highlighted that NAES is well positioned with the public administration system to continue its efforts to access this target group to the labor market in close inter-institutional cooperation with other governmental agencies. In addition, the profile, experience, expertise, and reputation of the implementing partner (UNDP Albania) and its **unique position as a development partner for the Government of Albania offer immense added value to the project design, strategy, and implementation**. For instance, UNDP Albania is currently cooperating with the Ministry of Finance and Economy to develop the Employment and Skills Strategy (2023-2030), in which the SCUL project has played a significant role. More so, UNDP Albania is working with other development partners in Albania, including the European Union, on tackling issues of long-term unemployment, reskilling, and upskilling of various target groups.

The project has **brought together many national stakeholders that operate and are involved in the employment and skills field decision-making** in Albania, as well as international organizations, such as UNESCO Lifelong Learning, that have authority with a focus on adult and continuing education, literacy, and non-formal basic education. Interviews reiterated the good approach of the project in tackling this issue and involving relevant stakeholders. UNESCO Lifelong Learning representative stated that the approach was *"extremely interesting, and it will be used as a case study for future references on how to use the UNESCO tool for assessing skills of low-skilled and long terms job seekers"* (Interview, November 2022). Local and International experts interviewed for this evaluation convincingly argued that the project is, in fact, **fully compatible with efforts to tackle adult learning not only in Albania but also across the region and the European Union**.

SCUL project has already **led the way that policy actors and other stakeholders should follow to address better the needs for upskilling for adult jobseekers to reintegrate into the labor market**, but also to facilitate

their access to further training and continuous education. At the time of design and implementation, the project **was entirely in line with the National Employment and Skills Strategy 2019- 2022**, the Albania long-term program for increasing the employment and skills of various groups in society. More specifically, it falls under pillar C: promote social inclusion and territorial cohesion, recently highlighted as requiring more substantial commitment among the four. The Ministry of Finance and Economy is currently consulting a **new National Employment and Skills Strategy (2023-2030)**. Adult learning, lifelong learning, and upskilling of adults' basic literacy and digital skills, particularly low-skilled, will be the focus of this new strategic policy program. The interviews for this evaluation confirmed the **contribution of SCUL in the new strategy and the role** of UNDP Albania in ensuring synergies of different initiatives in the sector. The project **scope and intervention logic are also in line with other national strategic documents related to the inclusion of Roma and Egyptian communities**, such as the new National Action Plan for equality, inclusion, and participation of Roma and Egyptians in Albania (2021-2025), gender equality and social and economic empowerment of women such as the national gender equality strategy and the law on gender equality.

Furthermore, the project is **embedded within the broader EU integration process of Albania**, the overarching reforming agenda of the country, as well as will be in line with the European Skills Agenda. The project responds to the EC commission's recommendation for Albania to address issues of discrimination against Roma and Egyptian minorities and vulnerable communities living in social and economic hardship and facing enormous challenges in accessing the labor market ([European Commission, Annual Report Albania 2022](#), p. 36).

The right to education, training, and lifelong learning is enshrined in the European Pillar of Social Rights (principle 1). The intervention is linked with the **European Education Area 2021-2030**, focused on adult learning. In addition, the project is compatible with the European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness, and resilience. It includes ambitious actions to help people to develop their skills throughout life ([Adult Learning in the EU, European Commission](#)). As part of the EU accession process, Albania will strive to ensure the implementation of the same principles and actions. Furthermore, the project is in line with the third **Riga Conclusion on VET** and, more specifically: "Enhance access to VET and qualifications for all through more flexible and permeable systems, notably by offering efficient and integrated guidance services and making available validation of non-formal and informal learning," endorsed by the ministers of EU and candidate countries, including Albania ([Declaration here, June 2022](#)).

A core component of SCUL is also strengthening the **basic digital skills of the target group and developing digital curricula in adult learning**. Albania is undergoing various digitalization processes in both the public and private sectors. Hence digital knowledge for adults is crucial for the digitalization strategies of Albanian education and employment systems on the national scale. Thus, the project aligns with the **Osnabrück Declaration on vocational education and training** as an enabler of recovery and just transitions to digital and green economies. The project is compatible with focus number 2 of the Declaration: Establishing a new lifelong learning culture – relevance of C-VET and digitalization ([Full Declaration, 2020](#)). The Government

of Albania has prepared the implementation plan, considering lessons learned throughout the SCUL implementation process.

In essence, the project attempts to achieve **systemic change in how vulnerable low-skilled job seekers can access the labor market**. The intervention logic and strategy are clearly defined, and the theory of change narrative is a credible outline of the causal pathway of results leading to the active participation in society and transition to the labor market of vulnerable low qualified job seekers. As such, although **highly relevant and adequate, the theory of change is at the same time very ambitious to be achieved within the given timeframe** of the project and considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and bureaucratic constraints of policymaking in practice in Albania.

3.2 Progress towards results - Project Effectiveness

Effectiveness – to what extent results at various levels, including outcomes, have been achieved based on planned activities?
<u>Evaluation Questions</u> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. To what extent have the expected outputs, outcomes and goal been achieved?2. What are the major factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of the results/ outputs?3. Have changes been made and are they effective?4. Are work-planning processes results-based?

The effectiveness of the project in terms of progress toward results is evaluated as partially satisfactory. The SCUL project addresses the complex issue of insufficient basic functional skills (literacy, numeracy, and digital) in adults. Specifically, the project addresses the needs of approximately 5,000 jobseekers registered in the NAES database who face long-term unemployment and belong to vulnerable and marginalized groups in society and Roma and Egyptian minorities. The project had three outputs:

1. Vulnerable job seekers are referred to tailored basic learning provisions or other social services.
2. Low-skilled job seekers benefitted from quality, flexible, targeted trainings on basic skills.
3. Training provision is constantly improved based on collected evidence.

The project has managed to achieve **only partially these outputs**.

The project started implementation in April 2020 amid the **COVID-19 pandemic crisis in Albania** in full swing. The first work package (WP1) created a project steering committee and framed a project management strategy. Its second work package (WP2) focused on conducting an in-depth analysis of the target group. Digging into demographic characteristics, social-economic factors, geographical provenience, and the need for complementary health care or social services, the analysis helped identify specific sub-groups based on criteria other than age and educational attainment. As such, the project has successfully completed a **qualitative and quantitative analysis** of the target group carried out in a detailed final report on long-term unemployed jobseekers registered in Albania (WP2). This **analysis is evaluated as extremely helpful by all the informant interviews** for this evaluation as it provides an in-depth and comprehensive scan of the target group. This analysis's qualitative and quantitative data can serve as evidence for further policy interventions and future assessments to compare the progress.

The third work package (WP3) employed international and national expertise to adapt a literacy assessment tool and further assess the basic literacy skills of one sample of the target group (1000 persons). A feasibility study articulated the steps and the possible pathways in implementing a skills assessment methodology and tool based on tested international successful models. For this, a consultation was conducted, which guided the selection of a skills assessment methodology and instrument to address low-skilled adult learners' existing competencies. Thus, the project has **successfully identified an assessment methodology with European literacy and digital skills standards** that have been developed and tailored to the Albanian context. Specifically, 1000 jobseekers from the NAES database were assessed based on their skills. The selection of Mini-Lamp (the Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Program (LAMP), which is a system developed by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics to address the urgent need to measure literacy skills and mathematical operations) as the tool to be used was based on a preliminary desk review and assessment of the different methods. It is appreciated that the review took into consideration the purpose of the assessment, the countries that took part (similar or different to the Albanian context), the target population, the sampling size and design, the type of cognitive assessments implemented (reading, writing, mathematics, ICT, and the like) and the mode of delivery. The detailed comparative analysis of 15 different assessment tools was very comprehensive and **highly adequate to identify the right assessment tool for the Albanian context**. Even though this tool is not suitable for individual assessment but only group assessment, it is **still highly valid as a first step into creating a baseline** and, later on, utilizing a tool that can tackle needs and information individually. However, this was not easy to be completed, given that the OECD online assessment tool (provisioned in the preparatory phase) could not be purchased and adapted because it is not suitable for small-size samples. As a result, WP3 slowed down the implementation of other activities. This was complemented by grant agreement amendments that also slowed down the activities.

The fourth work package (WP4) focused on developing capacities by providing training to the NAES staff of the implementation of new procedures (applying the training of trainers' approach). The purpose of WP4 was to establish a structure to systematically support low-skilled unemployed adults since the moment they enter the employment office, until when they are referred to the most appropriated measure. The work package was designed having in focus strengthening NAES technical capacity and the **project has strengthened the capacities of NAES** (WP4). Also, the project has successfully established methodology for the identification of the target group sub-categories and a working protocol for the dedicated training of the target group depending on their categorization. The final report "On the profiling and sub-categorization of unemployed jobseekers without education and / or with low level of qualification" proposes two instruments for the profiling and identification of the sub-categories of the target group, which are: Mini Test and Mini Lamp. In the future, under this subcategory, basic skills support and training programs should be offered, combined with initiatives and financial support. As such employment promotion programs that provide non formal adult learning opportunities to adults without education and/or with a low level of qualification are a reasonable solution for their empowerment. In addition, following the identification and categorization of the target group, the project successfully developed the "*Guideline to Provide Basic Skills Training*", which consists of the dedicated protocol describing, step by step, all procedures that the staff of NAES shall

follow when dealing with low-educated jobseekers, including undertaking the skills assessment instrument. The project contributed to increasing the capacities of NAES staff by organising *trainings on protocols' implementation* for the central staff, especially from ALMP department, managerial staff in the regional level (directors and managers), ToT established in the central and regional level and staff (counselors) who work with the jobseekers in September 2022. The trainings were also complemented with the regional meetings (6c) whereby NAES staff were informed on key takeaways of the project implementation as far, and getting to know at core one of assessment tools “Mini Lamp”.

The fifth work package (WP5) developed a set of tailored, flexible, and quality learning opportunities to be offered to jobseekers not having completed primary education in Albania. A new technical curriculum was developed in the framework of diversifying the employment programmes portfolio and improving the employability levels of the jobseekers, allowing the combination of different modules and provision of flexible solutions. The delivery of training would make use of structures already in place, such as VTCs, and, if needed, employment offices, community and social centres or local NGO's. This intervention would as well help through equipping teachers of basic skills training with the pedagogical tools necessary to facilitate learning of adults with low cognitive equipment. Various previous curricula were consulted and also the final version was validated through focus groups, which is a suitable approach for a customized curricula that responds to the needs of the target group. Thus, the project managed to develop **a new curriculum built on basic educational skills (literacy and soft skills) and basic digital skills** for the low educated unemployed jobseekers (WP5).

However, **the project did not ensure the official adoption of the curriculum, which would have offered the legal base for its implementation and sustainability.** Although the project took all the necessary steps and measures to draft the legal ground for the curriculum adoption, external factors hindered the process. A joint group composed of internal NAES staff, the team of the project, the VTC General Director, and external legal experts drafted the legal base and rational document for the Decision of the Council of Ministers (DCM). The project team has confirmed to the evaluator that the DCM review by the institutions in charge took a long time and returned for comment and modification, making it impossible to finalize before September 2022. Since this DCM was built to address the project framework, policy actors must change the terms of the DCM to address institutional ownership beyond the project implementation. Due to these challenges, the project did not complete the training of trainers for this curriculum (5d).

The offer of tailored curricula and capacitation would have laid the ground for the implementation of training delivery (WP 6), as well as the final objective of the project, to design tailored roadmap for the whole target population and all the relevant stakeholders involved. The project did not manage to implement WP6 on delivering the developed and adapted training modules to the beneficiaries, identified by the employment offices, and referred to the VTCs. Therefore, allocation of incentives was not done, and budget not spent as planned. In order to deliver the curricula to the target group, a Decision of the Council of Ministers (DCM), which would regulate the entire procedure of the offer to the target group was required. **It is worth noting the intensive work between NAES working group, UNDP Albania and external legal expert to draft and push forward in the designing of the draft DCM** “On the procedures, criteria and rules

for the Implementation of the Employment Promotion Program through Basic Skills Training”. Although the draft DCM entered the legal procedure on May 10, 2022, it was not approved on time. The **non approval of the request for the extension** of the implementation period of the training delivery was another reason for the non completion of this core component of the project.

The project has completed a final evaluation study **collecting lessons learnt**, challenges and best practices and created of a **roadmap** that functions as a long-term mechanism for addressing low qualified jobseekers in the labour market (WP7). **The roadmap is a very useful document for the project and all relevant stakeholders given that it proposes a structure and explores the different pathways to address the specific education and qualification needs of this target group**, in order to encourage systemic upskilling mechanisms in the longer term, progressively reducing the size of this particular group, thus facilitating its transition towards the labour market. The roadmap has completed a review of all the adult education policy, analyzing the relevance to all the action taken within SCUL project and guidance is provided towards achieving a more successful completion of the goals that are not reached.

The SCUL implementation has faced **a major contextual challenge: the COVID19 pandemic** starting March 2020. The crisis has challenged Albania in many ways including the project implementation. However, the project has managed to mitigate the risks related to the crisis by showing some level of agility, flexibility, and high commitment towards achieving results. **The feedback received by the evaluator by the interviewed partners and target groups highlights the commitment and adaptability of the project team in implementing all project activities.** However, the legal and regulatory framework of public institutions would not allow for necessary flexibility and agility to manage change and major risks. Other reasons explaining alterations and delays in achieving outputs and implementation modalities of activities are the following: a) **Amendment of the grant agreement** and associated procedures delayed/postponed the implementation of several activities and consequently impacted objective achievements in the scheduled time; b) **change in purchase of the assessment tool different from OECD**; c) **non approval of the DCM** on “On the procedures, criteria and rules for the Implementation of the Employment Promotion Program through Basic Skills Training” and **non approval of the grant implementation extension**.

3.3 Project implementation and adaptive management (Efficiency)

Efficiency – how well and productively the NRC project has utilized the resources to reach the predefined goals?	
<u>Evaluation Questions</u>	
1.	Is the project implemented in the most efficient way, making the best use of available human, technical, technological, financial and knowledge inputs to achieve its desired results? Have there been any unforeseen problems? How well are they resolved?
2.	Following up on risk management, how the risk is assessed? And how the risk is managed? How did the Covid-19 restrictions and measures affect the efficiency of work towards the achievement of the project's intended results/goals?
3.	Review the monitoring tools used: Do they provide the necessary information? Do they involve key partners? Are they aligned or mainstreamed with national systems? Do they use existing information? Were they efficient and cost-effective? Are additional tools required? How could they be made more participatory and inclusive?

Overall, the efficiency of the project implementation and delivery is rated as satisfactory. The modalities of the project management allow for an efficient way of project implementation making use of available human, technical, financial resources, and knowledge inputs by NAES and UNDP Albania. The project management efficiency is supported by a dedicated SCUL project team assigned to take charge of the overall management, delivery, monitoring, reporting, coordination, and visibility of the project in close cooperation between NAES and UNDP Albania. The latter has supported with the project implementation NAES based on its long-standing experience in project implementation and working with governmental agencies. The project has progressed and adapted to the challenges posed by the COVID19 pandemic and government bureaucracy.

3.3.1 Project management arrangements and the efficient delivery of results

The modalities of management arrangements are clearly defined per each partner and well established in line with their profile and expertise. While the overall efficiency of programme implementation and results delivery has been good, it is evident that the efficiency of results delivery has faced challenges due to the very difficult external conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic and the non approval of the legal base for the delivery of trainings. Considering the external and contextual challenges, some activities have not been completed (WP5) as shown below.

Table 2: Status of completion per WP

Work Packages	Key activities	Status of completion
WP1: Project Management	1.a: Kick-off meeting 1.b: Project steering committee 1C: Closing Event	Completed 1c merged with 7b
WP2: Target Group Analysis	2. a: Conduct an in-depth qualitative analysis through focus group discussions with the target group in the selected municipalities 2. b: Conduct a quantitative analysis and mapping of the target group throughout the country, by utilizing available sources of information	Completed

	2.c: Presentation and validation of the results with the relevant key stakeholders	
WP3: Skills Assessment Methodology	3. a: Create an assessment roadmap/feasibility study. 3.b: Assess the skills of the target group/ conduct the survey. 3.c: Present the results of the adaptation of the tool and response collected in an international conference.	Completed
WP4: Strengthen National Agency for Employment and Skills' Capacities	4.a: Identify the sub-target groups based on the results of the evidence collected in WP2. 4.b: Design a new service package for the employment offices, targeting the low-educated unemployed jobseekers and prepare the step-by-step procedures (operational manuals) for its implementation. 4.c: Deliver training of the new service package for the staff of the employment offices.	Completed
WP5: Develop tailored curricula	5.a: Design a new curriculum module on basic digital skills and adopt the existing modules on literacy, numeracy and soft skills. 5.b: Discuss and validate the developed modules with selected instructors of the public education and training providers. 5.c: Prepare the necessary legal arrangements for the official adoption of the curricula and for its implementation (DCM and internal regulation). 5.d: Develop and conduct a programme for the training of training (20 selected instructors).	5a, 5b, 5c - completed DCM not approved ToT not delivered
WP6: Training Delivery	6.a: Deliver the developed and adapted training modules to the beneficiaries, identified by the employment offices and referred to the VTCs 6.b: Allocation of incentives 6.c: Regional Meetings	6c – completed Training modules not delivered Allocations of incentives not provided
WP7: Evaluation	7.a: Pre-Post Evaluation 7.b: Organize a final international conference to present the results, discuss the way forward and to compare the experience of Albania with other benchmarks in the region and/or the EU 7.c: Conduct a final external evaluation of the project 7.d: Prepare a roadmap to support the implementation of upskilling pathways in Albania	Completed

3.3.2 Monitoring and evaluation, project steering, and risk management systems

The project monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system, processes and key tools are defined in the project document and subsequently detailed in reporting of the project to donor and internal project record keeping. The main instruments/ tools for project monitoring and steering are: (1) the project performance monitoring framework, derived from the project's logical framework; (2) the project's annual work plan, setting out the activities to be implemented, the budget resources, and expected results; (3) the project's budget; (4) visits and feedback tools such as surveys; (5) monitoring and analysis of risks; and (6) the progress reports to the donor. Overall, the specified indicators and

targets of achievement provide for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data linked to the project and context.

Overall, the indicators and the targets are relevant regarding the measuring the achievement of the specific result to which they attach. Overall, there is room for improvement in terms of the quality of the performance monitoring framework in order that it may more efficiently and effectively support the analysis of project progress and results achievement, and thereby also efficient and effective project steering. With regards **to the monitoring and analysis of risks**, the risks and mitigation strategy were defined in the project document, and it is regularly reviewed by the project team and implementing partners during implementation. In the future this can help NAES to improve further its efficiency, decision making abilities and collaboration as well as mitigating the risks of a 'single source of failure' in case of staff turnover and improve onboarding.

3.4 Project sustainability

Sustainability – to assess preliminary indications of the degree to which NRC project results are likely to be sustainable beyond the project's lifetime (at the community and government level) and provide recommendations for strengthening sustainability.

Evaluation Questions

1. What is the risk that the level of stakeholder ownership (including ownership by governments, allocation of sufficient state budget resources and other key stakeholders) will be insufficient to allow for the programme's outcomes/benefits to be sustained?
2. Do the various key stakeholders see that it is in their interest that the programme benefits continue to flow? Is there sufficient public / stakeholder awareness in support of the long-term objectives of the programme?
3. Are lessons learned being documented by the Project Team on a continual basis and shared/ transferred to appropriate parties who could learn from the programme and potentially replicate and/or scale it in the future?

Overall, the progress SCUL to ensure the sustainability of the results and benefits after the end of the project is partially satisfactory. The design of the project supports its sustainability. There is high interest from NAES to support the results achieved after the life of the project such as the Mini Lamp tool and they confirmed to the evaluator their interest for the official adoption of the curriculum even after the life of the project.

The alignment of the SCUL with national priorities and the needs of the vulnerable low skilled job seekers are major factors contributing to the sustainability of the results. The approaches and methods for cooperation between implementing partners (IPs), beneficiaries and other stakeholders in a transparent, inclusive, consultative, and consistent way also contributes in principle to the prospects for sustainability. The sustainability of the project is also supported by a clear sense of ownership of the achieved outputs such as the assessment tool (Mini LAMP), the working protocols, curriculum, and the Roadmap by NAES. The project has managed successfully to ensure external coherence and synergies with other initiatives at national level with spill over effect in policy making (New National Strategy for Employment and Skills 2023-2030).

Based on evidence available to the evaluator, the sustainability of the project is hindered by the non approval of the DCM for the official adoption of the curriculum and the non completion of the training delivery to

the target groups, thus they did not benefit from quality, flexible, targeted trainings on basic skills. Thus, while knowledge transfer is evaluated as good for NAES capacity development, the same cannot be stated for the target group. Although the project has made enormous efforts to ensure all results are achieved, external and contextual factors have negatively influenced in the progress of planned outputs. It is worth noting that NAES is highly interested in the project outputs and intends to continue its effort for the official adoption of the curricula even after the life of the project.

The public events such as the final conference have contributed to raising awareness of stakeholders and ensuring their endorsement for the project scope and intervention logic. Interviews conducted for this evaluation have confirmed the interest of stakeholders and particularly of the target group for the benefits to flow. As such, further support by donors must be ensured to continue what SCUL project has already started and well-established.

3.5 Project impact

Impact – will assess the extent to which the intervention has generated or is expected to generate significant positive or negative, intended, or unintended, higher-level effects.
<u>Evaluation questions</u> To what extent has the generated a significant positive impact? What are some of the intended, or unintended, higher-level effects of the project? Which were the obstacles, challenges, and lessons learned?

The project has generated positive impact in policy sector regarding the needs of the the vulnerable low skilled job seekers and adult lifelong learning. For instance, the promotion of lifelong learning is one of the main priority objectives of the renewed National Strategy for Employment and Skills 2023-2030. This was recognized as an effort coming directly from the implementation of SCUL project in Albania. The project has managed to create a validated nationally owned assessment instrument for the basic literacy and digital skills of the vulnerable low skilled job seekers that can be easily used in the future. The project has raised awareness of stakeholders on how to tackle with non formal education the challenges of this target group in accessing labour market and thus ensuring their social and economic empowerment.

What is more, SCUL has motivated the **rigorous data and statistics development** in the sector to better identify and address needs of vulnerable unemployed jobseekers. Moreover, it has contributed to **evidence-based policy making** by feeding in the renewed National Strategy for Employment and Skills 2023-2030 with data and lessons learned from SCUL implementation. The feedback received by the beneficiaries for this evaluation has been highly positive regarding the scope of the project, its approach, the dedication, and expertise of the implementing partners. The project has yielded results in terms of EC recommendation for the **social inclusion of Roma and Egyptian minorities**. As such the project has guaranteed access of Roma and other minorities while addressing specific community barriers and needs as well as proposing solutions to ease the inclusion in education and employment.

Some of the **key obstacles for the achievement of the intended impact** are: a) Amendment of the grant agreement and associated procedures delayed/postponed the implementation of several activities and consequently impacted objective achievements in the scheduled time; b) change in purchase of the assessment tool different from OECD; c) non approval of the DCM on “On the procedures, criteria and rules for the Implementation of the Employment Promotion Program through Basic Skills Training” and non approval of the grant implementation extension.

In conclusion **some of the key merits and highlights of the project** are: SCUL project adopted an adequate scope, albeit very ambitious, to tackle a very complex issue affecting a vulnerable target group with multiple needs that have not been in the centre of policy attention and that have received few opportunities for their social and economic empowerment. The SCUL project has the merit of creating a solid evidence-based framework of need assessments of the target group that served for adapting all other actions. In addition, it has the merit of testing the Mini Lamp instrument in Albanian context which can also be used in the future in other countries. Another merit of the project impact is the development of a non formal education curriculum for upskilling of the low skilled long term unemployed job seekers as an alternative to the current provision in Albania, which are not very suitable to the needs of this target group. Finally, the development of a Roadmap that assesses the policy and legal framework in Albania and identifies the pathways for the upskilling of this target group is highly relevant and has contributed already to policy development in Albania.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

The goal of the Final Evaluation is to gain an independent analysis of the performance and the effects that the project “Support Continuous Unemployed Learning” (SCUL) in Albania, a project funded by the European Union, Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI), implemented jointly by the National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES) and UNDP Albania, aiming at contributing to the active participation of vulnerable low qualified jobseekers to the society and their transition to the labour market through the provision of quality, flexible, targeted trainings on basic skills. The project is implemented over the period of 30 months starting from 01st April 2020.

The project's overall objective, scope, and implementation strategy remain highly valid in Albania and highly relevant to the needs and priorities of the target group. The project relevance is well-situated and embedded in the scope and experience of the implementing partners. The project scope and intervention logic are also in line with national strategic programmes and embedded within the broader EU integration process of Albania. Although highly relevant and adequate, the theory of change is at the same time very ambitious to be achieved within the given timeframe of the project and considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and bureaucratic constraints of policymaking in practice in Albania.

The effectiveness of the project in terms of progress toward results is evaluated as partially satisfactory. The SCUL project addresses the complex issue of the needs of approximately 5,000 jobseekers registered in the NAES database who are vulnerable and face long-term unemployment. The project has managed to achieve only partially the outputs due to the challenges posed by external factors such as the COVID19 pandemic, governmental bureaucracy, non approval of the Decision of Council of Ministers, non approval of extension for training delivery, changes in the assessment tool compared to the initial plan. Notwithstanding, the entire project team (NAES and UNDP Albania) were highly committed and motivated to achieve the results and have worked to mitigate the risks and manage change.

Overall, the efficiency of the project implementation and delivery is rated as satisfactory. The modalities of the project management allow for an efficient way of project implementation making use of available human, technical, financial resources, and knowledge inputs by NAES and UNDP Albania. Overall, the progress SCUL to ensure the sustainability of the results and benefits after the end of the project is partially satisfactory. The alignment of the SCUL with national priorities and the needs of the vulnerable low skilled job seekers are major factors contributing to the sustainability of the results. Although the project has made enormous efforts to ensure all results are achieved, external and contextual factors have negatively influenced in the progress of planned outputs. It is worth noting that NAES is highly interested in the project outputs and intends to continue its effort for the official adoption of the curricula even after the life of the project.

The project has generated positive impact in policy sector regarding the needs of the the vulnerable low skilled job seekers and adult lifelong learning. The project has managed to create a validated nationally owned assessment instrument for the basic literacy and digital skills of the vulnerable low skilled job seekers that can be easily used in the future. The project has raised awareness of stakeholders on how to tackle with non formal education the challenges of this target group in accessing labour market and thus ensuring their social and economic empowerment. Moreover, it has contributed to evidence-based policy making by feeding in the renewed National Strategy for Employment and Skills 2023-2030 with data and lessons learned from SCUL implementation.

4.2 Lessons learned

Key lessons learned:

- Adopting a flexible approach and the ability of the Project to respond to changes in local contexts have proven essential for project activities, despite identified significant risks.
- Achieving systemic policy change is proven to be very challenging in practice in the Albanian context and when considering the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic and government bureaucracy.
- Inter-institutional cooperation and multistakeholder policy dialogue are paramount to achieving systemic and policy change. In the SCUL case, other government institutions are key stakeholders in addition to NAES, such as the Ministry of Education and Sports and subordinating agencies and the National Agency for Vocational Education, Training and Qualification (NAVETQ).
- Involvement of other government institutions in the project scope and intervention logic for achieving planned outcomes will require more time, resources, and adequate tools for Inter-institutional cooperation and multistakeholder policy dialogue. UNDP is placed well in the ecosystem to support this process, given its track record of engagement as a development partner.
- Communication, visibility, and engagement with stakeholders consistently and inclusively contribute to the Project's spill over effect in national policymaking.
- Management of direct funding from the European Commission by government agencies such as NAES comes with additional challenges related to the legal and regulatory frameworks that affect the financial management of the action and the limited institutional capacities for project management.

4.3 Recommendations

Based on the evaluation findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are made to the implementing partners:

- ⇒ It is important for NAES and UNDP Albania and relevant stakeholders to continue their efforts to deliver the developed curriculum by starting with pilot testing and delivery of training for a specific target group before rolling out and adopting officially the curriculum.

- ⇒ It is crucial for Ministry of Finance and Economy to work with both NAES and NAVETQ and the Ministry of Education and Sports as well as Ministry of Health and Social Protection and other relevant stakeholders and development partners, starting from the UNDP Albania, to make the necessary legal changes for the adaption of the curriculum as an alternative to the existing instruments in place for the upskilling of the vulnerable low skilled job seekers.
- ⇒ The needs of this target group are complex and accessing the labor market requires for them to do professional courses and for that they need basic literacy, numeracy, and digital skills that are validated and certified. So relevant stakeholders must strive to ensure the necessary legal changes for this to happen.
- ⇒ The support for this target group should be complemented with mentoring and coaching addressing individual needs but tackling the entire family as well within the integrated social services model.
- ⇒ The European Commission and other donors should consider supporting the project in the future given that the scope and intervention logic are highly relevant and positively evaluated.
- ⇒ Stronger and more efficient synergy and coordination is needed among stakeholders for evidence-based policy changes that address adult learning and lifelong learning.
- ⇒ Enhanced and strategic awareness raising is also needed for bring adult learning and lifelong learning to the plethora of policy making.
- ⇒ Cooperation with civil society, academia and private sector is also encouraged to yield positive results.

5. Annexes

5.1 Evaluation Matrix

No.	Evaluation Questions	Judgement Criteria/ Indicators	Sources of Verification	Methodology
RELEVANCE & COHERENCE				
1	To what extent are the objectives of the project still valid?	The project objectives and benefits generated remain relevant to needs	Project document, Contextual reports, National strategies, and policy	Document review
2	Are the activities and outputs of the project consistent with the overall goal and the attainment of its objectives?	The project results' framework and theory of change remain relevant and reflect the added value	Project document and results' framework (and any amendments)	Document review Interviews
3	Are the activities and outputs of the project consistent with the intended impacts and effects?	Project results' framework and theory of change remain relevant, and the identified assumptions true	Project document and results' framework (and any amendments)	Document review Interviews
4	How relevant is the project to target groups' needs and priorities?	The extent to which the target groups assess the project as relevant to their needs and priorities, and development plans	Project document, Contextual reports, National strategies, and policy	Document review Interviews
5	How relevant is the project to other key stakeholders' needs and priorities?	The extent to which other key stakeholders assess the project as relevant to their needs and priorities, and development plans	Other stakeholders' development policies and plans	Document review Interviews
EFFECTIVENESS				
6	To what extent have the expected outputs, outcomes and goal been achieved or are likely to be achieved?	-Performance assessment of actual progress against plan	Project results' framework, progress reports, and stakeholder feedback	Document review Interviews

No.	Evaluation Questions	Judgement Criteria/ Indicators	Sources of Verification	Methodology
7	What are the major factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of the outcomes/ expected results/ outputs?	Assessment of reasons for the over-achievement and the under-achievement of progress towards meeting the project targets	Project results framework, progress reports, and stakeholder feedback	Document review Interviews
8	Identify barriers to achieving the project objective	Assessment of the main barriers/ constraints to achieving the project objective	Project results' framework, progress reports, and stakeholder feedback	Document review Interviews
9	To what extent have project partners coordinated effectively and created synergies in the delivery of assistance?	The extent to which the project partners coordinate and review their actions and the timely delivery of these under the project	Project document, quarterly reports	Document review Interviews
10	Is the current coordination set up producing the intended results?	Assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of coordination set up	Project partners meeting minutes, progress report, stakeholder feedback	Document review Interviews
EFFICIENCY				
11	Is the project implemented in the most efficient way, making the best use of available human, technical, technological, financial and knowledge inputs to achieve its desired results? Have there been any unforeseen problems? How well are they resolved?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Milestones within annual plans are consistent with results framework -Assessment of reasons for over-and under-achievement of progress -Assessment of the main barriers/ constraints & unforeseen problems that hinder project efficiency 	project results framework, monitoring tools, progress, and financial reports	Document review Interviews
12	Following up on risk management, how the risk is assessed? And how the risk is managed? How the Covid-19 restrictions and measures affect the efficiency of work towards the achievement of the project intended results/goals?	-Evidence of risk assessments conducted by the project team, & meeting minutes of PPs meetings	Project progress reports, risk management plan, risk assessment reports	Document review Interviews

No.	Evaluation Questions	Judgement Criteria/ Indicators	Sources of Verification	Methodology
SUSTAINABILITY				
13	Are the approaches and methods used likely to ensure a continued benefit after the end of the project?	-The extent to which the project results have been utilized -Evidence of sustainability planning	Project progress reports, info. on sustainability	Document review Interviews
14	What are the major factors which influenced the achievement or non-achievement of sustainability of the project?	Assessment of major factors that promote or hinder the achievement of sustainability	Project progress reports	Document review Interviews
15	Are all key stakeholders sufficiently and effectively involved? Are their expectations met and are they satisfied with their level of participation? What is the risk that the level of stakeholder ownership (including ownership by governments and other key stakeholders) will be insufficient to allow for the project's outcomes/benefits to be sustained?	The extent to which the target groups and key stakeholders assess their involvement in the project (e.g. planning, beneficiaries, monitoring of policies) suitable	Project progress reports	Document review Interviews
16	Are lessons learned being documented by the project team on a continual basis and shared/ transferred to appropriate parties who could learn from the project and potentially replicate and/or scale it in the future?	-Evidences of knowledge-management and learning actions -Evidences of lessons learned (incl. good practice) being shared with partners via the project actions -The extent to which stakeholders are aware of the lessons learned	Project progress reports, information on knowledge-management and learning actions, the extent of outreach to relevant partners and their utilization of good practice, and stakeholder feedback	Document review Interviews
Impact				
17	To what extent has the generated significant positive impact in the?	Assessment of the generated positive impact	Project progress reports, feedback	Document review Interviews

No.	Evaluation Questions	Judgement Criteria/ Indicators	Sources of Verification	Methodology
18	What are some of the intended, or unintended, higher-level effects of the project?	Assessment of higher-level impacts	Project progress reports, feedback	Document review Interviews

5.2 List of interviews

Project Team

NAES	23/11/2022	Jonida Lika	Specialist Sektori i Planifikimit dhe Performancës Drejtoria e Planifikimit dhe Performancës
NAES		Gertian Bajraktari	Drejtor Drejtoria e Planifikimit dhe Performancës Agjencia Kombëtare e Punësimit dhe Aftësive
		Gertiola Cepani	Head of Employment Policies
UNDP	<u>05/10/2022</u>	Erika Haxhi	Project Coordinator SCUL

Experts/Consultants

International expert, Former ETF specialist	25/11/2022	Developing instrument to assess basic literacy skills of adults	Martiño Rubal Maseda
National Expert	23/11/2022	Design of Curricula	Gerda Sula
International Expert	25/11/2022	Design of Curricula	Dr. Eila Heikkilä
National Expert contracted by NAES	25/11/2022	Design of Protocols	Iliada Kuqi

Partners, Supporters, Steering Committee Members etc

UNESCO Uil	23/11/2022	Team Leader, Inclusive Learning	Jonas Nicolas
UNDP, involved in project design	<u>24/11/2022</u>	<u>SD4E</u>	<u>Sonila Limaj</u>
Key stakeholder	22/11/2022 in written	EU Delegation to Albania	<u>Enkelejda Bregu</u>

5.3 In-depth interviews guidelines

In-depth Interviews Guidelines for Project Team

Project Info

Project information: Support Continuous Unemployed Learning (SCUL) Project

Implementing partners: National Agency for Employment and Skills and UNDP Albania

Donor(s): European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI)

Evaluator: Blerjana Bino

Interviewing Process

- 1 – inform the interviewee about the evaluation process and data collection
- 2 – inform about the aim of the interview and data usage
- 3 – gain consent
- 4 – proceed with interview and interview recording
- 5 – transcribe key findings from the interviews

Key questions to guide the conversation

Place and Date _____

Name of Interviewee _____

Project management

1. How do you assess the overall internal consortium cooperation process during the implementation?
(Please mention any best practices developed or challenges faced)
2. How do you assess the overall relation with the donor?
3. What has been the main challenge during the implementation that you as an institution faced?
4. What have been your key lessons in the project implementation? What would do you do differently and how?
5. How can sustainability of results be achieved?

Project results

1. How do you assess the project's performance towards Output 1: Vulnerable jobseekers are referred to tailored basic learning provision or other social services?
2. How do you assess the project's performance towards Output 2: Low skilled job seekers benefitted from quality, flexible, targeted trainings on basic skills?
3. How do you assess the project's performance towards Output 3: Training provision is constantly improved based on collected evidence?
4. What have been the key successes of the project? What have been the main setbacks? What have been the main challenges?
5. What do you think should be done different in the future?

External factors

6. How do you assess the impact of COVID19 in the project?
7. How do you assess the impact of local political or other factors in the project?
8. Any other comments or feedback you would like to share?

In-depth Interviews Guidelines for Consultants

Project Info

Project information: Support Continuous Unemployed Learning (SCUL) Project

Implementing partners: National Agency for Employment and Skills and UNDP Albania

Donor(s): European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI)

Evaluator: Blerjana Bino

Interviewing Process

- 1 – inform the interviewee about the evaluation process and data collection
- 2 – inform about the aim of the interview and data usage
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- 4 – proceed with interview and interview recording
- 5 – transcribe key findings from the interviews

Key questions to guide the conversation

Place and Date _____

Name of Interviewee _____

Engagement with the project

1. What has been your engagement with the project? What did you achieve?
2. Overall, how do you assess your engagement with the project?

Project results

1. How do you assess the project's performance towards Output 1: Vulnerable jobseekers are referred to tailored basic learning provision or other social services?
2. How do you assess the project's performance towards Output 2: Low skilled job seekers benefitted from quality, flexible, targeted trainings on basic skills?
3. How do you assess the project's performance towards Output 3: Training provision is constantly improved based on collected evidence?
4. What have been the key successes of the project? What have been the main setbacks? What have been the main challenges?
5. What do you think should be done different in the future?
6. How can sustainability of results be achieved?

External factors

7. What are the external factors that have affected the project and in what ways?
8. Are there any lessons learnt? What can be done differently in the future and how?

In-depth Interviews Guidelines for Partners, Supporters, Steering Committee Members

Project Info

Project information: Support Continuous Unemployed Learning (SCUL) Project

Implementing partners: National Agency for Employment and Skills and UNDP Albania

Donor(s): European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI)

Evaluator: Blerjana Bino

Interviewing Process

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Key questions to guide the conversation

Place and Date _____

Name of Interviewee _____

Overall performance of the project

1. In what ways have you been involved with the project?
2. How relevant is the project for Albania?
3. How do you assess the overall performance of the project? In your view and knowledge, what did it achieve?

External factors

1. What are the external factors that have affected the project and in what ways?
2. Are there any lessons learnt? What can be done differently in the future and how?
3. How can sustainability of results be achieved?

