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Sida Decentralised Evaluation

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Evaluation of the Project “Support to Further Development and Implementation of an IT Employment Service System (ESS) at the Albanian National Employment Service (NES), 2011-2013”

Final Report

Evaluation of the Project
“Support to Further Development
and Implementation of an IT
Employment Service System
(ESS) at the Albanian National
Employment Service (NES),
2011-2013”

July 2014

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Sabina Ymeri**

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The views and interpretations expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Sida.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

NES	National Employment Service
SPES	Swedish Public Employment Service
ESS	IT Employment Service System (the employment software)
The project	Support to Further Development and Implementation of an IT Employment Service System at the Albanian National Employment Service
DSDC	Department of Strategy and Donor Coordination
NAIS	National Agency for an Information Society
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IPA	EU Instruments of Pre-accession

Preface

This evaluation of the Support to Further Development and Implementation of an IT Employment Service System at the Albanian National Employment Service was commissioned by the Embassy of Sweden in Tirana, Albania.

Indevelop carried out the evaluation between March 2014 and June 2014. Sarah Gharbi was the Project Manager with overall responsibility for managing the implementation and the process of the evaluation, and quality assurance of the methodology and reports was provided by Dr Ian Christoplos.

The independent evaluation team included the following members:

- Jim Newkirk, Team Leader
- Sabina Ymeri, National evaluator

This report has incorporated feedback from Sida and the Embassy of Sweden in Tirana on the draft report.

Executive Summary

This document is the report of the final evaluation of the Sida-funded project '*Support to Further Development and Implementation of an IT Employment Service System (ESS) at the Albanian National Employment Service (NES), 2011-2013*'. The evaluation was commissioned by the Embassy of Sweden in Tirana and was undertaken in April and May of 2014 by a team of evaluators from Indevelop.

Project Summary

The project proposal defines the project's **overall objective** as to promote a better functioning of the Albanian labour market by help of a more efficient IT-based registration and information system.

The **project purpose**, which was intended to contribute to the achievement of the overall objective, was to increase the efficiency, transparency and accessibility of public employment services in Albania.

The project proposal defines five intended **results**:

1. An amended version of the Software for NES Employment Service System (ESS) is developed, procured, installed and is functional in all NES organisation (12 regional employment offices and 24 local employment offices) by September 2012.
2. Hardware is procured, installed and is functional in all NES organisation (12 regional employment offices and 24 local employment offices) by December 2011.
3. Capacity building of NES staff to understand, use, keep running and benefit from the IT system.
4. NES organization has adopted organization, working methods, routines, procedures and staff management in line with modernization and information of the employment system.
5. Increased accessibility of men and women jobseekers and businesses to the on-line employment service.

Evaluation Summary

The intent of the evaluation, per the Terms of Reference, was to examine and draw conclusions about the project, with the specific intent of:

- Assessing project results in order to account for the resources invested by Sweden in this cooperation.
- Providing recommendations, particularly on the sustainability of the project results.

- Contributing to the learning on this cooperation experience with the National Employment Service.

Per the Terms of Reference, the evaluation particularly assessed effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability.

Effectiveness – Summary Analysis of Results

Project Objective	The project makes a strong contribution to the promotion of a better functioning of the Albanian labour market through a more efficient, IT-based registration and information system.
Project Purpose	The project makes a strong contribution to the efficiency, transparency and accessibility of public employment services in Albania.
Result 1 - An amended version of the Software for NES Employment Service System (ESS) is developed, procured, installed and is functional in all NES organisation (12 regional employment offices and 24 local employment offices) by September 2012.	This result was achieved in full. There were issues and delays with the design and tender process, and implementation of the software tender, but ultimately a fully functional system has been rolled out in all regional and local employment offices. Full functionality of the ESS has not yet happened (largely due to not yet finalising the inputs of ‘stock’ data in all offices). It is anticipated that this process will be completed in the near future.
Result 2 - Hardware is procured, installed and is functional in all NES organisation (12 regional employment offices and 24 local employment offices) by December 2011.	This result was achieved in full. There were issues and delays with the tendering process that had implications for activities and outputs in other result area, but the hardware is fully procured, installed and functional in all offices.
Result 3 - Increased capacity building of NES staff to understand, use, keep running and benefit from the IT system.	This result was somewhat achieved. The capacity building process suffered from the related issues of lateness and problems in the delivery of the hardware and software tenders, and the focus that was required to complete those components with the pressures caused by their delay. The training programme was late being delivered, and ultimately, it must be said, it was not completed. Not all Employment Officers are fully aware of the detailed functioning of the ESS, nor do they take advantage of all of its capabilities. However, since the completion of the project, these processes are on-going, and it is anticipated that the intent of the

	project in this area will be realised in the near future.
Result 4 - NES organization has adopted organization, working methods, routines, procedures and staff management in line with modernization and information of the employment system.	This result was largely achieved. In general, the ESS works, in all offices, and has been well received. However, the extensiveness of uptake, completeness of transfer from the old system and use of all systems across the NES is not complete. Further, the full intent of this result area appears to have been lost somewhere during implementation, probably as a result of the pressures and issues associated with the delays in delivery of the hardware and software.
Result 5 - Increased accessibility of men and women jobseekers and businesses to the on-line employment service.	It is likely that this result is being achieved, although as described in the Limitations section, a confident judgement is not possible within the framework of the evaluation and the current status of ESS implementation. As with Result 4, the full intent of this result area was lost somewhere during implementation. This is best exemplified by the focus of the Final Report on the activity of the information campaign, as opposed to (the much more substantial result statement) 'increased access to the employment system'.

The project's outputs, summarised above, have left the NES in a strong position to progress strongly in the provision of effective employment service provision to jobseekers as well as to employers looking for staff. The ESS is demonstrably easier to use, is more effective in the storage and accessing of employer and jobseeker data and as a result fits well within the new service model being implemented across the NES. The changes have been very well received by Employment Officers, with strong indications of support also from jobseekers and employers, and is strongly supported within Government. Indications are that with a strong and steady on-going implementation of further upgrades, and a greater awareness of the system in the public sphere, that the NES's service delivery will regularly demonstrate high standards of quality.

Efficiency

The project overall represents an efficient approach to the use of resources. The sense of the team is that the approach taken was an efficient modality for the delivery of this type of project. The NES is of this view, as are the international experts involved in implementation.

Delays in the Tendering Processes

The delays in tender processes for both hardware and software (results 1 and 2) had a significant impact on project implementation, particularly the timing of delivery. The initial delays in delivery of the hardware tender flowed on to the timing for issuing

the software tender. This delay was lengthened with delays specific to the software process.

The Use of the Direct Funding Approach

The Embassy was strongly encouraged by Sida in Stockholm to demonstrate a ‘new model’ of assistance, a model that could provide a demonstration of aid effectiveness with an emphasis on ownership. The Embassy determined that the NES had the financial management capacity to undertake the project, and was flexible in its approach to design, implementation and to the NES. There is demonstrable, strong ownership by the NES over the whole process. Three areas were most important in contributing to the success of the project and the modality:

- The thought given to, and discussions about the project, during negotiations between the Embassy, SPES and the NES.
- The flexibility demonstrated in design and implementation - this flexibility ensured the strengths of different actors were used in the most appropriate aspects of implementation to achieve the best outputs/ outcomes.
- The willingness to encourage NES ownership while insisting on appropriately detailed, and timely, administrative and financial reporting.

Engagement of the Swedish Public Employment Service

The role of the Swedish Public Employment Service in the project was somewhat unique. The SPES has a particular history with the NES, including, as described above, the delivery of the original Efficient Employment Service in Albania (2004-2008) project. However, their role was different in this initiative, as it included a support role to the NES in components of the project delivered through the direct-assistance modality and components that were specifically their responsibility (and that were directly funded by Sida). Across both roles, the SPES continued in its value-adding support/ partnership role with the NES.

The engagement of the SPES was specifically useful in the project. Chief among the strengths mentioned by both SPES and NES personnel was the appropriateness of knowledge provided by the SPES in the design and implementation of the ESS (‘sister knowledge’ was the phrase that was used). The SPES has standardised procedures for all aspects of their employment services, and their systems are completely in line with international standards and approaches. The NES was provided with clear advice and guidance while configuring their own system – which was a major contribution from the SPES as the tools of standardisation ease processes going forward while lowering costs throughout development/ implementation. The SPES provided tools, and then worked together with NES staff in an on-the-job-type learning approach. This was the essence of the cooperation, and the training – making use of their knowledge, their systems and their experience. At its most fundamental level, the ESS incorporates an EU model into the Albanian system.

NES Management

One key factor of success has been the capacity and strong commitment of senior NES management to the change process, and to driving the process. The project manager was strongly committed to the project, which was evident throughout implementation. This commitment was to the redevelopment of the ESS, more than to ‘the project’, but of course the two were completely interlinked. However, management capacity (and leadership) in the NES is shallow. Too much depends on the Director of Employment Services, with support from his two key staff (one in employment services and one IT), and to a lesser extent some key regional office staff. The impact of this includes the fact that strategy development for the NES’s medium to long-term directions (and the ‘selling’ of this strategy) within government; development and marketing of strategies for increasing job vacancies in the system; and detailed discussions with key IT and employment specialists on future directions, all compete with day-to-day functions and the addressing of issues best left to other senior staff.

Reporting

The evaluation notes a number of issues with project narrative reporting, specifically its lack of analysis in managing for results and in the related loss of connection between the results framework and project reporting. The key point is not implementation, but how the NES describes and details implementation, and results. It is important for the NES to be able to describe the importance of the work it is engaged in, including in its discussions within Government on what it is doing and the success of these actions. Effective reporting ensures stakeholders can better understand and share successes.

Communication and Coordination

Internal NES communication and coordination happen at an acceptable level. The expressed view is that transparency is a strength of communication with headquarters, and that communication has become more flexible. Communication and coordination within offices also appears to happen at a relatively high level.

Communication and coordination worked well with government partners, particularly the Department of Strategy and Donor Coordination and with the National Agency for an Information Society. NES managed the relationships well, with appropriate discussions on plans and programmes, and the status of implementation.

Communication with the Embassy was managed well, with both sides commenting on the quality of the relationship. Given the decision to pursue a direct funding modality for the project, this was an important relationship.

Sustainability

More than one stakeholder used the expression ‘there is no going back now’, and this seems clear. It is also noted that this was always said in a positive way. Across all groups interviewed, from Government to clients, the value and effectiveness of the ESS is apparent. So too is the sense that it will be supported in its on-going develop-

ment and growth. This is the essence of feedback during the Evaluation. There is a clear improvement in quality and quantity of information, on both sets of clients (employers/ jobseekers). There is a stated need for, and confidence in, the system, i.e., the ESS, and in the ability of the NES to meet the necessary performance objectives. Linked with the new service model, sustainability is very likely.

Conclusions

The NES and the ESS are more central to Government thinking, and Government priorities on service provision. The Government acknowledges the very positive visibility gains from the ‘new service model’, demonstrated in the new offices in Durres and Tirana. Government is also aware that these changes have had a significant impact on its thinking and planning. But, they also acknowledge that the fundamental change is in the ESS, which is the solid structure behind the façade of the offices, and that the ‘new service model’ would not be nearly as important without the changes brought about by the ESS development.

The capacity development components of the project (results 3 and 4) became the less important aspects for the NES in implementation, compared to the procurement aspects in results 1 and 2. The whole project would have benefited from a stronger focus on the capacity building processes, and on it being built into two different phases: a consolidation of the hardware/ software platform first (result 3), followed by changes in and to the working environment (result 4) – the working environment as a tool, and how the office conditions and service model change because of the ESS. This would have aided the design and delivery of the capacity building, while improving the linkages with the IPA-funded ILO project.

A stronger linkage with the IPA-funded ILO project would strengthen the changes brought about by the ESS development, and vice versa. The ‘new service model’ incorporates the ESS in service delivery, and the implementation of the ESS, in offices, happens within the structure of the ‘new service model’.

The system changes generated strong support from Employment Officers and jobseekers, each of whom had an immediate appreciation of the value to them of the changes, notably in accessibility and transparency. There was no sense at all of any burden or resistance to the changes – the understanding of the value to the service provider and to the client was immediate.

There is a wide range of changes being requested from the field, changes which are understood to be in the future plans at NES headquarters, although an ESS development plan is not readily visible. An important aspect of this is how to improve all aspects of the system (not just the ESS), as a package:

- Finalisation of the ‘stock’ data entry.
- Completion of capacity-building to ensure all staff in all offices are fully conversant with all aspects of the ESS.
- Dispensing with the paper-based system.

- Improvements/ refinements to the system's matching capabilities.
- Linkages to outside systems (taxation and social welfare).
- Strategies for increasing numbers of vacancies (sector strategies, seasonal strategies, regional strategies).

SPES inputs did not include support to partner organisations in management functions such as planning, analysis and reporting. These areas tend to be areas where an upgrading of capacity is needed in the partner agency, and outside of the Swedish partner, there is no system for provision of this capacity building support. It would add value to the work of Swedish government agencies if, in their contributions to partner agencies, their responsibilities included assistance in development of these sets of skills, as a matter of course, in their service provision. It may be that these skills will need improvement within Swedish government agencies in order to fulfil such a responsibility. This should be welcomed.

Lessons Learned

The direct funding modality is a viable, efficient approach in circumstances of strong organisational leadership, and the approach encourages ownership by the funded agency.

Within the direct funding modality, technical support to the local agency from a Swedish government agency can add significant value where there is a strong correlation between the work and priorities of both organisations. A stronger focus on support in management functions is needed.

The direct funding modality must be structured with recognition of the additional requirements in time that will be required by the Embassy. Given the direct relationship between Embassy and funded agency, this cannot be avoided.

The direct funding modality is best served by an approach that balances independence for the funded organisation with a consistent application of Sida's administrative and financial requirements.

Key to the success of the direct funding modality is the breadth and depth of discussions and negotiations during project design. Discussions must canvas all aspects of organisational strengths and weaknesses and how these will be managed, used and improved as part of the project.

This evaluation, as well as earlier work, provides strong indications with regards to the inputs of Swedish Government Agencies to projects and national partners, and the need to strengthen both the expected outcomes of project activities and the management and administrative arrangement of the project. Central to this is ensuring the funded agency receives the necessary assistance required to fulfil all aspects of project planning, analysis and reporting.

Recommendations for the NES

- Inputs of ‘stock data’ must be completed as a matter of urgency. It is critical for effective analysis of jobseeker and vacancy data for all information to be complete and up-to-date.
- Negotiations with Government to end use of the paper-based system must be completed as soon as possible. The effectiveness (and motivation) of Employment Officers depends to a certain extent on moving solely to the electronic system.
- All Employment Officers in all Employment Offices need to be brought to the same level of understanding and use of the ESS. Data analysis and ‘matching’ are particular priorities.
- An ESS Development Plan is required.
 - This development plan should include detail on the internal feedback systems on system needs, processes for assessing the feedback, detail on the NES approach to system analysis, maintenance and development and a budget for the human and financial resources that will be required, in an on-going way, to ensure this development takes place.
 - It is immediately critical that both a short and medium term development plan be developed and distributed in order for Government, and for staff in regional and local offices, to know and have confidence in NES planning processes.
- The ESS development cannot (nor should it) be seen in isolation, particularly in relation to the work of the IPA-funded ILO project. These initiatives should be seen by the NES and Government as a ‘package’, with changes that strategically support each other.
- This ‘package’ needs to include the capacity building approaches taken by the NES and ILO in order that the delivery of services to jobseekers and employers is seen as a single process.

Recommendations for Sida/ The Embassy

- Further support to capacity development is required both at NES headquarters and in the regional and local offices. This capacity development includes management, technical and service delivery components. Further Sida support to the NES in addressing these capacity needs is appropriate, with certain constraints:
 - The emphasis of the process must be on results – what capacity is being built/ what new skills are being learned, not on the number and type of training inputs.
 - A focus on service delivery is required, and should incorporate both the ‘higher level’ aspects of the ESS and the quality of service delivery more relevant to the ‘new service model’, i.e., support to the ILO project in ‘front office’ processes.
 - A focus on employers (and increases in the numbers of job vacancies) would be appropriate, although it is acknowledged that this is not a focus for all Employment Offices.

- Implementation of the direct funding modality requires a more detailed understanding of the roles and responsibilities of Sida/ the Embassy and the funded agency. The project proposal provides a detailed project definition/ description, and the Agreement provides the structural relationship between Sida/ the Embassy and, in this instance, the Government of Albania. It would be useful to also provide a further layer to the description of the ‘partnership’ between Sida/ the Embassy and the funded government agency. This further layer, a ‘partnership agreement’ or memorandum of understanding, would define more than the contractual obligations of the grant recipient, concentrating on the roles and responsibilities of each:
 - Why the parties are entering into a relationship.
 - What is expected of each party, defining both specifics and more general expectations.
 - What benefits are anticipated for each party.
 - How the relationship works.
- Sida/ Embassy requirements of the Swedish Government Agency should include the ability to provide detailed assistance (mentoring) to the funded agency at a ‘higher level’ than technical support. Subject to assessments undertaken and agreements reached, these service requirements are likely to include the development of planning, analysis and reporting capacity within funded agency management.

1 Project Description

The initiative being evaluated was the finalisation of an earlier Sida-financed project implemented by the Swedish Public Employment Service (SPES) - *Efficient Employment Service in Albania (2004-2008)*¹. The previous project:

- Developed an IT system known as the Employment Service System (ESS), which contains a Vacancy Bank, a Jobseeker register and an Employer register and was implemented at the National Employment Service (NES) offices in Tirana and Korça, as well as at the Head Office in Tirana.
- Defined and procured the necessary hardware for the developed software.
- Implemented staff training at the NES, and trained staff trainers.
- Carried out an information campaign to inform stakeholders about the new IT system.

Following this earlier project, a new project was proposed to develop and procure software amendments, and to procure the necessary hardware and software across the NES, with associated training. The upgrading and up-scaling of the ESS was identified as a requirement by the NES and the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. This need for support was addressed as a request to the Embassy of Sweden in Tirana in two official letters.²

Sweden supported the NES during the preparation phase of the project proposal through four different assignments that made the finalisation of the project proposal and preparation for the implementation of the project possible:

- Outline of the project and recommendations regarding direct financing options, SPES, March 2010.
- Review of the draft project proposal submitted by NES and outlines presented by SPES, Sida IT helpdesk (recommendations regarding ESS), Sida IT helpdesk report, June 2010.
- Functional requirement study (technical specifications, cost estimation for ESS system, market survey), Nils Jenssen Consulting, October 2010.
- Internal Review (recommendations regarding management, procurement, audit, specific agreement conditions, IT asset management before and during the

¹ Efficient Employment Service in Albania, June 2004 - December 2008

² Nr. 1559, dated 15.07.2008 (official letter and proposal from the General Director of NES), and nr. 2569 dated 29.12.2008, (Official letter of the Deputy Minister).

implementation of the project including an Action Plan for follow-up), SIPU, December 2010.

The Embassy was strongly encouraged by Sida in Stockholm to demonstrate a ‘new model’ of assistance, a model that could provide a demonstration of aid effectiveness with an emphasis on ownership. Following detailed and positive discussions with SPES, which took on board the NES and Sida Stockholm’s views, a direct assistance model was agreed. The direct funding relationship requires more involvement from the Embassy and is more demanding on Embassy resources in administrative activities. In the context of the direct financing arrangement:

- A specific account was opened at the Bank of Albania, following Ministry of Finance approval.
- Sida disbursed project funding to this account.
- The NES was the implementing partner.
- Procurement of goods and services foreseen in the project were to be carried out according to Albanian procurement law.
- The governing documents for project implementation were
 - The agreement signed between the two governments (Albania and Sweden)
 - Regulations and instructions of the Ministry of Finance
 - NES internal rules and regulations.

The project proposal describes four components:

- Upgrade of software and procurement of software.
- Procurement of hardware and installation.
- Capacity building of NES staff.
- Communication and information on the new IT system.

Of the four, only components 1, 2 and 4 were delivered through the direct financing modality. Component 3 (and part of Component 4) was financed through and delivered by SPES: the project proposal³ explains this approach⁴. The NES proposed pro-

³ Project Proposal - Further Development and Implementation an IT Employment Service System (ESS) at the Albanian National Employment Service (NES) in all the 12 Regional and 24 Local Employment Offices -2011-2013. Republic of Albania, Ministry Of Labour, Social Affairs And Equal Opportunities, National Employment Service, General Directorate. Tirana. 22 February 2011.

⁴ Project proposal extract, Page 15: ‘NES has decided that activities linked with **results 3** of the project (training activities) and activity 4.1 of the **result 4** to be outside the directing financing agreement with Sida. NES proposal is to have the support of SPES in the implementation of the above mentioned training activities using the same model of cooperation with SPES as in the first phase (Sida contracting SPES for the implementation of the training activities). NES has experience of collaboration with SPES and strongly believes that capacity building was a very strong point of SPES in the previous phase. SPES as a Public Employment Agency have experience and knowledge on the employment

curement through international experts for software and hardware, in addition to the assistance of procurement advisors. This proposal was supported by the Sida-commissioned ‘NES Internal Review Report.’

1.1 PROJECT OVERALL OBJECTIVE

As per the project proposal, the overall objective was to promote the better functioning of the Albanian labour market by help of a more efficient IT-based registration and information system.

1.2 PROJECT PURPOSE

As per the project proposal, the project purpose, which was intended to contribute to the achievement of the overall objective, was to increase the efficiency, transparency and accessibility of public employment services in Albania.

1.3 PROJECT DETAILS

The project proposal provided these details on the project.

Country	Albania
Project Title	Development and Implementation of an IT Employment Service System at the Albanian National Employment Service
Implementing Agency	Albanian National Employment Service
Total Budget of the Project	Sida and NES: Euro 824,066
Sida total contribution	Euro: 680,266
Direct Financing of Sida to NES	Euro: 483,418

services, working methods in a computerized environment, procedures and routines related with this modernized environment, staff competence development, customer service, etc. SPES has the advantage of knowing very well NES organization, has experience of the first phase and enjoys the reputation among NES staff of being a reliable and flexible partner. NES trusts that SPES will implement the assigned activities successfully and in harmony with the rest of the project components thanks to their full understanding of this component's context and NES working methods.’

External financing service of Sida	Euro: 196,848
NES contribution	Euro 143,800
Main Partners	Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities Ministry of Finance Ministry of Interior (National Register of Civil Status) INSTAT National Agency of VET National Agency of Information Society General Directorate of Social State Service General Labour State Inspectorate Institute for Social Insurance General Directorate of Tax Authority Employers Organisation and Trade Unions Organisations Civil Society Organisations (NGOs).
Main target groups:	Jobseekers Employers NES staff in regional and local offices
Time-Line	April 2011- March 2013

1.4 ANTICIPATED PROJECT RESULTS

While the project proposal describes four components, it details five anticipated results. Component 3 (capacity-building for NES staff) is effectively covered in results 3 and 4:

- **Result 1:** An amended version of the Software for the NES Employment Service System (ESS) is developed, procured, installed and is functional in all NES organisations (12 regional employment offices and 24 local employment offices) by September 2012.
- **Result 2:** Hardware is procured, installed and is functional in all NES organisation (12 regional employment offices and 24 local employment offices) by December 2011.
- **Result 3:** Capacity building of NES staff to ensure they understand, utilise, keep running and benefit from the IT system.
- **Result 4:** The NES organisation has adopted organisation, working methods, routines, procedures and staff management in line with modernisation and information of the employment system.
- **Result 5:** Increased accessibility of male and female jobseekers and businesses to the on-line employment service

2 The evaluation

2.1 PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

As per the evaluation's Terms of Reference⁵:

The evaluation is to examine and draw conclusions about the project *Support to Further Development and Implementation of an IT Employment Service System (ESS) at the Albanian National Employment Service (NES), 2011-2013* (hereinafter the project) and will, among other tasks, compare the project to an earlier NES cooperation in assessing project efficiency. The Evaluation is to:

- Assess project results in order to account for the resources invested by Sweden in this cooperation.
- Provide recommendations, particularly on the sustainability of the project results.
- Contribute to the learning on this cooperation experience with the National Employment Service.

2.2 SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

In the project proposal, each of the five intended results of the project, detailed above, were also defined by a set of related activities and a set of objectively verifiable indicators.

Regular, on-going reporting has been undertaken throughout the life of this project. These reports were analysed, in the context of the project design and the intended results, and further analysis undertaken with project stakeholders. These processes assisted the Evaluation Team to:

- 'Assess these project results in order to account for the resources invested by Sweden in this cooperation. This is a qualitative assessment – the evaluation does not look directly at procurement or the financial management of the project.

⁵ The evaluation Terms of Reference can be found in Annex 2.

- Contribute to learning with regards this cooperation experience with National Employment Services.’⁶

2.3 INTENDED USERS OF THE EVALUATION

The primary intended users of the evaluation are:

- The Embassy and Sida. The Embassy anticipates that the evaluation will provide:
 - Conclusions on what has worked and what has not worked in the project.
 - A judgement on whether or not the resources invested were justified by the actual result.
 - Some indications of approach to the NES on the follow-up of issues related to the project.
 - Discussion of the lessons that can be learned from this type of direct support to a governmental partner.
- NES. The Embassy anticipates that the evaluation will provide recommendations addressed to the NES and the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth with a specific focus on the sustainability of the system.
- Other donors and international organisations. The Embassy anticipates that the evaluation will be of particular use to other donors and international organisations as a ‘case study’ in the direct financing modality to a government institution. A particular focus of this aspect of the evaluation was the coordination and communication structures and the practice of the NES towards stakeholders and donors. This is an area where there are perceptions of a need for an increase in skills and practice, and areas where the project’s activities and outputs address key components of the aid effectiveness agenda. Furthermore, given the importance of the strengthening of confidence in government institutions as the EU’s Instruments for Pre-accession (IPA) funding increases, demonstrated capacity growth within the NES is critical.
- The evaluation may be of value to the Swedish Employment Service itself, and its approach to and delivery of outcomes in Albania and elsewhere. The evaluation was undertaken with this in mind, although this is not the main focus, and uptake will be a matter for the Swedish Employment Service.

⁶ Ibid.

2.4 LIMITATIONS TO THE EVALUATION

The analysis drew heavily on qualitative approaches – interviews with project and related personnel and external stakeholders and desk studies of reports and reviews. Findings are indicative of the views expressed by stakeholders and informed experts and the statements made in available documentation.

With regards to Result 5, some feedback was sought from clients (jobseekers and businesses) to attempt to understand the perception clients have of the changes brought about by the implementation of the ESS and what impact these changes have had on the service provided by the NES – specifically as to whether or not there is *increased accessibility of male and female job-seekers to the online employment system*. While the evaluation fieldwork did succeed in speaking to a number of clients (both employers and jobseekers), the feedback was not sufficient for there to be significant confidence in the comments. Further, the ESS has not been in place long enough for a judgement to be made on accessibility of the system to job seekers.

The Evaluation has addressed the output objectives in detail. Analysis of outcome objectives has also been undertaken, but with somewhat less strong conclusions, given the timeframe of the project, the fact the implementation of the ESS is quite recent, as is the implementation of new routines and methods. The Evaluation was able to assess the extent and effectiveness of the implementation of the hardware and software, and to ascertain/ confirm the extent of its operation across the NES. Furthermore, feedback and analysis on what the change in hardware and software has meant in respect of NES effectiveness was also addressed, as was the extent of the implementation and apparent effectiveness of the capacity building. Some feedback was sought on each of the following areas, each of which provides an indication of the level and extent of the uptake of change within the NES:

- Increase in transparency of the labour market services offered at the national level.
- Improvement in the quality and quantity of information on job seekers and employers at the national level.
- Improvement in the organisation of work for employment officers.
- Reduction in the time needed for administrative routines.
- Increased time for contact with employers.
- Increased measures for assisting jobseekers.
- Improvement in the image and visibility of the NES through website information on job vacancies.

2.5 EVALUATION APPROACH

The evaluation had four phases/ stages.

2.5.1 Inception

The inception phase focused on elaboration on the scope and feasibility of the evaluation, methodology (including a detailed description of the methodological choices) design of the causal analysis, data collection methods and instruments and the evaluation work plan. The Inception Report included an analysis (and further development) of the evaluation questions, the evaluation time plan and division of labour.⁷

2.5.2 Desk Study

The evaluation team made use of secondary and primary data. As per the Terms of Reference, the assessment of secondary data was performed through studies and analysis of *existing reports, evaluations, and other relevant documents*.

2.5.3 Fieldwork

Primary data was collected using empirical methods *through interviews and focus groups with relevant stakeholders and informed experts*, including implementing partners (such as government institutions and CSOs), beneficiaries and other donors.

Included in the group of key stakeholders with whom interviews were held⁸ were:

- Relevant, knowledgeable Sida and/ or Embassy staff (Sida officers and managers involved in the project).
- NES staff at HQ.
- NES staff in regional and specific local employment offices.
- Swedish Employment Agency experts.
- The hardware and procurement experts involved in the project⁹.
- The Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth.
- Members of the Steering Committee for the project.
- Donors and international organisations whose work is linked or related to employment.

⁷ The Inception Report can be found in Annex 3.

⁸ A full list of interviewees is in Annex 1.

⁹ Efficient Employment Service in Albania, June 2004 - December 2008

- As indicated above, a very limited sample of clients of the NES who make use of the ESS directly or indirectly, online or through visits to NES offices –
 - Jobseekers
 - Employers.

2.5.4 Analysis and Reporting

The evaluation's analytical findings are detailed in this report. The report analyses the results (outputs and outcomes) of the project, draws *conclusions*, based on analysis using evidence coming specifically from the primary and secondary sources of the evaluation, and provides *lessons learned* – insights from the development assistance that will be of relevance to Sida, the Embassy, partners and other organisations working in the field. The report makes *recommendations*, addressed mainly to the Embassy and the NES and presented in order of priority. The recommendations are structured so there is a clear link between an observation from the desk study or fieldwork, analysis and findings and the recommendation.

2.6 EVALUATION QUESTIONS

As per the evaluation Terms of Reference, of the five OECD/ DAC evaluation criteria, the evaluation is intended to particularly assess effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability:

- ‘*Effectiveness* shall be assessed primarily with regard to objectives on an outcome level (focusing on medium-term). Although the scope of the evaluation is not assessing impact, it is critical that the positive and negative, as well as intended and unintended effects on an outcome level, are assessed.
- *Efficiency* shall be assessed primarily with regard to the utility and value to the users (primarily the NES).
- *Sustainability* is to be assessed as the longevity of the development results after the cessation of the intervention. The evaluation criteria shall be clearly operationalized in order to constitute useful tools for assessment.’¹⁰

The following narrative addresses the detailed evaluation questions, in the context of the framework provided by the Terms of Reference.

¹⁰ The evaluation Terms of Reference can be found in Annex 2.

2.6.1 Effectiveness

As per the Terms of Reference, the Evaluation will focus primarily on the ‘achievement of objectives at the outcome level (focusing on the medium-term)’.

- Has the project achieved its objectives? Specifically, the Evaluation will assess the effectiveness of the project in:
 - Development, procurement and delivery of the NES ESS software in the 12 regional and 24 local employment offices.
 - Procurement and effective installation of related hardware in these offices.
 - Improvements in the capacity of NES staff to use and benefit from the new hardware and software.
 - Improvements in organisation, working methods, routines, procedures and staff management across the NES.
 - Improvements in accessibility of the on-line employment service to male and female job seekers and businesses.
- Has the project been successful in terms of its intended development results? The Evaluation will focus here more on the capacity and organisation objectives, and on improvements in access by clients to the NES system. These are the more important, longer-term outcomes that will make use of the hardware and software procured by the project.
 - Has there been an improvement in the quality and quantity of information on job seekers and employers available at the national level? How is this known – does the NES now have systems in place to assess and monitor these areas? Is information on clients a demonstrable priority for NES offices?
 - What specific changes have been implemented in the organisation of work routines, work methods and procedures for employment officers in the NES offices? What is the assessment of NES employment officers on the changes in systems and procedures as a result of the project? Specifically, has there been:
 - A reduction in the time required for administrative routines.
 - An increase in time for contact with employers.
 - An increase in measures for assisting jobseekers.
 - Has a particular approach been used to target and reach discriminated social groups – particularly, were discriminated social groups specifically considered in the design? In the implementation?
 - Was there a specific gender focus? If so, what did it encompass?
 - Are these organisational changes visible in the 12 regional and 24 local employment offices?
 - Are NES staff aware of and supportive of the changes?
 - Are the changes improving service delivery?
 - Is there a clear understanding of how the implemented changes are improving service delivery to clients (job seekers and businesses)?
 - Are there clear indicators of an improved image and the increased visibility of the NES through website information on job vacancies? What are

- these indicators? Does the NES have a system in place for measuring client interactions with the website on job vacancies?
- Are there apparent improvements in NES' coordination and communication structures and practices? Is this true at all levels of the NES?
 - Internal communication and coordination? How is this visible?
 - Communication with clients? How is this visible?
 - Communication and coordination with other stakeholders and donors? How is this visible?
 - What have been the key factors of success or failure?
 - Did project implementation (by the NES, as well as experts) focus on the hardware and software or on the improvements in capacity, organisation, working methods, etc.? What evidence is there of this focus?
 - Was the capacity-building programme focused on outputs and outcomes, or on the inputs of training delivery? Was capacity built (did capacity grow)? How was this growth assessed?
 - What strengths and weaknesses in NES leadership and governance impacted on the management of this project? What are the implications for future sustainability?
 - Was there a clear sense across the NES (national, regional and local offices) of the intent of the project? Did the NES nationally, regionally and locally see the value of, and were they committed to, the change being generated by the project? What NES governance factors contributed to this, whether negative or positive?
 - What strengths and weaknesses have been demonstrated in the internal communications between different directorates at NES HQ and between NES HQ and Regional and local employment offices? What are the implications for future functioning and sustainability?
 - Was the utilisation of the Swedish Employment Agency specifically useful in the delivery of the project? Could the project have been delivered through another modality, such as a consultancy firm? Are there specific added values to the use of a state agency in processes related to EU accession?
 - Have there been any negative and/or positive side-effects from the project?

2.6.2 Efficiency

As per the Terms of Reference, the Evaluation will focus primarily on ‘utility and value to users’ (primarily the NES, but also the Embassy and other organisations, as described above). The Evaluation will make use of an earlier Sida cooperation with the NES¹¹ in its analysis of the project’s efficiency.

- Does the NES perceive that the time, energy and resources which have been invested into the project have provided a relative level of outputs/ outcomes/ benefits, for the NES and for Albania more generally?
- Does NES management perceive that the modality of working with the Swedish Employment Agency was an efficient approach?
- Is it the perception of the Swedish experts engaged to work on the project, that the time, energy and resources invested in the project provided a relative level of outputs/ outcomes/ benefits, for the NES and for Albania more generally?
- Specific implementation questions from the Terms of Reference are:
 - How effective has the NES been in the coordination of the work of the different components and experts involved in the project?
 - How effective has the NES been in sharing information, and in gathering input from the relevant stakeholders in the process of planning, implementation and post-implementation of project activities?
 - How effectively has communication between NES and the Embassy worked?
- What specific strategies and detailed measures were used in project planning and implementation to ensure efficient use of resources? In the view of the project personnel and the NES, were these strategies and measures effective?
- Is the hardware and software fully operational?

2.6.3 Sustainability

As per the Terms of Reference, the Evaluation will assess the likely ‘longevity of development results after the completion of the project’.

- What are the current prospects for the sustainability of the project’s results?
 - Specific reference will be given to this question in relation to the questions above, regarding Efficiency, in terms of strategies and measures of sustainability, and to determine the functioning and use of the developed IT system.

¹¹ Efficient Employment Service in Albania, June 2004 - December 2008

- What strategies and measures have been developed and implemented to ensure that the project's developed IT system is fully operational into the future?
- With regards the range of questions addressed concerning Effectiveness, what is the likelihood that the changes in practice, routine and procedure will a) continue to add value to the provision of services to clients and b) be maintained and grow as a pattern of work practice across the NES?
 - Do the regional and local employment offices perceive the benefits of the hardware and software to their work quantity and quality?
 - Do the regional and local employment offices perceive the benefits of the changed work practices? Do they have 'ownership' of the changes?
 - Are the changes likely to be imbedded in NES practices going forward?
 - What support or assistance is required to ensure sustainability of the changes?
- In this context, do the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth and the NES have the commitment, and the financial and human resources necessary to maintain the benefits of the project?

2.7 EVALUATION STANDARDS

The evaluation and the reporting followed DAC's evaluation quality standards.

3 Findings

3.1 SUMMARY OF RESULTS (OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES)

The project was largely successful in delivering the planned activities and in achieving its anticipated results. Furthermore, the project has contributed, in a significant way, to the overall objective and project purpose. Specifically:

- The project makes a strong contribution to the promotion of the better functioning of the Albanian labour market through a more efficient, IT-based registration and information system.
- The project makes a strong contribution to the efficiency, transparency and accessibility of the public employment services in Albania.

The path forward, in the medium and longer term, is clear, and, in the assessment of the evaluation, will be adhered to. There are a range of questions and issues that will need to be addressed to ensure the changes are further embedded in practice, and continue to develop. These questions and issues are discussed below.

3.1.1 Result 1 - An amended version of the Software for the NES Employment Service System (ESS) is developed, procured, installed and is functional in all NES organisation (12 regional employment offices and 24 local employment offices) by September 2012.

This result was achieved in full.

There were issues and delays with the design and tender process, and implementation of the software tender, but ultimately a fully functional system has been rolled out in all regional and local employment offices. This roll-out did not occur within the project's timeframe (it was completed in the weeks prior to the evaluation) and full functionality of the ESS has not yet occurred (largely due to not yet finalising the inputs of 'stock' data in all offices). It is anticipated that this process will be completed in the near future.

The product was successfully delivered in December 2012. Both the in-office (ESS) and the online system. The software includes:

- A jobseeker register.
- An employer register.
- A job vacancy register.
- A matching process – matching jobseekers and vacancies.

- A reminder component.

The software has two parts, the ESS and the online systems.

- The ESS ‘resides’ in the Employment Office, is bigger, more complex and contains more information. Only NES staff can operate the ESS.
- The online system is for jobseekers, employers and for vacancies – it contains descriptions of available jobs.

Financial summary:

- Budget: 100,000 Euros.
- Actual: 71,000 Euros.

3.1.2 Result 2 - Hardware is procured, installed and is functional in all NES organisation (12 regional employment offices and 24 local employment offices) by December 2011.

This result was achieved in full.

There were issues and delays with the tendering process that had implications for the activities and outputs in other result areas, but the hardware has been fully procured, installed and is functional in all offices. A maintenance programme is in place, and the NES has a plan for the maintenance and upgrade of the system. The following details the specific outputs:

- 290 PCs.
- 80 laptops.
- 325 UPS.
- 60 printers.
- The server sits at NAIS. The software etc. resides at the server. All 290 PCs in all offices connect directly to the server at NAIS through a VPN.
- Routers.
- Network cabling and related materials.
- Delivery and installation.

Financial summary:

- Budget: 280,000 Euros
- Actual: 255,116 Euros.

3.1.3 Result 3 - Increased capacity building of NES staff to understand, utilise, keep running and benefit from the IT system.

This result was somewhat achieved.

The capacity building process suffered from the related issues of lateness and problems in the delivery of the hardware and software tenders, and the focus that was re-

quired to complete those components with the pressures caused by their delay. The training programme was late being delivered, and ultimately, it must be said, it was not completed. Not all Employment Officers are fully aware of the detailed functioning of the ESS, nor do they take advantage of all of its capabilities. However, since the completion of the project, these processes are on-going, and it is anticipated that the intent of the project in this area will be realised in the near future.

Per the project proposal, two types of training were anticipated, which in total would deliver training to 32 ‘super-users’ trainers (4 for the Tirana regional employment office, 2 each for the other 11 regional employment offices and 6 at NES headquarters), 250 users and 50 managers. Training was delivered in three stages as anticipated:

- 50 managers were trained in March 2013, including the 12 Directors of the Regional offices, 24 Directors of the Local Offices and managers from the NES Headquarters, focused on the use of the IT system, understanding on the IT system, and management by objective, use of the IT system for monitoring.
- 32 NES staff received the Training of Trainers Course in March 2013. Of these, nine were from NES HQ and Tirana Regional Offices and the remainder from other regional offices. These people still serve as resource persons within the organization, in relation to the operation of the system as well as for the delivery of internal NES training.
 - Handle all administrative features in the system.
 - Fulfil function as helpdesk for the ordinary users.
 - Help users in completing, in more efficient way, the information needed for jobseekers and employers.
- 250 system users (employment specialists) in all regions were trained by NES staff in cooperation with SPES experts, who were specifically involved in the training in Shkoder, Lezhe, Berat, Vlore, Korce and Fier. The employment specialist training program focused on understanding the general purpose of the ESS, and receiving the basic skills to use the system in the day-to-day processes of NES. Their particular training emphasised:
 - Understanding the general purpose with the new NES IT-System.
 - Registering a new vacancy.
 - Search for vacancies.
 - Deactivate a vacancy.
 - Register a new job-seeker.
 - Search for existing job-seekers.
 - Deactivate a job-seeker
 - Register a new employer.
 - Search for existing employers.
 - Deactivate an employer.

3.1.4 Result 4 – The NES organisation has adopted organisation, working methods, routines, procedures and staff management in line with modernisation and information of the employment system.

This result was largely achieved.

In general, the ESS works, in all offices, and has been well received. However, the extensiveness of uptake, completeness of transfer from the old system and use of all systems across the NES is not complete. Furthermore, the full intent of this result area appears to have been lost somewhere during implementation, probably as a result of the pressures and issues associated with the delays in delivery of the hardware and software. This is best exemplified by the focus of the Final Report. The Final Report titles this result as ‘Result 4 – *Hire 12 New Staff for the NES*’. This is some way from the wording of the original proposal; indeed, hiring 12 new staff was one of four proposed activities designed to deliver the organisational changes:

- ‘Activities related to Result 4:
 - 4.1. Drafting of new routines and procedures in connection with the introduction of the IT system.
 - 4.2 A full time project assistant will be hired under Sweden no-objection to support NES management working group.
 - 4.3. NES hires 12 IT experts for the implementation and behind the life of the project in order to ensure the sustainability of the project investment.
 - 4.4. Strategy for the increase of job offers from the public sector.’¹²

It is understood by the Evaluators that the recruitment of IT experts is a specific type of action as it is a requirement of the Specific Agreement between Albania and Sweden for the project. In this context it is appropriate for this component to be treated somewhat differently by the NES in reports and other, related documents. However, the fact remains that there is no discussion in the project reporting on the drafting of new routines and procedures, no reference to the engagement and role/ function/ outputs of the project assistant and no discussion of the strategy for the increase of job offers from the public sector. While it is clear that some of this work was completed, and, as indicated above, the work routines associated with the ESS are being rolled out across the NES, this component lost its central significance during implementa-

¹² Project Proposal - Further Development and Implementation an IT Employment Service System (ESS) at the Albanian National Employment Service (NES) in all the 12 Regional and 24 Local Employment Offices -2011-2013. Republic of Albania, Ministry Of Labour, Social Affairs And Equal Opportunities, National Employment Service, General Directorate. Tirana. 22 February 2011.

tion. The concern for the Embassy and the NES is that without Results 4 and 5, the project becomes a much less significant procurement project. Results 4 and 5, and to a certain extent Result 3, emphasise the growth in capacity and the change in approach/ procedure that focus the project on reform processes, rather than procuring hardware and software.

3.1.5 Result 5 - Increased accessibility of male and female jobseekers and businesses to the on-line employment service.

It is likely that this result is being achieved, although as described in the Limitations section, a confident judgement is not possible within the framework of the evaluation and the current status of ESS implementation.

As with Result 4, the full intent of this result area was lost somewhere during implementation. This is best exemplified by the focus of the Final Report on the activity of the information campaign, as opposed to (the much more substantial result statement) ‘increased access to the employment system’.

However, the evaluation fieldwork specifically enquired about this increased accessibility, and it is clear that accessibility to the ESS – online and in-office – has occurred, and is increasing. Jobseekers recognise this, Employment Officers discuss it extensively when asked, and ESS reports demonstrate it. It is not possible however to determine to what extent increased accessibility is attributable to this project alone. Other initiatives that have happened during the last year, including the aggressive information campaign with a clear focus on employment and NES services, better placement of labour offices in central city locations and with modern infrastructure, have simultaneously contributed to this result along with this project. Further, the ESS has not been in place for a sufficient length of time for an adequate assessment of accessibility (and access) to be made. Finally, the ESS, at the time of the evaluation, was not yet functioning across the NES.

As will be seen below, these comments on Results 4 and 5 are also relevant to capacity within the NES, particularly in terms of communication and reporting, as it can be argued that these results were delivered, at least to a large extent, but that project reporting does not effectively detail this point.

3.1.6 Project Outcomes

The project’s outputs have left the NES in a strong position to progress strongly in the provision of effective employment service provision to jobseekers as well as to employers looking for staff. The ESS is demonstrably easier to use, is more effective in the storage and accessing of employer and jobseeker data and as a result fits well within the new service model being implemented across the NES. The changes have

been very well received by Employment Officers, with strong indications of support also from jobseekers and employers, and is strongly supported within Government. Indications are that with a strong and steady on-going implementation of further upgrades, and a greater awareness of the system in the public sphere, that the NES's service delivery will regularly demonstrate high standards of quality.

3.2 EFFECTIVENESS

The project has demonstrated effectiveness in five key areas:

- Increased efficiency, transparency and accessibility.
- Improved NES staff capacity.
- Improvements in NES methods, routines and procedures.
- Implementation of a gender-aware system and gender balance.
- Visibility of the NES.

Each is discussed in detail below.

3.2.1 Increased Efficiency, Transparency and Accessibility

The project reached its objectives - it has contributed to *'the better functioning of the Albanian labour market through a more efficient, IT-based, registration and information system, and, it has increased the efficiency, transparency and accessibility of the public employment services in Albania.* There are a number of areas where this can be seen.

Swedish expert:

The NES was hugely successful in a multi-channel approach in the Employment Service: new offices, new system, and online system for job seekers and employers. This is a major step for a country with a not-very-developed infrastructure.¹³

The project procured and installed the *appropriate hardware* in all 12 regional and 24 local employment offices. This process was delayed by a number of factors related to the agreed tendering process (the use of both Swedish and Albanian procedures, the use of both English and Albanian languages in the tenders), that ultimately required a re-tendering for the hardware. These delays impacted 'down the line' on other activities and results of the project, in the timing of these activities and in the overall effectiveness of their delivery.

¹³ Fieldwork interview.

The project procured the development and delivery of the NES *ESS software* in all 12 regional and 24 local employment offices. This process was also delayed, not in its tendering but in the delivery of the software by the contractor. This delay further impacted on overall project timing and on the effectiveness of delivery of subsequent activities. It should also be noted that while all employment offices have a functioning ESS, this was not completed during the project period – some having become operational only in recent weeks. Although the ESS was installed in all offices before the project was completed, the NES headquarters have only made its use mandatory by all field offices in the recent months.

The project has delivered important improvements in the systems which are likely to increase *accessibility* (and access) for male and female jobseekers and businesses, through the on-line employment service. This is particularly notable in the shift from a paper-based system for recording client records to the ESS system of electronic recording and storage – as the shift to online services required changes to the mind-set and approach of an Employment Officer. Within the ESS, clients – notably jobseekers – are now active participants in the employment process. They are able to register themselves, and to search for and access job vacancies. This change has the potential to increase their proactivity in their relationship with Employment Officers, although such a change is not yet visible.

This change significantly increases *system transparency*, with and for jobseekers and within the vacancy register. Transparency improvements include the visibility of vacancies to jobseekers and the visibility of jobseekers to employers, as well as the access both sets of clients have to vacancies and jobseekers across the system, i.e., not just within their specific NES office. Jobseekers notice an increase in vacancies appropriate to their skills and backgrounds and Employment Officers note a significant improvement in their ability to match jobseekers with vacancies. Numbers of jobseekers, and vacancies, are now visible in the system, in aggregate numbers and disaggregated, improving system transparency. The evaluation team spoke with a number of job seekers and employers to understand their perspective on accessibility. While there is not enough feedback to speak with statistical confidence about client views on the system, the indications are positive, particularly from jobseekers, who note both ease of access to information on themselves and vacancies, and an increase in the number of vacancies they are being provided with that are appropriate for their skills. As one said:

The old system was chaos. I cannot comment objectively, but there was not enough data available to me. Now when I enter into the system I see that the data is up to date. At least weekly I think there are published vacancies. I also see the availability of staff – they are much more willing and available to me.¹⁴

While it is early days in the implementation of the ESS, and therefore of its impact nationwide, the system clearly demonstrates an improvement in the quality and quantity of *information on jobseekers, employers and vacancies*. The system monitors this information, and there is evidence (mostly anecdotal at this point) of an increase in the availability of vacancies to particular jobseekers. As the system is not yet fully operational (see the reference to inputs of ‘stock’ data below), there are limitations on its effectiveness in matching jobseekers with vacancies and in the statistical analysis that is available. This is being addressed.

The evaluation team was impressed with the knowledge and commitment of Employment Officers, particularly their individual commitment to gathering, and using information on clients to assist them with finding positions. It appears that there is more time for contact with employers, and there is a clear increase in the number of vacancies, which implies this contact. However on the basis of project reports, the Employment Offices visited and the employers spoken to, it cannot be confirmed that there is a change within the NES in the amount of time for, or in the approaches to employers. Some feedback from the fieldwork would indicate that while the NES understands the priority of addressing employers, the focus is still heavily in favour of jobseekers, and given the newness of the ESS, it may be that this is a necessary focus at this point. But strategic approaches to employers are not unknown - the Director of the NES is currently engaged with the hospitality industry on the coast to build the number of vacancies available in the system as the holiday season approaches.

There has been an increase in *measures* for assisting jobseekers. Six active labour market programmes are currently scheduled for implementation or are being implemented. There has been an improvement in how the ESS treats these measures, and there is some capacity for them to be monitored for their use and effectiveness. These measures include a focus on discriminated social groups. Within the specific design and implementation of the project there was no specific consideration of discriminated social groups beyond the availability of detailed disaggregation within the ESS itself.

¹⁴ Fieldwork interview.

However, while there are clear indications about improvements, and how these improvements will impact positively on the effectiveness of the system to increase access for male and female jobseekers, project implementation did not place significant emphasis this increased accessibility per se, nor did implementation activities emphasise disaggregated detail on jobseeker access to the ESS. All of this is possible within the ESS, and Employment Offices and NES headquarters are very capable of discussing the transparency of the system and the capacities for disaggregation of data within the system.

3.2.2 Improved NES Staff Capacity

The project ensured improvements in the capacity of NES staff to *use and benefit* from the new hardware. The IT system was built to support working methods – it was planned in this way. The training sessions and all the discussions were along these lines, with the changes in routines, methods and procedures built into the system.

While it is clear from feedback during the evaluation that staff have been trained in the use of the ESS, and indeed they are using the ESS daily in servicing clients, the level of knowledge of the system and its tools is not consistent across the NES, and the ESS is not being used consistently by Employment Officers. Specific servicing of jobseekers is consistent, but making more sophisticated use of the system is not yet visible in all offices. Particularly notable here are two areas where the ESS offers significant change that is not yet being applied consistently:

- Taking advantage of the change in role of jobseekers – i.e., making use of the increased active participation of jobseekers to improve results for individuals and across the system.
- Knowledge and utilisation of system-capacity for advanced queries and the automatic matching of jobseekers with vacancies.

Staff turnover is visible in the organisation, particularly in senior management posts in Employment Offices. At present, new directors have been appointed in all regional and local offices, which indicates that the results of the training of managers activity may have largely been lost. Some 15 people who previously worked at NES HQ have now left the organization. No data is available with regard to staff turnover in the regions. The evaluators visited three regional/local offices and can confirm that the Directors were new in all three locations. In one of these cases the newly appointed Director had been promoted to the position from within the organisation (Tirana), and had very good familiarity with and appreciation of the added value of the system in daily management. In the other two cases (Durres and Kruja) the new Directors had no previous experience with NES. However, other senior staff are very familiar with the system and previous project activities, which was noted as important to the new Directors as well as to the training of new Employment Officers in Employment Offices.

3.2.3 Improvements in NES Methods, Routines and Procedures

The project enabled improvements in organisation, working methods, routines, procedures and staff management across the NES. Management of work time and planning of work processes has improved, and the process of querying data is much faster. This in turn *improves services to jobseekers*. There is a more dynamic work flow in the Employment Offices, and the in-built Reminder System is of particular help to Employment Officers in the management of specific jobseekers and vacancies, and in the planning of their work. All NES offices are using work routines designed for the ESS, and all have been trained in the use of the system, from inputs to outputs and analysis. They are supportive of the changes in system and routines, and how these make their tasks easier, specifically in terms of registering jobseekers, matching jobseekers with vacancies, and extracting statistics from the system. Even in those Employment Offices where the changes have only recently been implemented, there is strong support for the system and the real and potential impact on the work of Employment Officers, as well as on the outputs of Employment Offices (linkages between jobseekers and vacancies). Staff are very aware of how the changes improve service delivery.

The changes are noted by other agencies as well. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) is implementing an IPA project which is closely related to the ESS. This IPA project is developing and implementing a ‘new service model’ in Employment Offices¹⁵. Links between the two initiatives are clear:

The Sida project improved functions and activities in order to prepare/ develop the information system. They worked in detail on process improvements that were then reflected in the ESS. We then took these into account when working on the Service Model. So, there were many detailed procedures that were already defined when we began work on the Service Model that had been defined as a part of the ESS development (referred to as

¹⁵ See: <http://www.ipa-hrd.al>. ‘The EU IPA 2010 project on Human Resources Development in Albania, funded by the European Union is being implemented by the International Labour Organization in co-operation with the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, the Ministry of Education and Sport and their implementing agencies. The overall objective of the Project is to improve labour market functioning and the quality of human capital, while the specific objectives cover the improvement of the capacity of labour market institutions, mainly the State Labour Inspectorate (SLI) and National Employment Service (NES).’

‘the Swedish system’). We pulled all these pieces together in defining/developing the Service Model.¹⁶

The *operational changes* are visible across all NES offices, local and regional, although in some instances the change to the ESS and implementation of new routines has only taken place in recent weeks. Furthermore, there is not yet a consistent use of routines, nor of ESS capacity. There is a clear need for further building of capacity within Employment Offices in the use of the ESS. On the jobseeker and employer side, the evaluation was able to obtain some anecdotal evidence as well of the improvements in service delivery.

However, the changeover to the ESS is not complete. Employment Offices continue to maintain the paper-based system in parallel with the ESS, while awaiting administrative changes that will allow them to do away with the paper-based system. Not all historical (but still current) files on jobseekers – known as stock – have been put into the system. The process is some 80% complete and programmed for completion by the end of June 2014. Until it is complete, jobseeker data in the system is not complete and statistics are not useable at the national level. The ESS cannot fully function, nor can working methods, routines and procedures be fully upgraded, until this process is finalised.

3.2.4 Implementation of a Gender-Aware System and Gender Balance

Within the framework of the project (and the structure and functioning of the ESS), the NES addressed a number of specific priorities in relation to gender focus and a gender balance. This is particularly relevant in relation to the Vacancy Register and the Jobseeker Register, where there were a wide range of issues that needed to be addressed. In order to respond most effectively to these priorities, the NES engaged a local NGO, the Gender Alliance for Development. The Gender Alliance for Development contributed to the analysis of NES’s working documents from the perspective of non-discrimination on the basis of gender and other aspects such as minorities. They also contributed to the preparation of the Terms of Reference for the development of the NES software, with a particular emphasis on gender disaggregation and the identification of potential jobseeker vulnerabilities at the time of interview¹⁷. As a result, the ESS is ‘gender aware’, and has a sophisticated disaggregation capacity, including significant gender detail on jobseekers and job vacancies, as well as on suc-

¹⁶ Fieldwork interview.

¹⁷ Fieldwork interview.

cess rates (placements) for job seekers disaggregated by gender (as well as age, education level, social group, etc.).

Beyond their work on the Terms of Reference for the software, the Gender Alliance for Development contributed to the design and delivery of the project training programme - through workshops and meetings, with women, to maximise the ability of women to find a job, using the system.

In relation to gender awareness and gender balance, the Final Report states that:

The ESS system has respected the gender-related country legislative and regulative framework. The system produces sex disaggregated data, and this data can be easily used by policy makers for informed decision making with regards to the employability of women in general, and for the vulnerable group of women in particular. Both administrative and electronic data shows that the number of female jobseekers is higher compared to males. From a total of 143,938 jobseekers registered in the employment offices, 74,028 are women (data of 1st of March 2014), or 51.5%. In the electronic system from 41,117 jobseekers registered, 21,053 are females or 51.2%.¹⁸

There is an expressed view from the fieldwork that the project had no specific gender focus, other than the actual structure of the ESS, and its disaggregation capacity, although the view of external contributors was that the project manager and project team were very open and cooperative in the development of the gender aspects of the ESS.¹⁹ The clear sense from interviews is that the project, and the changes occasioned, are about the system, the ESS, and efficiencies and processes, but that these relate to all jobseekers – there was no sense that the project had a specific focus on gender awareness or gender balance.

3.2.5 Visibility of the NES

There are clear indicators of the improved visibility of the NES. These indicators include the availability in the online system of jobseeker data and vacancy data, the extensive use of media in recent times to promote changes in NES operating approaches (not all project driven but all with an impact on visibility). The EU-funded

¹⁸ Project Final Report. March 2014.

¹⁹ Field interview.

ILO project on changes to the NES service model, and an enhanced commitment from the newly elected Government, both contribute to this improvement in visibility, and add value to the more fundamental change in practice and approach that the ESS has brought about. It cannot be said that there is an improvement in the image of the NES as a result of the project. An improvement seems plausible, and anecdotal evidence would support this, but the Evaluation cannot confirm this.

3.3 EFFICIENCY

Notwithstanding some specific areas discussed below, the project overall represents an efficient approach to the use of resources. The sense of the team is that the approach taken was an efficient modality for the delivery of this type of project. The NES is of this view, as are the international experts involved in implementation. Some further discussion is found below in a number of key areas that impacted, both positively and negatively, on the efficient delivery of the project.

3.3.1 Delays in the Tendering Processes

The delays in tender processes for both hardware and software (results 1 and 2) had a significant impact on project implementation, particularly the timing of delivery. The initial delays in delivery of the hardware tender flowed on to the timing for issuing the software tender. This delay was lengthened with delays specific to the software process.

As well as the specific timing issues, the delays created too much emphasis on the procurement processes, which drew focus away from the capacity-building, the procedural changes and the accessibility area (results 3, 4 and 5). There is a sense in project reporting (not representative of the project's original design) that the project was about procurement. The focus on the complete renovation of the employment system, including approaches to jobseekers and employers is missing to some extent.

3.3.2 The Use of the Direct Funding Approach

The Embassy was strongly encouraged by Sida in Stockholm to demonstrate a 'new model' of assistance, a model that could provide a demonstration of aid effectiveness with an emphasis on ownership. The NES had not been happy with the earlier twinning support, where their interactions with the SPES were intermittent, and also with the procurement process and language difficulties experienced with the contracted company. Following detailed and positive discussions with SPES, which took on board the NES and Sida Stockholm's views, the direct assistance model was agreed, with the NES directly implementing the hardware procurement. The Embassy sought more support from Sida Stockholm, but assistance from Stockholm actually declined

as part of the transition to greater responsibilities for the Embassy in Tirana as it moves towards being ‘Delegated’, in 2015.

The decline in support from Stockholm increased the Embassy’s engagement, both in design and negotiation in the early stages and in the oversight processes throughout implementation. The NES/ Embassy relationship requires more involvement from the Embassy than a traditional twinning operation or a project delivered by an NGO or consulting firm. It is more demanding on Embassy resources – and is particularly intensive in administrative activities. From experience, this is not surprising. There are other examples of direct assistance in Albania,²⁰ and while most Sida support is through an intermediary (framework organisation, consultancy) this is not an unusual approach - it is not a ‘new model’²¹, although the size of the procurement was large in an Albanian context.²² The implementation demanded more of the Embassy, and demonstrated exactly the strengths and weaknesses described in the following extract from a comparative modalities table from an earlier evaluation in Albania.²³

Comparative Modalities²⁴		
	Direct Support To Albanian Institutions	Support Through Swedish Public Agencies to Albanian Institutions
Leveraging policy and institutional reform anchored in national ownership	Reflect the Aid Effectiveness Agenda. Strong on ownership	No clear examples of overall strategic reform despite strong ownership
Moving from policy/strategic planning towards implementation	Yes, but some perceived tendencies for support to ‘get stuck in Tirana’	Particularly regarding technical areas
Linking national and local development	Not a focus, see above	Subject to focus area this can be a strong aspect

²⁰ The Embassy has directly supported InSTAT, the Ministry of the Interior/ Albanian State Police on community policing, the Prime Minister’s Office for a strategic advisor on solid waste.

²¹ The Embassy in Tirana.

²² Dec 2010. *Support to the Albanian National Employment Service – Review of Internal Control Systems*. SIPU

²³ Feb 2013. Christoplos et al. Final Report. Evaluation of Results of Sweden’s Development Cooperation Strategy in Albania. Reference number: RE81 - Indevelop Framework Agreement for Sida Reviews, Evaluations and Advisory Services on Results Framework.

²⁴ This extract only includes the columns from the original table on direct support and support through Swedish public agencies (given the role of SPES in the project).

Comparative Modalities²⁴		
	Direct Support To Albanian Institutions	Support Through Swedish Public Agencies to Albanian Institutions
Reflecting the value base and policies of Swedish development cooperation	No	On a technical level yes, some agencies are developing capacities related to Swedish policies while others are very weak
Overall value for money	Some manageable risks, but good, particularly if assisted structurally; requires more inputs/oversight from the Embassy	Good, even ‘inexpensive’
Understanding of client needs	Obviously strong, but politicisation may override attention to the needs of the ultimate clients	Excellent, technically, good peer support; not so strong on providing personnel who understand the parameters of international cooperation
Timeliness/efficiency of delivery of activities/outputs	Subject to risks, particularly in procurement where systems can be outside agency control	Good
Responsiveness to changing conditions	An area of risk, related to the ability to respond effectively given bureaucratic/political constraints	Seems good
Achievement of results and results reporting	Difficult to generalise; results reporting likely to be very weak	Good at activity/output level; less so regarding outcomes
Added value in strategic alliances	Depends on the nature of the agency being supported	Good – a strong positive for this modality

The Embassy was aware of these issues prior to and during negotiations with the Government and NES on the project, and, based on its own assessment, the pre-project work of the SPES²⁵ and with the assistance of outside advice²⁶, strongly encouraged the NES to take on board some specific resources (administrative assistance and reporting), which would be covered by the development assistance agreement. This was agreed, and included in project financing, although as is discussed below, the actual use of these resources was not extensively demonstrated during the project.

The direct funding approach agreed by the Embassy and the NES was intended to deliver, and delivered, NES control. Further, while the project was ‘a burden’ to NES management, it was of their choosing, with the burden of change and project implementation taken up with vigour and professionalism. There is demonstrable, strong ownership by the NES over the whole process. They procured and installed it themselves (‘they sweat over it’) - this is a critical aspect of project success. While in general the process was managed relatively well by the NES, the management strengths and weaknesses described above impacted on delivery. High level management within NES was changed more than once during the project duration, creating an additional burden in project delivery.

The Embassy was flexible in its approach to design, implementation and to the NES. Three areas were most important in contributing to the success of the project and the modality:

- The thought given to, and discussions about the project, during negotiations between the Embassy, SPES and the NES.
- The flexibility demonstrated in design and implementation - this flexibility ensured the strengths of different actors were used in the most appropriate aspects of implementation to achieve the best outputs/ outcomes.
- The willingness to encourage NES ownership while insisting on appropriately detailed, and timely, administrative and financial reporting.

While the ‘front end’ - the type of assistance and its exact structure - was specific to this project, the ‘back end’ processes - financial and narrative reporting - followed all standard Sida requirements. This balance was very important to overall success, as it allowed appropriate variations in design and implementation processes without weakening administrative controls.

²⁵ Dec 2009. *Efficient Employment Service in Albania – Further Development and Implementation of the NES Employment Service System (ESS). Inception Project For The Final Project Phase*. Swedish Public Employment Service

²⁶ Dec 2010. *Support to the Albanian National Employment Service – Review of Internal Control Systems*. SIPU.

The direct funding model does not, per se, ensure any specific strategies for, or detailed measures to be used in project planning and implementation. It does not ensure an efficient use of resources. No specific strategies or measures were identified, beyond the planning process that lead to the project proposal. These included the detailed discussions between the NES and the Embassy that enabled administrative and financial controls to be well thought through and well developed, as well as the work with experts in the design and implementation of the procurement processes.

3.3.3 Use of the SPES

The role of the Swedish Public Employment Service in the project was somewhat unique. The SPES has a particular history with the NES, including, as described above, the delivery of the original *Efficient Employment Service in Albania (2004-2008)* project. However, their role was different in this initiative, as it included a support role to the NES in components of the project delivered through the direct-assistance modality and components that were specifically their responsibility. Across both roles, the SPES continued in its value-adding support/ partnership role with the NES.

The engagement of the SPES was specifically useful in the project. Chief among the strengths mentioned by both SPES and NES personnel was the appropriateness of knowledge provided by the SPES in the design and implementation of the ESS (‘sister knowledge’ was the phrase that was used). The SPES has standardised procedures for all aspects of their employment services, and their systems are completely in line with international standards and approaches. The NES was provided with clear advice and guidance while configuring their own system – which was a major contribution from the SPES as the tools of standardisation ease processes going forward while lowering costs throughout development/ implementation. The SPES provided tools, and then worked together with NES staff in an on-the-job-type learning approach. This was the essence of the cooperation, and the training – making use of their knowledge, their systems and their experience. At its most fundamental level, the ESS incorporates an EU model into the Albanian system.

The view of NES staff was that the SPES contribution was significant in system design, not only just the IT, but the services and IT together. Furthermore, the exchange process between the SPES and the NES contributed to the NES’s development of a vision of what the system would do for the NES, and what they wanted from the system. And the key to their involvement, and to the effectiveness of this modality, was that the NES and the SPES are both national employment agencies – they understood each other’s responsibilities and needs.

While the technical inputs directly related to project results are effective, a strong demonstration of skills in planning, analysis and reporting, and in passing these skills

along to the NES, was not apparent, nor specifically called for in project design. SPES inputs did not, but could have, included support to the NES in these management functions. As one comment from the fieldwork expressed it, ‘What you need to do as an Authority and how you need to do it. This is so critical in the strengthening process. Technical, for sure, but also the ‘how to be an Authority’ - they need mentoring.’²⁷

This was most apparent during the Evaluation in project reporting, the weaknesses of which are described below. The capacities and skills of the Swedish framework organisations overseeing Sida’s civil society development programme have, of necessity because of Sida insistence, developed dramatically in this area in recent years. While it is understood that this was not defined in this project, and Sida has no long-term investment programme with SPES, as there is with the civil society framework organisations, delivering assistance in these areas is critical for Swedish government agencies – as is demonstrating their ability to pass on these skills/ capacities to organisations such as the NES.

3.3.4 NES Management

One key factor of success has been the capacity and strong commitment of senior NES management to the change process, and to driving the process. The project manager was strongly committed to the project, which was evident throughout implementation. This commitment was to the redevelopment of the ESS, more than to ‘the project’, but of course the two were completely interlinked. This commitment continues, and is demonstrated in the on-going development of strategies for further improvements in the number and type of job vacancies in the system (e.g., the current strategy in the hospitality industry) and the on-going high-level of communication with regional and local offices on system functions and potential development.

However, management capacity (and leadership) in the NES is shallow. Too much depends on the Director of Employment Services, with support from his two key staff (one in employment services and one IT), and to a lesser extent some key regional office staff. The impact of this includes the fact that strategy development for the NES’s medium to long-term directions (and the ‘selling’ of this strategy) within government; development and marketing of strategies for increasing job vacancies in the system; and detailed discussions with key IT and employment specialists on future directions, all compete with day-to-day functions and the addressing of issues best

²⁷ Fieldwork interview.

left to other senior staff. Too much is left to too few. It is the view of the evaluation team that this situation influenced the decisions made (and not made) when the hardware and software tenders were in process, and subsequently impacted on the wider focus of the project. Views expressed during the fieldwork can be summarised as expressing some concern regarding the sustainability of the ESS if the management processes at senior levels of the NES are not deepened and strengthened.

Project administrative assistance was recommended in the SIPU review, the NES accepted this recommendation and a position was provided within the project, with the support of the Embassy. However, the position/ person was underutilised, and a number of administrative tasks that could have been handled by the project assistant remained with more senior NES management.

Feedback from fieldwork provided a clear indication that project management and implementation approaches focused on all necessary activities and changes. For example, while procurement delays impacted on the capacity building focus, the focus was not lost, and Employment Office staff have been prepared for the use of the ESS. This process is incomplete, but is still being implemented, and will be completed across all offices. NES staff, nationally, regionally and locally are very appreciative of the improvements in both their work practices and their outputs that are the result of the project. For them, the value in the changes are self-evident, and the support they have received from NES headquarters in facilitating the change is noted and acknowledged.

3.3.5 Reporting

The evaluators were disappointed with the quality of project narrative reporting, specifically its lack of analysis in managing for results and in the related loss of connection between the results framework and project reporting. In order to illustrate this, the table below excerpts the project proposal and the final report, as a comparison.

Project Proposal – (extract from the Proposal)		Final Report – Extract.
Result Statements	Activity Statements For Each Result	The dot points are evaluator comments.
Result 3: Capacity building of NES staff to understand, use, keep running and benefit from the IT system.	3.1. Preparation of a work plan for the trainings and the training curricula. 3.2. Training of NES staff users, trainers and managers at NES 3.2.1. Training of Trainers. Training of the ordinary users. Training of users (250 users at	Results Nr. 3. Staff Training The result refers to building capacity (output) not training (input). Success of the training is quantified – number of participants/ numbers of sessions. There is some discussion of outputs, but no detailed analysis of outcomes, i.e., how NES staff are

	regional level 3 days in 12 training sessions in the 12 regions). Training of 50 managers in total (including the management level at NES, and the 36 regional, and local directors' level).	better able 'to understand, use, keep running and benefit from the IT system'.
Result 4: NES organisation has adopted organization, working methods, routines, procedures and staff management in line with modernisation and information of the employment system.	4.1. Drafting of new routines and procedures in connection with the introduction of the IT system. 4.2 A full time project assistant will be hired under Sweden, no-objection to support NES management working group. 4.3. NES hires 12 IT experts for the implementation and behind the life of the project in order to ensure the sustainability of the project investment. 4.4. Strategy for the increase of job offers from public sector.	Result Nr. 4. Hire 12 IT staff for NES. The result statement has disappeared and been replaced by the Activity statement 4.3. There is no discussion/ analysis related to adoption of 'working methods, routines, etc.' There is no reference in the final report to new routines or procedures. There is no discussion of the project assistant. There is no discussion of strategies for increasing job offers from the public service.
Result 5: Increased accessibility of male and female jobseekers and businesses to the on-line employment service.	5.1. Information campaign for ESS amended version installed and functional for all stakeholders (customers, jobseekers, employers, and all the participating partners). 5.2. A communication plan for the new service will be developed and resourced.	Result Nr. 5. Increase access to services through information campaign and communication plan. The result statement has shifted from 'increasing accessibility' (output) to an emphasis on the information campaign and communication plan (inputs). There is no discussion/ analysis of the information campaign except a mention of a couple of media actions. There is no mention at all of a communication plan – neither the plan nor its development and resourcing.

High quality reports, reports that provide a strong representation of the results and effects of an initiative, can be used as quite effective tools with Government and external agencies as part of the process of promoting the strategies and needs of an organisation – they give confidence to Government and external actors.

The key point here is not about implementation but about how the NES describes and details implementation and results in relation to both outputs and outcomes:

- It is important for the NES to be able to describe for itself the importance of the work it is engaged in.
- It is important for its discussions with Government, as a way of ensuring Government is both aware and supportive of the changes/ improvements being made.
- It is important for Sida and other international partners, not least as it can impact on both effective strategy development by these international partners and can improve the likelihood of funding opportunities.

The evaluators heard, from a number of sources, some disappointment about the emphasis in public discussion on the ‘new service model’ being implemented through the IPA-funded ILO project. The service model includes a complete refurbishing of the public areas of NES offices around the country, which is a particularly visible component of the service model. Significant emphasis is placed by media, and from some in Government, on this refurbishment, and there is some misunderstanding/ confusion about the activities and outputs of the IPA-funded project compared with the ESS development funded by Sida. Chief among criticisms of this emphasis was the fact that the new service model was the ‘icing on the (ESS) cake’; that the fundamental changes those which are occurring with the ESS and the online system. A better developed, more detailed, results-oriented reporting could contribute significantly to a better understanding of the ‘cake’, i.e., could assist the NES in putting forward to Government, the media and the public the significance of the changes as a result of the ESS developments.

The SIPU review proposed, the project proposal included and the Embassy agreed that the NES would use finances provided by the project to engage a specialist reporting assistant. This position would have assisted in developing reports and in developing reporting skills within the NES. The NES chose not to engage this resource during the project. Reporting, particularly its more analytical components, is a senior role in an organisation – it is not certain this position would have addressed the NES’s reporting capacity needs.

3.3.6 Communication and Coordination

Internal NES communication and coordination are undertaken at an acceptable level. While it was not possible within the framework of the Evaluation to compare current communication and coordination with earlier practice, feedback from Employment Offices indicates that exchange with senior management on general or policy matters, as well as on specific matters to do with the ESS hardware and software, is good. The expressed view is that transparency is a strength of communication with headquarters, and that communication has become more flexible. Statistics are a good example – they are now able to be provided by email, where previously they were required to be

sent via the post. As one Employment Office said, ‘what is important is that HQ and the IT person there are incredibly supportive of our work in taking up usage of the system. Maybe we are even boring but they are very responsive’. Some concern was expressed about the internal organisation within HQ, specifically that divisions of responsibility are not clear, which hampers clear communications with the appropriate people.

Communication and coordination within offices also appears to happen at a relatively high level. Specific enquiry was made into communication with clients, both jobseekers and employers. The response on all sides was positive and supportive, although feedback from employers and jobseekers was limited.

To other agencies linked directly to the project, communication and coordination worked well, with government partners, particularly the Department of Strategy and Donor Coordination (DSDC) and the National Agency for an Information Society (NAIS). NES management managed the relationships well, with appropriate discussions on plans and programmes, and the status of implementation. In terms of the future, there was discussion from a number of perspectives on the need for the ESS to link into other government agency systems – specifically social welfare and tax. These links would improve transparency in jobseeker registration as well as improve data quality with relation to identification and contact details. The NES, and other agencies, are aware of these proposals and they form part of the current agenda for system improvements.

Interactions with international stakeholders shows room for improvement. The project (and the NES) were hampered by a constant change of director (four during the project period), which was apparent in communications with external agencies. With regards to international experts, the evaluation heard a broad range of perspectives on the quality of communication, coordination and use of the international experts who participated in the project. Generally, but not completely, the views regarding the experts were positive. Some issues were raised as to whether or not experts were used optimally, but on balance experts and the NES felt that their contribution was welcomed, important and effective, and was effectively managed.

Communication with the Embassy was managed well, with both sides commenting on the quality of the relationship. Given the decision to pursue a direct funding modality for the project, this was an important relationship. The Embassy had to ‘make its own way’, to a certain extent, in determining exactly how the modality would work, and made a number of reasoned decisions related to flexibility, type of oversight and determination of the amount of time/ energy to expend on the project. All of these decisions impacted across the relationship with the NES.

3.4 SUSTAINABILITY

More than one stakeholder used the expression ‘there is no going back now’, and this seems clear. It is also noted that this was always said in a positive way. Across all groups interviewed, from Government to clients, the value and effectiveness of the ESS is apparent. So too is the sense that it will be supported in its on-going development and growth. This is the essence of feedback during the Evaluation. There is a clear improvement in quality and quantity of information, on both sets of clients (employers/ jobseekers). There is a stated need for, and confidence in, the system, i.e., the ESS, and in the ability of the NES to meet the necessary performance objectives. Linked with the new service model, sustainability is very likely.

4 Conclusions

The NES and the ESS are more central to Government thinking, and Government priorities on service provision. The Government acknowledges the very positive visibility gains from the ‘new service model’, demonstrated in the new offices in Durres and Tirana. Government is also aware that these changes have had a significant impact on its thinking and planning. But, they also acknowledge that the fundamental change is in the ESS, which is the solid structure behind the façade of the offices, and that the ‘new service model’ would not be nearly as important without the changes brought about by the ESS development.

The capacity development components of the project (results 3 and 4) became the less important aspects for the NES in implementation, compared to the procurement aspects in results 1 and 2. The whole project would have benefited from a stronger focus on the capacity building processes, and on it being built into two different phases: a consolidation of the hardware/ software platform first (result 3), followed by changes in and to the working environment (result 4) – the working environment as a tool, and how the office conditions and service model change because of the ESS. This would have aided the design and delivery of the capacity building, while improving the linkages with the IPA-funded ILO project.

A stronger linkage with the IPA-funded ILO project would strengthen the changes brought about by the ESS development, and vice versa. The ‘new service model’ incorporates the ESS in service delivery, and the implementation of the ESS, in offices, happens within the structure of the ‘new service model’.

The system changes generated strong support from Employment Officers and jobseekers, each of whom had an immediate appreciation of the value to them of the changes, notably in accessibility and transparency. There was no sense at all of any burden or resistance to the changes – the understanding of the value to the service provider and to the client was immediate.

There is a wide range of changes being requested from the field, changes which are understood to be in the future plans at NES headquarters, although an ESS development plan is not readily visible. An important aspect of this is how to improve all aspects of the system (not just the ESS), as a package:

- Finalisation of the ‘stock’ data entry.
- Completion of capacity-building to ensure all staff in all offices are fully conversant with all aspects of the ESS.
- Dispensing with the paper-based system.
- Improvements/ refinements to the system’s matching capabilities.

- Linkages to outside systems (taxation and social welfare).
- Strategies for increasing numbers of vacancies (sector strategies, seasonal strategies, regional strategies).

SPES inputs did not include support to partner organisations in management functions such as planning, analysis and reporting. These areas tend to be areas where an upgrading of capacity is needed in the partner agency, and outside of the Swedish partner, there is no system for provision of this capacity building support. It would add value to the work of Swedish government agencies if, in their contributions to partner agencies, their responsibilities included assistance in development of these sets of skills, as a matter of course, in their service provision. It may be that these skills will need improvement within Swedish government agencies in order to fulfil such a responsibility. This should be welcomed.

5 Lessons learned

The direct funding modality is a viable, efficient approach in circumstances of strong organisational leadership, and the approach encourages ownership by the funded agency.

Within the direct funding modality, technical support to the local agency from a Swedish government agency can add significant value where there is a strong correlation between the work and priorities of both organisations. A stronger focus on support in management functions is needed.

The direct funding modality must be structured with recognition of the additional requirements in time that will be required by the Embassy. Given the direct relationship between Embassy and funded agency, this cannot be avoided.

The direct funding modality is best served by an approach that balances independence for the funded organisation with a consistent application of Sida's administrative and financial requirements.

Key to the success of the direct funding modality is the breadth and depth of discussions and negotiations during project design. Discussions must canvas all aspects of organisational strengths and weaknesses and how these will be managed, used and improved as part of the project.

This evaluation, as well as earlier work, provides strong indications with regards the inputs of Swedish Government Agencies to projects and national partners, and the need to strengthen *both* the expected outcomes of project activities *and* the management and administrative arrangement of the project. Central to this is ensuring the funded agency receives the necessary assistance required to fulfil all aspects of project planning, analysis and reporting.

6 Recommendations

6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NES

- Inputs of ‘stock data’ must be completed as a matter of urgency. It is critical for effective analysis of jobseeker and vacancy data for all information to be complete and up-to-date.
- Negotiations with Government to end use of the paper-based system must be completed as soon as possible. The effectiveness (and motivation) of Employment Officers depends to a certain extent on moving solely to the electronic system.
- All Employment Officers in all Employment Offices need to be brought to the same level of understanding and use of the ESS. Data analysis and ‘matching’ are particular priorities.
- An ESS Development Plan is required.
 - This development plan should include detail on the internal feedback systems on system needs, processes for assessing the feedback, detail on the NES approach to system analysis, maintenance and development and a budget for the human and financial resources that will be required, in an on-going way, to ensure this development takes place.
 - It is immediately critical that both a short and medium term development plan be developed and distributed in order for Government, and for staff in regional and local offices, to know and have confidence in NES planning processes.
- The ESS development cannot (nor should it) be seen in isolation, particularly in relation to the work of the IPA-funded ILO project. These initiatives should be seen by the NES and Government as a ‘package’, with changes that strategically support each other.
- This ‘package’ needs to include the capacity building approaches taken by the NES and ILO in order that the delivery of services to jobseekers and employers is seen as a single process.

6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SIDA/ THE EMBASSY

- Further support to capacity development is required both at NES headquarters and in the regional and local offices. This capacity development includes management, technical and service delivery components. Further Sida support

to the NES in addressing these capacity needs is appropriate, with certain constraints:

- The emphasis of the process must be on results – what capacity is being built/ what new skills are being learned, not on the number and type of training inputs.
- A focus on service delivery is required, and should incorporate both the ‘higher level’ aspects of the ESS and the quality of service delivery more relevant to the ‘new service model’, i.e., support to the ILO project in ‘front office’ processes.
- A focus on employers (and increases in the numbers of job vacancies) would be appropriate, although it is acknowledged that this is not a focus for all Employment Offices.
- Implementation of the direct funding modality requires a more detailed understanding of the roles and responsibilities of Sida/ the Embassy and the funded agency. The project proposal provides a detailed project definition/ description, and the Agreement provides the structural relationship between Sida/ the Embassy and, in this instance, Albania. It would be useful to provide also a further layer to the description of the ‘partnership’ between Sida/ the Embassy and the funded government agency. This further layer, a ‘partnership agreement’ or memorandum of understanding, would define more than the contractual obligations of the grant recipient, concentrating on the roles and responsibilities of each:
 - Why the parties are entering into a relationship.
 - What is expected of each party, defining both specifics and more general expectations.
 - What benefits are anticipated for each party.
 - How the relationship works.
- Sida/ Embassy requirements of the Swedish Government Agency should include the ability to provide detailed assistance (mentoring) to the funded agency at a ‘higher level’ than technical support. Subject to assessments undertaken and agreements reached, these service requirements are likely to include the development of planning, analysis and reporting capacity within funded agency management.

7 Annexes

7.1 ANNEX 1 – LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

7.1.1 NES Staff - Headquarters

1. Mr. Genci Kojdheli, General Director of National Employment Service
2. Neshat Zeneli, Director of Employment Service and Migration Directorate, Project Manager of the project
3. Mr. Elvis Rexha, responsible for IT at NES Headquarters
4. Mrs. Kostanca Martini, Employment Service Expert

7.1.2 NES Staff – Employment Offices

5. Mr. Fatjon Dhuli, Director of the Regional Employment Office Tirana
6. Mrs. Manjola Bici, IT Expert Tirana Regional Employment Office
7. Julinda Gjonja Supervisor of Employment Services Tirana Regional Employment Office
8. Sonila Zeka Expert of Employment Services Tirana Regional Employment Office
9. Egla Saliasi Expert of Employment Services Tirana Regional Employment Office
10. Mr. Indrit Puteci, Director of Regional Employment Office Durres
11. Mrs. Majlinda Mema, Expert of Employment Services Durres Regional Employment Office
12. Mr. Romir Frasheri, IT Support Staff Durres
13. Odetta Garori – Statistics Expert, Durres Regional Employment Office
14. Ferrok Taci, Director of Regional Employment Office, Kruje Local Employment Office
15. Fatjon Hyka, Expert of Employment Service, Kruje Local Employment Office
16. Florjana Kupi, Expert of Employment Service, Kruje Local Employment Office

7.1.3 Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth

17. Mrs. Genta Qosja, Director of Employment Policy in the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth
18. Ms. Silva Radovani General Director of Employment Policy and Vocational Training
19. Ms. Jonida Rika IT Advisor to the Minister

7.1.4 National and International Experts (Experts in the delivery of the project)²⁸

- 20. Anja Müller-Kästner – International Procurement Expert engaged by Charles Kendall Consulting
- 21. Eva Granath, SPES Software Support Expert
- 22. Nils Jensen, International Hardware Expert
- 23. Mirela Arqimandriti, Executive Director, Gender Alliance for Development

7.1.5 Non-stakeholder experts

- 24. Mrs. Maria de Gomes, Project Manager, IPA project implemented by ILO
- 25. Mrs. Etleva Vertopi, Project Manager, GIZ project funded by the Government of Germany

7.1.6 Project Steering Committee

- 26. Mr. Ismail Varoshi, representative of Council of Employers Organisation
- 27. Mrs. Anisa Subashi, representative of the Confederation of Trade Unions, Director, Albanian Trade Unions Centre for Education and Research.

7.1.7 Jobseekers

- 28. Zamir Hyseni – Tirana
- 29. Enes Haga – Tirana
- 30. Avni Hasa - Kruje

7.1.8 Employers

- 31. Kelvin Hila – Strabag/Oman Albania, at the NES Office Durres
- 32. Joana Herczegh, Human Resources, responsible for recruiting, Teleperformance (a call centre in Durres employing 800 people, the largest employer in Durres).
- 33. Greta Mecaj, Human Resources, Teleperformance.

7.1.9 Sida/ Embassy Staff

- 34. Rezarta Katuchi, Project Officer responsible for the project at the Embassy of Sweden in Tirana
- 35. Mikael Elofsson, Head of Western Balkans and Turkey Unit at Sida Headquarters
- 36. Sofie Berghald, former responsible programme officer for the project at Sida Headquarters

²⁸ Christer Wallin, SPES Staff Training Expert was not interviewed. He has been ill, and on leave, and is not in a position to be interviewed until late July.

7.2 ANNEX 2 – LIST OF DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

- December 2009. Efficient Employment Service in Albania – Further Development and Implementation of the NES Employment Service System (ESS). Inception Project For The Final Project Phase. Swedish Public Employment Service.
- February 2010. Project Proposal: Efficient Employment Service in Albania Phase II. Further Develop And Implement An Employment Service System (ESS) At The NES. Swedish Public Employment Service.
- 22 February 2011. Project Proposal - Further Development and Implementation an IT Employment Service System (ESS) at the Albanian National Employment Service (NES) in all the 12 Regional and 24 Local Employment Offices -2011-2013. Republic of Albania, Ministry Of Labour, Social Affairs And Equal Opportunities, National Employment Service, General Directorate. Tirana. Annexes:
 - Budget
 - Work plan
 - LFA
 - Standard Terms of Reference
 - Instructions for financial reporting.
- Specific Agreement Between Sweden And Albania - Sida Contribution No: 53030048
- February 2012. First Progress Report.
- October 2012. Second Progress Report.
- April 2013. Third Progress Report.
- October 2013. Amendment to the Specific Agreement.
- March 2014. Final Report.
- Various items of correspondence between the Embassy of Sweden in Tirana and the NES regarding the Specific Agreement, Reports, etc.
- Various mission reports from experts engaged on the project

7.3 ANNEX 3 – EVALUATION TERMS OF REFERENCE

7.3.1 Background

Sweden has cooperated since 2004 with National Employment Service, hereafter named as NES, through a cooperation between NES and Swedish Public Employment Agency (SPES) in a project titled: “Efficient Employment Service in Albania”. One of the project components focused on the development of an IT system called the Employment Service System (ESS) which was implemented at the pilot offices in Tirana and Korça and at the Head Office for the National Employment Service in Tirana. The up-grading and scaling up of the ESS was identified as a need by National Employment Service and the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. In early 2009, this three years project was evaluated by an independent evaluator²⁹.

Following the request from the Albanian side and the recommendations from the evaluation, Sida commissioned four assignments for the preparation of a continued support to NES which basically provided recommendations on different matters such as the feasibility of the technical aspects of the project, the financing modality and the capacity of NES to take over the ownership of the project implementation. The project proposal focused on four components: 1) Upgrade of software and procurement of software, 2) Procurement of hardware and installation, 3) Capacity building of NES staff and 4) Communication and information on the new IT system.

In June 2011, Sweden signed the agreement for the implementation of the project: “Support to Further Development and Implementation of an IT Employment Service System (ESS) at the Albanian National Employment Service, 2011-2013”. The agreement stipulated the direct financing to NES for the implementation of the project. Albania opened a specific bank account for this purpose. According to the agreement, the procurements follow the Albanian procurement law and procedures with some exceptions³⁰. Sweden agreed to procure the international experts. This financing modality (direct-financing) and the role that national partner plays (in having full responsibility for the implementation, monitoring, coordination and reporting) is

²⁹ GRM International AB, mission March 2009.

³⁰ Information on this in the reference documents to this ToR.

one of only two examples³¹ of the Swedish support in Albania since the start of development cooperation assistance in 1998. The project activity date ended in 15 January 2014 (following amendments of the original agreement). The agreement is valid until October 2014 and final reporting is due on end of February 2014.

To this date, the IT Employment Service System (NES has procured the software and hardware) has been installed at all 12 regional Employment Offices and 24 local offices³². Training of all staff (including management, super users and users) on the use of software has been conducted in cooperation with SPES within August 2013 after the finalization of software and hardware installation. Following the national elections and the new government coming into power, the NES HQ management was changed and also management and staff at local level. A new Strategy for Employment and Skills 2014-2020 is currently being drafted and there are indications from the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth that short and long term measures will be taken to reform the services provided by NES.

A separate assignment will be commissioned by the Embassy shortly that will specifically aim to drawing conclusions from the experience of cooperation with governmental institutions in a direct financing modality that could inform other interventions, combining also with findings from the other example of cooperation in the direct-financing modality with INSTAT on Statistics Project.

7.3.2 Evaluation Purpose and Objective

The Evaluation has a dual purpose. The evaluation will assess the results in order to account for the resources invested by Sweden in this cooperation and provide recommendations particularly on the sustainability of the project results. The evaluation is moreover to contribute to the learning on this cooperation experience with National Employment Services.

The primary intended users of the evaluation are 1) Embassy and Sida 2) National Employment Agency and Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth 3) other donors and international organisations involved in the area of employment (mainly for the second purpose of the assignment).

³¹ Direct support to Statistics Albania , INSTAT 2010-2013: Census of Non-Agricultural Economic Enterprises and Census of Agricultural Holdings

³² In January 2014, this network included also a new Service Model Employment Office for Tirana (following a request by NES to support the opening of this office).

7.3.3 Scope and Delimitations

The evaluation is to examine and draw conclusions about the Swedish Cooperation with National Employment Service for the project “Support to Further Development and Implementation of an IT Employment Service System (ESS) at the Albanian National Employment Service (NES), 2011-2013. The previous cooperation with NES³³ will be included in this evaluation as a comparison for assessing the efficiency.

7.3.4 Evaluation Questions and Criteria

Out of five OECD/DAC evaluation criteria, the evaluation shall in particular assess: effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. Effectiveness shall be assessed primarily with regard to objectives on an outcome level (focusing on medium-term). Although the scope of the evaluation is not assessing impact, it is critical that the positive and negative as well as intended and unintended effects on an outcome level are assessed. Efficiency shall be assessed primarily with regard to the utility and value to the users (primarily NES). Sustainability is to be assessed as the longevity of development results after the cessation of the intervention. The evaluation criteria shall be clearly operationalized in order to constitute useful tools for assessment.

The following questions should be answered in the evaluation:

Effectiveness:

1. Assess whether the intervention financed by Sweden has reached its objectives. Was the intervention successful in terms of development results, what are the general factors for success or failures?
2. Has the intervention considered particularly discriminated social groups in the design of the programme and the implementation of the activities? How is gender equality included in the intervention?
3. Is there any spin-off or side effects deriving from this intervention?

Efficiency:

1. Assess from the perspective of NES the perceived value of invested time compared to the perceived benefits.
2. What measures have been taken during planning and implementation to ensure that the resources are efficiently used?

³³ Efficient Employment Service in Albania, June 2004 - December 2008, implemented by Swedish Public Employment Service

3. What measures have been taken that the IT system developed is fully operational after the end of the project activities?

Sustainability

1. What are the current prospects for the sustainability of the results of this project in light of assessing the current situation with regards to the functioning and the use of the IT system?
2. Assess the general requirements for the sustainability of this project with a special focus on ownership
3. Does the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth (and National Employment Service) have the commitment and the financial and human resources capacity to maintain the benefits from this project?

Implementation of the project

1. Assess to the extent that is possible strengths and weaknesses in NES leadership and governance related to the management of this project.
2. How the internal communication (between different directorates at NES HQ and NES HQ and Regional and local employment offices) has functioned?
3. How NES has coordinated the work under different components and experts involved in this project?
4. How NES has shared information and gathered input from relevant stakeholders in the process of planning, implementation and post-implementation of project activities?
5. How the communication between NES and the Embassy has worked?

7.3.5 Conclusions, Recommendation and Lessons Learned

The report should contain a session on conclusions, lessons learnt and recommendations.

- The conclusions in the evaluation should be based on analysis and exemplified with evidence based data.
- Lessons learnt should provide insights relevant not only to the Embassy and NES, but also other donors and international organisations working in this area.
- Recommendations should be addressed primarily to the Embassy and NES presented in order of priority. Each recommendation should be structured so that there is an observation, followed by analysis, followed by the recommendation.

7.3.6 Approach and Methodology

The suggested approach for this evaluation is the participatory approach but the Consultant is expected to suggest other approaches that could be combined with the participatory approach and could be more suitable for this assignment.

The Evaluation team is expected but not limited to meet with NES staff at HQ and local level, the Embassy in Tirana, Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, members of the Steering Committee for the Project, other donors and international organisations working in the area of employment, Albanian Agency for Information Society, etc. Suggestions of names and contacts will be provided at a later stage by the Embassy and NES.

The primary data for these meetings can be collected through interviews or focus group discussions. The Consultant is expected to elaborate further the methodology in the proposal to the Embassy.

The evaluation team is expected to contact also via email, telephone or Skype the Swedish Employment Agency experts, the hardware and procurement experts (contracted by Sida) involved in this project and Sida officers and managers involved in this project.

The evaluation team will make use of secondary and primary data which will be analysed using preferably the Results Assessment Framework of the project. Primary data may be collected using empirical methods through interviews and focus groups. The field-study will be an important part of this assignment.

7.3.7 Time Schedule

The assignment will be carried out during week 9 and week 15 and will take up to 22 person days out of which at least 12 person days to be used for the field work and divided between the Swedish and the local expert. The desk review, the field visit and the draft report is expected to be finalised within March 2014. The team is expected to include two persons, one Swedish and one local. The team of evaluators shall be responsible for all logistics during the assignment.

7.3.8 Reporting and Communication

The Consultant shall prepare a draft report and submit it to the Embassy in electronic form by, 24 March 2014. The draft report should be shared also with NES. The Embassy comments will be sent to the Evaluators by 29 March 2014. A final version of the report shall be submitted to the Embassy, electronically and in two hardcopies by 7 April 2014.

The report shall be written in English.

Approval of the Final Report will be based on its adherence to the OECD/DAC Evaluation Quality Standards.

Contact person at the Embassy in Tirana will be Lisa Fredriksson, at li-sa.fredriksson@gov.se and Rezarta Katuci at rezarta.katuci@gov.se.

7.3.9 Resources

The estimation from the Embassy on the budget needed (number of working days, fees for the Swedish and local evaluator, etc.) for this assignment is not more than 420.000 SEK. The Consultant is advised to note that the fees for the local consultants in Albania vary from 150-250 EUR.

7.3.10 Evaluation Team Qualification

The assignment is expected to be carried out by two persons. The Swedish consultant should fulfil the required qualifications for Category I (according to Appendix D in the Framework Agreement) and be an experienced evaluator. The team in combination should have the needed experience and knowledge to perform the tasks foreseen in this assignment including:

- Experience from the region/country
- Experience of evaluating projects/programmes in the area of employment and ICT.
- Experience of project management and implementation analysis

The evaluators must be independent of the evaluated project and have no stake in the outcome of the evaluation.

The Consultant shall specify in the proposal to the Embassy how the quality assurance will be handled by the Consultant.

7.3.11 References

- 1) Project Documents
- 2) Agreement and latest amendments
- 3) Draft Final Report of the Project by NES
- 4) Evaluation Report of Results of Sweden's Development Cooperation Strategy with Albania:

<http://sidapublications.citat.se/interface/stream/mabstream.asp?filetype=1&orderlistmainid=3470&printfileid=3470&filex=4961056800020>

Other reports and documentation needed for the evaluators to carry out their work will be submitted to the team upon agreeing on the start date of the assignment.

7.4 ANNEX 4 – INCEPTION REPORT

Executive Summary

This report summarises the evaluation team's understanding of the scope of the evaluation, and the Terms of Reference, and addresses both an understanding of the Evaluation Questions and how these questions will be assessed, and reported on. Finally, the report details the evaluation team's approach and methodology for the evaluation, including initial thinking on the time frame for each component of the assignment.

7.4.1 Assessment of scope of the evaluation

Purpose of the evaluation

The evaluation will contribute to learning, particularly in relation to this cooperation experience with the National Employment Service. In this context the evaluation has a dual purpose:

- To assess Project results in order to account for the resources invested by Sweden in this cooperation.
- To provide recommendations, particularly on sustainability of Project results.

Scope of the evaluation

General

The project had five intended results:

- An amended version of the Software for NES Employment Service System (ESS) is developed, procured, installed and is functional in all NES organisation (12 regional employment offices and 24 local employment offices) by September 2012.
- Hardware is procured, installed and is functional in all NES organisation (12 regional employment offices and 24 local employment offices) by December 2011.
- Increased capacity building of NES staff to understand, use, keep running and benefit from the IT system.
- NES organization has adopted organization, working methods, routines, procedures and staff management in line with modernization and information of the employment system.
- Increased accessibility of men and women jobseekers and businesses to the on-line employment service.

Each of these intended results has a set of related activities and a set of objectively verifiable indicators. Regular, on-going reporting has been undertaken throughout the life of the Project. These reports will be analysed, in the context of the Project design

and intended results, and further analysis undertaken with Project stakeholders. These processes will assist the Evaluation Team to *both*:

- ‘Assess these Project results in order to account for the resources invested by Sweden with this cooperation. This will be a qualitative assessment – the evaluation will not directly look at procurement or financial management of the Project.
- Contribute to learning with regards this cooperation experience with National Employment Services.’

The evaluation will examine and draw conclusions about *the Project Support to Further Development and Implementation of an IT Employment Service System (ESS) at the Albanian National Employment Service (NES), 2011-2013* (hereinafter Project) and will, among other tasks, compare the Project to earlier NES cooperation in assessing project efficiency.

Intended Users of the Evaluation

The primary intended users of the evaluation are:

- 1) The Embassy and Sida. The Embassy anticipates that the evaluation will provide
 - a. Conclusions on what has worked and what has not worked in the Project.
 - b. A judgement of whether or not the resources invested were justified by the actual result.
 - c. Some indications of approach to the NES on the follow-up of issues related to the Project.
 - d. Discussion of the lessons that can be drawn from this type of direct support to a governmental partner.
- 2) NES. The Embassy anticipates that the evaluation will provide recommendations addressed to the NES and the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth with a specific focus on the sustainability of the system. Other, related recommendations are also anticipated.
- 3) Other donors and international organisations. The Embassy anticipates that the evaluation will be of particular use to other donors and international organisations as a ‘case study’ in the direct financing modality to a government institution. A particular focus of this aspect of the evaluation will be the coordination and communication structures and practice of the NES towards stakeholders and donors. This is an area where there are perceptions of a need for a growth in skill and practice, and areas where the Project’s activities and outputs address key components of the aid effectiveness agenda. Further, given the importance of the strengthening of confidence in government institutions as IPA funding increases, demonstrated growth in capacity within the NES is critical.
- 4) The evaluation may be of value to the Swedish Employment Service itself, and its approach to and delivery of outcomes in Albania and elsewhere. The

evaluation will be undertaken with this in mind, although the evaluation is not focused here, and uptake will be a matter for the Swedish Employment Service.

Limitations to the Evaluation

The analysis will draw heavily on qualitative approaches – interviews with project and related personnel and external stakeholders and desk studies of reports and reviews. This will enable us to make judgements on the contribution, and to address the evaluation questions. Findings will be indicative of the views expressed by stakeholders and informed experts and the claims made in available documentation.

With regards to Result 5, some feedback from clients (job seekers and businesses) is required to understand the perception these clients have of changes in routines, work practices etc. and what impact on the service provided by the NES has happened as a result of these changes. Such feedback is necessary to fully understand any changes in accessibility to the on-line system. It is not clear at this point that such feedback is possible – the Project did not directly deal with these ‘beneficiaries’, and organising interviews or a focus group session with an informed group may not be possible.

Recommendations Regarding the Scope of the Evaluation

The Evaluation will be able to look at output objectives in detail. Analysis of outcome objectives will be undertaken, but will provide somewhat less strong conclusions given the timeframe of the Project, and the status of the implementation of the changes and the implementation of new routines and methods. Specifically, the Evaluation will be able to assess the extent and effectiveness of the implementation of the hardware and software, and to ascertain/ confirm its operation across the NES. Further, feedback and analysis on what the change in hardware and software has meant to NES effectiveness will also be addressed. Implementation of the training programme will also be assessed. However, the extent and effectiveness of uptake of the training programme will not be able to be assessed with complete confidence. Indicators of change in practice, and in the implementation of the new routines and methods of service delivery for the clients (job seekers and employers) will be assessed, but the analysis is likely to only indicate outcomes in the medium and longer term. In this context, some feedback will be sought on each of the following areas, each of which will provide an indication of the level and extent of the uptake of change within the NES:

- Increase in transparency of the labour market services offered at the national level.
- Improvement in the quality and quantity of information on job seekers and employers at the national level.
- Improvement in the organisation of work for employment officers.
- Reduction in the time needed for administrative routines.
- Increased time for contacts with employers.
- Increased measures for assisting jobseekers.

- Improve the image and visibility of the NES through website information on job vacancies.

7.4.2 Relevance and evaluability of the evaluation questions

Per the Terms of Reference, the evaluation will focus on the OECD/ DAC criteria effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. The Terms of Reference place a specific emphasis will be placed on the Project's implementation processes of the Project, and provided an indication of certain, specific questions to address in this area, within either the effectiveness or efficiency aspects of the Evaluation. These specific questions can be found within one or the other of these sections below, and will be address within the body of the Evaluation analysis/ narrative.

The Evaluation will address, in its conclusions and recommendations, the following specific areas:

- An analysis of what worked and what did not work in the Project. Did the Project reach its objectives? Was it effective in terms of development results? The approach to effectiveness is described more fully at 3.1.1 below.
- A subjective judgement, founded on the perceptions and analysis of the NES and relevant Swedish experts, of whether or not the time, energy and resources invested were justified by the Project's results, the measures taken to ensure efficient use of resources and measures taken to ensure the IT system was fully operational by completion of the Project. The approach to efficiency is described more fully at 3.1.2 below.
- Prospects for sustainability, particularly with regards to use of the IT system and 'ownership', and levels of human and financial resources committed to the IT system long term. The approach to sustainability is described more fully at 3.1.3 below.
- Some indications of how best to approach the NES with regards follow-up of issues related to the Project.
- Recommendations, addressed to the NES and the Ministry, with a specific focus on the sustainability of the system. Other, related recommendations are also anticipated.
- Discussion of the lessons that can be drawn from this type of direct support to a governmental partner. The Embassy anticipates that the evaluation will be of particular use to other donors and international organisations as a 'case study' in the direct financing modality to a government institution. A particular focus of this aspect of the evaluation will be coordination and communication structures and practice within the NES, towards stakeholders and donors, which is an area where there are perceptions of a need for a growth in skill and practice.

Evaluation Questions

Effectiveness

Per the Terms of Reference, the Evaluation will focus primarily on the ‘achievement of objectives at the outcome level (focusing on the medium-term)’.

- Has the Project reached its objectives? Specifically, the Evaluation will assess the effectiveness of the Project in
 - Development, procurement and delivery of the NES ESS software in the 12 regional and 24 local employment offices.
 - Procurement, and effective installation of related hardware in these offices.
 - Improvements in the capacity of NES staff to use and benefit from the new hardware and software.
 - Improvements in organisation, working methods, routines, procedures and staff management across the NES.
 - Improvements in accessibility of the on-line employment service to men and women job seekers and businesses.
- Has the Project been successful in terms of its intended development results? The Evaluation will focus here more on the capacity and organisation objectives, and on improvements to access from clients to the NES system. These are the more important, longer-term outcomes that will make use of the hardware and software procured by the Project.
 - Has there been an improvement in the quality and quantity of information on job seekers and employers available at the national level. How is this known – does the NES now have systems in place to assess and monitor these areas? Is information on clients a demonstrable priority for NES offices?
 - What specific changes have been implemented in the organisation of work routines, work methods and procedures for employment officers in NES offices. What is the assessment of NES employment officers on changes in systems and procedures as a result of the Project? Specifically, has there been
 - A reduction in the time needed for administrative routines.
 - An increase in time for contacts with employers.
 - An increase in measures for assisting jobseekers.
 - Has a particular approach been used to target and reach discriminated social groups – particularly, were discriminated social groups specifically considered in design? In implementation?
 - Was there a specific gender focus? If so, what did it encompass?
 - Are these organisational changes visible in the 12 regional and 24 local employment offices?
 - Are NES staff aware of and supportive of the changes?

- Are the changes improving service delivery?
 - Is there a clear understanding of how the implemented changes are improving service delivery to clients (job seekers and businesses)?
- Are there clear indicators of an improved image and visibility of the NES through website information on job vacancies? What are these indicators? Does the NES have a system in place for measuring client interactions with the website on job vacancies?
- Are there apparent improvements in the NES' coordination and communication structures and practice? Is this true at all levels of the NES?
 - Internal communication and coordination? How is this visible?
 - Communication with clients? How is this visible?
 - Communication and coordination with other stakeholders and donors? How is this visible?
- What have been the key factors of success or failure?
 - Did Project implementation (by the NES, as well as experts) focus on the hardware and software or on the improvements in capacity, organisation, working methods, etc.? What evidence is there of this focus?
 - Was the capacity-building programme focused on outputs and outcomes, or on the inputs of training delivery? Was capacity built (did capacity grow)? How was this growth assessed?
 - What strengths and weaknesses in NES leadership and governance impacted on the management of this project? What are the implications for future sustainability?
 - Was there a clear sense across the NES (national, regional and local offices) of the intent of the Project? Did the NES nationally, regionally and locally see the value of, and were they committed to, the change being generated by the Project? What NES governance factors contributed to this, whether negative or positive?
 - What strengths and weaknesses have been demonstrated in the internal communications between different directorates at NES HQ and between NES HQ and Regional and local employment offices? What are the implications for future functioning and sustainability?
 - Was the use of the Swedish Employment Agency specifically useful in the delivery of the Project? Could the Project have been delivered through another modality, such as a consultancy firm? Are there specific added values to the use of a state agency in processes related to EU accession?

- Have there been any negative and/or positive side-effects from the Project?

Efficiency

Per the Terms of Reference, the Evaluation will focus primarily on ‘utility and value to users’ (primarily NES, but also the Embassy and other organisations, as described above). The Evaluation will make use of an earlier Sida cooperation with NES³⁴ in its analysis of Project efficiency.

- Does the NES perceive the time, energy and resources which have been invested in the Project have provided a relative level of outputs/ outcomes/ benefits, for the NES and for Albania more generally?
- Does NES management perceive that the modality of working with the Swedish Employment Agency was an efficient approach?
- Is it the perception of the Swedish experts engaged to work on the Project, that the time, energy and resources invested in the Project provided a level of outputs/ outcomes/ benefits, for the NES and for Albania more generally?
- Specific implementation questions from the ToR:
 - How effective has the NES been in the coordination of the work of the different components and experts involved in the Project?
 - How effective has the NES been in sharing information, and in gathering input from relevant stakeholders in the process of planning, implementation and post-implementation of project activities?
 - How effectively has communication between NES and the Embassy worked?
- What specific strategies and detailed measures were used in Project planning and implementation to ensure efficient use of resources? In the view of the Project personnel and the NES, were these strategies and measures effective?
- Is the hardware and software fully operational?

Sustainability

Per the Terms of Reference, the Evaluation will assess the likely ‘longevity of development results after the completion of the Project’.

- What are the current prospects for sustainability of the Project’s results?
 - Specific reference will be given to this question in relation to the questioning above, regarding Efficiency, in terms of strategies and measures of sustainability, and to determine the functioning and use of the developed IT system.

³⁴ Efficient Employment Service in Albania, June 2004 - December 2008

- What strategies and measures have been developed and implemented to ensure that the Project's developed IT system is fully operational into the future?
- With regards the range of questions addressed at Effectiveness, what is the likelihood that the changes in practice, routine and procedure will a) continue to add value to the provision of services to clients and b) to be maintained and grow as a pattern of work practice across the NES?
 - Do the regional and local employment offices perceive the benefit of the hardware and software to their work quantity and quality?
 - Do the regional and local employment offices perceive the benefit of the changed work practices? Do they have 'ownership' of the changes?
 - Are the changes likely to be imbedded in NES practice going forward?
 - What support or assistance is required to ensure sustainability of the changes?
- In this context, do the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth and the NES have the commitment, and the financial and human resources, necessary to maintain the benefits of the Project?

7.4.3 Proposed approach and methodology

Approach

The evaluation will have four phases/ stages.

Inception

The inception phase has focused on elaboration on the scope and feasibility of the evaluation, methodology, including a detailed description of the methodological choices, design of the causal analysis, data collection methods and instruments and evaluation work plan. The Inception Report includes an analysis of the evaluation questions. The Inception Report (this document) includes the evaluation time plan and division of labour.

Desk Study

The evaluation team will make use of secondary and primary data. As per the Terms of Reference, the assessment of secondary data will be performed through studies and analysis of *existing reports, evaluations, and other relevant documents*.

Field Work

Primary data will be collected using empirical methods through *interviews and focus groups with relevant stakeholders and informed experts* who will include implement-

ing partners (such as government institutions and CSOs), beneficiaries and other donors. Sida and the Embassy will inform relevant stakeholders about the forthcoming evaluation, and will provide the evaluation team with project and other stakeholder contact details. Focus group and interview participation targets will be determined and the team will make arrangements at the earliest possible date.

Included in the group of key stakeholders with whom interviews will be held are:

- Relevant, knowledgeable Sida and/ or Embassy staff (Sida officers and managers involved in the Project).
- NES staff at HQ.
- NES staff in regional and specific local employment offices.
- The Swedish Employment Agency experts, the hardware and procurement experts (contracted by Sida) involved in the Project and with a focus on earlier Projects³⁵.
- The Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth.
- Members of the Steering Committee for the Project.
- The Albanian Agency for Information Society.
- Donors and international organisations whose work is in linked or related fields to employment.

Clearly, a focus will be on NES staff, at HQ, but critically also in local offices. A key determination during preparations for the field work is the exact composition of these interviews.

As indicated above, in Limitations, it would be of value to analysis if appropriate, and appropriately knowledgeable/ informed NES clients (job seekers and businesses) could be interviewed, or could participate in a focus group meeting. It is not clear that this is possible, but it would assist analysis of the results that specifically look at service provision (results 4 and 5), as well as giving some insight into mid-term outcome objectives.

Analysis and Reporting

The evaluation's analytical results will be provided in a report. The report will draw conclusions based on analysis using evidence coming specifically from the primary and secondary sources of the evaluation, provide lessons learned – insights from the development assistance that will be of relevance to Sida, the Embassy, partners and other organisations working in the field. The report will make recommendations (addressed mainly to the Embassy and the NES) and presented in order of priority. The

³⁵ Efficient Employment Service in Albania, June 2004 - December 2008

recommendations will be structured so there is a clear link between an observation from the desk study or field work, analysis and findings and the recommendation.

Evaluation Timeframe

The evaluation will be carried out according to the following timeframe.

Inception Period

The inception period will begin on March 24 and, as agreed, the Inception Report will be submitted by April 2.

Desk Study

The evaluation team will begin work on the desk review of documentation, and detailed preparations of field material starting from 24 March. This phase will continue through 9 May. Detailed analysis of documentation will take place throughout this period, as will development and finalisation of the Evaluation Team's 'field instruments' (interview sheets and focus group conversation formats). These processes will be completed by 5 May.

Field arrangements (appointments and arrangements for focus group meetings, as appropriate) will be completed, in principle, by 5 May, although some finalisation of arrangements will be required during the actual period of field work.

Field Work

Initial meetings with Sida and the Embassy will take place on 12 May.

Interviews (and possible focus group meetings) with key stakeholders in Albania will take place from 12-20 May. Appropriate Sida/ Embassy staff will also be interviewed during this period.

A second meeting with Sida/ Embassy staff is proposed for the afternoon of 20 May. This meeting will be used by the team to update on the field work and to provide initial comments on analysis/ findings.

Further interviews will be undertaken, via Skype, throughout the period from 5 May through 30 May and the submission of the Draft Evaluation Report. While this will specifically focus on experts in Sweden, it will not be limited in this regard. It may be of value to the field enquiry to have some inputs from Swedish experts prior to interviews with NES staff, from the perspective of refining specific of the questioning that will take place with NES personnel.

Reporting

Analysis and reporting will take place from 21 May through 30 May. The Draft Evaluation Report will be submitted on 30 May.

The Embassy/ Sida will comment on the Draft Evaluation Report by 13 June.

The Final Evaluation Report will be submitted by 20 June.

Evaluation Team and Division of Labour

The assignment will be carried out by the following team.

Jim Newkirk, Team Leader. Jim is responsible for developing the methodology, carrying out the field work, and drafting the evaluation report.

Sabina Ymeri, Evaluator. Sabina is the national evaluator and will contribute in data collection, analysis and reporting. Sabina will also assist with logistics, particularly communication with key informants (both project stakeholders and informed experts) in relation to the focus group workshops and key informant interviews.

7.4.4 Other issues and recommendations**Evaluation Standards**

The evaluation and the reporting will follow DAC's evaluation quality standards. Per these DAC standards (see:

<http://www.oecd.org/development/evaluationofdevelopmentprogrammes/dcdndep/36596604.pdf>) the overarching considerations include:

- **Development evaluation** - Development evaluation is the systematic and objective assessment of an on-going or completed development intervention, its design, implementation and results. In the development context, evaluation refers to the process of determining the worth or significance of a development intervention. When carrying out a development evaluation the following overarching considerations are taken into account throughout the process.
- **Free and open evaluation process** - The evaluation process is transparent and independent from programme management and policy-making, to enhance credibility.
- **Evaluation ethics** - Evaluation abides by relevant professional and ethical guidelines and codes of conduct for individual evaluators. Evaluation is undertaken with integrity and honesty. Commissioners, evaluation managers and evaluators respect human rights and differences in culture, customs, religious beliefs and practices of all stakeholders. Evaluators are mindful of gender roles, ethnicity, ability, age, sexual orientation, language and other differences when designing and carrying out the evaluation.
- **Partnership approach** - In order to increase ownership of development and build mutual accountability for results, a partnership approach to development evaluation is systematically considered early in the process. The concept of partnership connotes an inclusive process, involving different stakeholders such as government, parliament, civil society, intended beneficiaries and international partners.
- **Co-ordination and alignment** – To help improve co-ordination of development evaluation and strengthen country systems, the evaluation process takes into account national and local evaluation plans, activities and policies.

- **Capacity development** - Positive effects of the evaluation process on the evaluation capacity of development partners are maximised. An evaluation may, for instance, support capacity development by improving evaluation knowledge and skills, strengthening evaluation management, stimulating demand for and use of evaluation findings, and supporting an environment of accountability and learning.
- **Quality control** - Quality control is exercised throughout the evaluation process. Depending on the evaluation's scope and complexity, quality control is carried out through an internal and/or external mechanism, for example peer review, advisory panel, or reference group.

Quality Assurance

Indevelop strives to provide high quality in all of its evaluations and we will carry out systematic quality control to meet both Sida and OECD/DAC requirements. The evaluation will have quality control as an integrated part of the assignment management procedure, regardless of the different scales of the activities. Our commitment to delivering high quality services requires effective quality assurance mechanisms. For this we have developed and apply a quality assurance system, which is compliant with ISO 9001:2000, and managed by Indevelop's Project Manager.

We will request feedback on the evaluation through a performance assessment form, both on the process, the team, deliverables (reports) and other outputs. The feedback will ensure the continuous improvement of the services.

Ms. **Sarah Gharbi** is the appointed **Project Manager** (category 2) at Indevelop's office in Stockholm who is responsible for managing the assignment's implementation. She will ensure coordination that leads to the kind of evaluation process that Sida has committed itself to in the evaluation guidelines which include learning and utility (usefulness). She will specifically have contact and liaison with Sida, managing the financial and contractual aspects of the assignment, providing monitoring and coordination of the quality assurance process during implementation, back stopping and support to the team and to facilitate support as needed.

Dr. **Ian Christoplos** is the **Project Director** (category 1) responsible for quality assurance on all assignments implemented under the framework agreement. He will provide technical backstopping and quality assurance on methodology and the draft and final reports to ensure that the reports are in line with Sida's requirements. He will ensure that the evaluation is in line with Sida's Evaluation Guidelines and meet the OECD/DAC quality standards for evaluation. His role is in ensuring that evaluators without extensive experience with Sida norms and guided and briefed accordingly.



Evaluation of the Project “Support to Further Development and Implementation of an IT Employment Service System (ESS) at the Albanian National Employment Service (NES), 2011-2013”

The report assesses the financial support provided to the National Employment Service (NES) in Albania, providing a more efficient, IT-based system that increases efficiency, transparency and accessibility in public employment services. The Employment Service System (hardware and software), was developed, procured and installed across the whole of the NES. Further, building of the capacity of all NES staff, in all regional and local offices, in the use of the system was undertaken. The transfer to the new system, from the old, paper-based system, is progressing and is near completion, and the transparent servicing of key NES clients (jobseekers and employers) is improved, and is continuing to develop. The direct funding approach was demonstrated to be an effective modality for provision of assistance to government agencies.