



Sustaining and Advancing Local Governance Reform

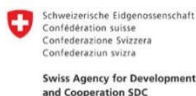
FINAL NARRATIVE PROGRESS REPORT

Jul 2021 – June 2024

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I. Executive Summary

A. STAR3 project – scope, adaptation, flexibility

Sustaining and Advancing Local Governance Reform (STAR3) project is the third phase of a joint initiative of international partners to support decentralization and local government reforms from the advent of the administrative and territorial reform in 2014-15 to the consolidation of the newly organized local government in Albania. The project provided expert support to decentralization and local government reforms on capacity building for policy making, implementation, and consolidation of various aspects of municipal affairs related to local democracy, integrity, service delivery, and digital transformation.

STAR3 is made possible thanks to the joint contributions of the European Union, the Governments of Sweden and Switzerland, USAID, UNDP Albania, and the Government of Albania.

A STAR3 project framework document, accompanied by an indicative budget, was officially co-signed by the Albanian Ministry of Interior and UNDP Albania in August 2020. UNDP provided the initial funding, followed by Sweden and Switzerland, which contributed half of their pledged funds respectively in Nov and Dec 2020, preconditioning the full amounts on the Government of Albania payment of its share to the project budget.

By June 2021, in consultation with the partners and the Government, initial proposed project interventions were prioritized and resized to match the available funding and pledges. This revision was reflected in Description of the Action of the Contribution Agreement between EU and UNDP in Albania, concluded in June 2021. As per the above Contribution Agreement scope and funds eligibility, the present Report provides a detailed account of the project implementation for the period 1 July 2021 – 30 June 2024.

The Government of Albania contribution was disbursed in two tranches, respectively in Nov 2021 and July 2022, followed by the remaining Swiss and Swedish contributions. USAID joined in June 2022 as a new partner.

The actual implementation of field activities started as soon as the project received the first EU contribution in June 2021. By June 2021, UNDP had mobilized human resources, formulated and consulted some of the intervention approaches, and undertaken some preliminary field assessments.

Shortly thereafter, further external developments had to be incorporated into the project implementation.

In early March 2022, the project's main counterpart and beneficiary, the Ministry of Interior, requested that project partners consider reorienting some project activities toward assistance in formulating the new NCSDLG 2023 - 2030.

The next month, April 2022, following the Government decision on the closure of central public service delivery offices and the exclusive shift to online services modality effective from 1 May 2022, the Ministry of Interior requested the project to suspend the ongoing procurement process for the OSSIS rollout to Administrative Units and asked the project to be prepared for consultations on how to address the digital transformation of service provision at the local level.

Subsequently, a formal government request on 27 June 2022 articulated the new government vision and requested assistance from the project to undertake a set of e-readiness assessments at the local level, replacing the planned support for OSS expansion to administrative units.

By December 2022 the project was revised in scope and duration to reflect the above changes and a first no-cost extension until 31 December 2023, was approved by the Government of Albania.

During 2023, along with the implementation of the originally planned activities, the project supported the drafting of the new Decentralization and Local Government Strategy (officially approved in April 2023) and the design and implementation of the fieldwork of the digital readiness assessment exercise across the 61 municipalities of the country.

In September 2023, the government reorganization led to the creation of a new ministerial position, the Minister of State for Local Governance, who became the project's new institutional counterpart.

The new government leadership was swift in reviewing and reconfirming the relevance of the project activities and advised their full pursuance with particular emphasis on the activities related to integrity planning knowledge transfer, the digital readiness assessment, the capacity building for monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the NCSDLG as well as the addition of a pilot exercise on reengineering selected municipal services in the Municipality of Tirana.

In order to do so, and based on the project progress, UNDP requested and was granted a last no-cost extension until the end of June 2024.

The unchanged STAR3 project's Overall Objective is: to strengthen local government effectiveness and efficiency through enhancing the supporting framework, consolidating systems, standards, and organizational capacities in place, expanding, and sustaining service delivery innovation and best practices, and institutionalizing local government accountability to women and men for enhanced participatory governance.

In line with the project's Overall Objective, the project contributed to the following three outcomes:

1. Local government participatory governance practices are in place and functional and encourage civic engagement.
2. Municipal systems and standards are enhanced, expanded, and consolidated for improved service delivery and overall municipal performance.
3. Government institutions responsible for decentralization and local government are capacitated to effectively drive policy development, coordination, and monitoring.

The current and final version of the STAR3 action document lasted 36 months, from 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2024, and had a cumulative budget of **4,251,285 USD**.

B. STAR3 project – key results vs objectives

Despite several implementation challenges, such as incremental funding, several government policy shifts, and the adoption of new elements, the project successfully supported the development of public consultation instruments, expanded municipal integrity planning, and expanded and preserved the municipal OSS system within the possible limits. Additionally, the action conducted for the first time a municipal e-readiness assessment supported the drafting of the new National Cross-Cutting Strategy for Decentralization and Local Government (NCSDLG) 2023-2030 and developed a coherent instrument for Strategy monitoring.

In more detail and as per the specific results, the project has achieved the following:

Result 1.1: Concrete methodology for public consultation and participation adopted and implemented in up to seven municipalities and endorsed as a municipal standard.

STAR3 action has made significant progress in implementing participatory governance practices at the local government level. The scope of this particular assistance was to coach and support seven municipalities (executive branch) in the full cycle of public consultation and participation in line with Law 146/2014, "On Notification and Public Consultation."

Concretely, the action supported the development of annual public consultation plans in **seven** municipalities of Shkoder, Lezhe, Berat, Patos, Roskovec, Kolonje, and Permet, and facilitated **fourteen real-life public consultations**. **Four regional workshops** in Berat, Gjirokaster, Korce, and Shkoder were organized with the participation of the other municipalities to disseminate best practices. Additionally, an **electronic platform** for municipal public consultations was developed with no additional costs to the project and used by the **seven** municipalities plus by **thirteen** other voluntary municipalities of Devoll, Dibër, Divjakë, Durrës, Elbasan, Fier, Kukës, Lushnje, Pukë, Shijak, Tropoje, and Vlore.

The electronic platform is still functional. However, the institutionalization of this instrument has not taken place as the government envisages integrating municipal public consultations into the national register (konsultimipublik.al) in the future.

Result 1.2: 1/3 of Albanian municipalities supported to adopt integrity planning as a tool for the management of corruption risks

The action extensively supported the integrity planning processes at the local level as well as the knowledge transfer support to the ASLG, as part of its project objectives.

While the action target was to support 15 municipalities in developing integrity plans, this target has been exceeded as, by the end of June 2024, the project reports **28** municipalities (**23** already completed and approved their integrity plans, and **5** finalized, expecting the approval stage). The last municipalities have been supported as part of the knowledge transfer provided to the ASLG through hands-on and live learning processes in new municipalities.

In addition, an **Integrity Index** was developed through broad consultations and validations and adopted by ASLG for integrity monitoring.

A **municipal guide** on conducting Integrity Risk Assessment and drafting the Integrity Plan is developed and disseminated to all municipalities through four regional workshops in Korçe, Gjirokaster, Shkoder, and Tirana.

In collaboration with and in support of ASLG, a **training plan** for the transfer of knowledge and practice to the Agency as the institution responsible for supporting and supervising the adoption of local integrity plans has been drafted and implemented. The training included hands-on learning and live sessions in new municipalities, enhancing the capacity of local government officials.

However, ensuring sustained commitment from local government officials is crucial for effective integrity planning implementation. Municipalities need to integrate integrity management into their strategic objectives and policies. Complementarily, ASLG requires additional support to promote the further expansion of the integrity plans and adopt effective monitoring instruments.

Result 2.1 The one stop shop system functionality is supported, and digital readiness is assessed in depth at the local level

Under this result, the action was tasked to support three main activities: 1) Sustain the OSS system functionality at the municipal level, later on, 2) the undertaking of a set of e-readiness assessments, and 3) responding to the government request in the project Steering Committee meeting of October 2023 for piloting the re-engineering of selected municipal services in the Municipality of Tirana.

Sustain the OSS system functionality at the municipal level - The OSS-related activity consisted in the consolidation, improvement, and institutionalization of the municipal OSS system and its expansion to about 240 Administrative Units. This activity was implemented partially as it was heavily impacted by the government's decision to shift exclusively to online services from May 2022, which led to the suspension of several OSS-related sub-activities from May 2022 onward.

Despite the suspension of further OSSIS expansion to the Administrative Units, the government recognized the system's utility and advised continuing support for the existing OSS system in municipal central offices for the duration of the STAR3 action.

In response to the government request, the action canceled the tender on OSS expansion (which was at the stage of evaluation of bids in early May 2024) and the OSS public awareness campaign launch. Also, the task for OSSIS upgrade and enhancement did not take place and the system has been kept running in its current state since May 2022.

On the other hand, the action successfully completed the procurement and distribution of IT equipment for OSSIS use before May 2024. Discussions with mayors reconfirmed needs and ensured municipality commitment to cover part of the IT infrastructure costs. As a result of these consultations, the project allocated approximately one-third of its original budget. The agreed quantities of IT equipment were procured and delivered by mid-April 2022.

In consideration of the government request for non-expansion to the Administrative Units, the project did not engage in supporting the installation of IT equipment in the Administrative Units. However, OSSIS records indicate that 12

municipalities attempted to expand the system independently, and the system operated in 33 different administrative units from May 2022 to May 2024. Currently, the system operates in only 7 administrative units across 4 municipalities.

It is worth noting that if the system had been supported and institutionalized, the number of administrative units reached would have been much higher. The changing context did not allow for such expansion. However, the IT infrastructure provided remains with the municipalities, and there were no plans to recollect these items.

Regarding the preservation of the OSSIS functionality, from July 2021 to December 2023, OSSIS warranty and maintenance services, including 2nd and 3rd level support, have been provided to 52 municipalities. A Help Desk was established and functional during this period to respond to municipal calls and provide ad-hoc on-the-job training. Also, regular software updates, upgrades, and security checks were conducted during the period for the central OSS server.

In early 2024, the project has provided each target municipality with a full set of technical documents, guides and source codes for the OSS system and engaged a technical expert to provide troubleshooting and final training to municipal staff. This additional assistance was completed in May 2024.

OSS usage statistics report over **160,000 applications** processed from Nov 2018 to June 2024, with an average of **2,500 applications** per month and a saving of about **1,900 hours** of travel for citizens and businesses serviced at the administrative units alone. The monthly average number of applications has remained steady from year to year, starting with a low figure in the early years, 778/month (2020), 2,887/month (2021), 4,167/month (2022), 3,842/month (2023), and 3,271/month (2024).

Despite the stated government mid-term plans envisioning the development of a new, more robust, and integrated system for municipal service delivery, since late 2023, the project has made efforts to transfer the Central Infrastructure to AKSHI, requesting the latter to secure power and internet for the functioning of the OSS Central Infrastructure. The rationale behind is that the present OSS system may serve as an interim solution until better changes are implemented. However, these efforts have unfortunately not yielded positive results to date.

Without such central support, the functionality of the existing OSS - to date about 30 municipalities continue to use the system – may stop at any time. Municipalities would revert to their old methods of service delivery, leading to significant disruptions in municipal operations, as the project lacks the leverage to enforce further changes or ensure the system's continued use.

E-readiness Assessment - The Government's request for comprehensive municipal digital readiness assessments became the new project task, formally communicated to UNDP and the partners in late June 2022. The Ministry of Interior requested the undertaking of three assessments: 1) an overall assessment of the country's digital ecosystem, 2) an assessment of the digital readiness of municipalities, and 3) an assessment of the public's readiness and acceptance of online services.

The first assessment, the Country's digital ecosystem assessment, which had a scope beyond the local level, was reviewed with AKSHI. However, AKSHI did not find it relevant or necessary, and therefore, this assessment was not conducted.

The municipal and the public e-readiness assessments were conducted in all 61 municipalities in Albania. They aligned with UNDP's Digital Strategy and its Digital Transformation Framework. The exercise was a comprehensive due diligence in each municipality about the preparedness of municipalities and their citizens for digital transformation and the adoption of e-governance services.

The Municipal e-Readiness Assessment was conducted along five pillars - Government, Regulation, Infrastructure, Economy, and People. The assessment involved fieldwork, audit visits, and technical meetings with municipal representatives.

On the other hand, the Public e-Readiness Assessment consisted of physical interviews to assess citizen readiness across seven pillars: cultural norms, Adoption, Digital Literacy Skills, Usage, Access, Protection, and Trust.

The assessment produced **61 reports for each Municipality**, a **National aggregated report**, and a **Roadmap report**, which is the final product released in June 2024.

The Roadmap report was based on the assessment findings and outlines practical actions for local, national, and international stakeholders to engage and support the advancement of digital transformation at the local level.

The wealth of information gathered is expected to be useful for informed decision-making by the relevant government institutions in charge of digital reform, the municipalities themselves, and the development partners for their current and future contributions to the digital transformation domain.

Piloting the re-engineering of selected municipal services - This activity was triggered by a special request by the Minister for Local Government during the last project Steering Committee meeting of October 2023 to pilot the re-engineering of selected municipal services in the Municipality of Tirana. As a follow-up, the project engaged in consultations with Tirana municipality and came to an agreement to review the functionality of the municipality's General Directorate of Information Technology, Communication, Innovation, and Statistics (DITCIS). The objectives included external assistance for 1) enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of data collection, processing, and reporting functions within DITCIS, and 2) possibly creating a model replicable for other municipalities.

The project engaged in a desk review of existing documents, face-to-face meetings with DITCIS staff, and detailed analysis of organizational structure, metadata, and indicators, from April to May 2024. The support concluded with **proposed changes for improved efficiency**, including standards for data management and a minimum set of indicators, along with a guide for replicating improvements in other municipalities.

While the assistance was provided within time limitations, which may have impacted the depth of analysis, it was appreciated by Tirana municipal staff, who have committed to consider and follow these recommendations.

Result 2.2 The feasibility of a local government data platform for municipal IPSIS compliance and performance is assessed

The adoption of IPSIS at the municipal level involved several consultations with the Good Governance Department at the PMO's Office on considering IPSIS as a central monitoring instrument for public administration have been conducted during Sep-Oct 2021 and led to the engagement of an international expert to assess the situation, options, and next steps. Following two missions in the country with intensive consultations with institutional stakeholders at central and local level, the final findings and recommendations suggested that **IPSIS** is an instrument not consolidated at central level and **is premature to plan its expansion at local level** as several preconditions need to be met.

Result 3.1: Central-level government structures in charge of Decentralization and Local Government are supported in the drafting process of the new NCSDLG and are capacitated to monitor the implementation of the NCSDLG and its Action Plan

Under this outcome, the project was tasked to 1) support the drafting and finalization of the new National Cross-Cutting Strategy for Decentralization and Local Government (NCSDLG) 2023-2030, and 2) develop a monitoring framework and provide coaching to the Agency for the Support of Local Governance (ASLG) staff.

Support formulation of new NCSDLG - STAR3 assistance in formulating the new NCSDLG was **complementary to the engagement of other partners**, specifically SDC Strong Municipalities, SECO Local Finances, and OECD SIGMA. All these partners offered guidance and advice regarding the methodological and content-related aspects of the strategy's drafting process.

For its part, and in response to the needs identified by the Ministry of Interior, STAR3 engaged expert resources across various thematic areas, namely i) Water and Transport, ii) Local and Rural Development, iii) Social Services, iv) Environment, Forests, and Greening, v) Delegated functions, vi) Legal Framework, and vii) facilitation of the strategy chapter concerning the "Local Economic and Rural Development" pillar.

Furthermore, STAR3 actively supported the Ministry of Interior/Agency for the Support of Local Governance in ensuring **a consultative and inclusive decision-making process**. This involved facilitating and supporting various consultations and brainstorming meetings among experts and, notably, the organization of four regional consultative meetings from November to December 2022, involving participants from all 61 municipalities.

Finally, STAR3 supported **the iterative editing of the NCSDLG drafts until the last version**, which was formally approved in April 2023.

NCSDLG monitoring and reporting support - This activity aimed to support the Ministry of Interior (MoI) and the Agency for Support to Local Government (ASLG) in establishing a system for coordinating, monitoring, and reporting on the implementation progress of the National Strategy for Decentralization and Local Governance (NCSDLG) 2023-2030.

The start of the assistance coincided with the establishment of a new Minister of State for Local Governance and changes in the high management and structure of the Agency for Support to Local Self Government (ASLG), the main recipient of the assistance. These changes required additional time to develop the outline and complete the inception phase, and the concrete technical assistance kicked off in January 2024.

The approach followed involved reviving the NCSDLG technical group, developing a monitoring system, and enhancing stakeholder capacities.

The assistance lasted until the end June 2024 and was conducted in close collaboration with ASLG. This collaboration was **instrumental for the establishment within ASLG of a dedicated Sector for Strategy Monitoring**, with trained staff and standard operating procedures in place. In addition, the activity included the development of **a comprehensive monitoring framework** with standardized tools and procedures aligned with the national IPSIS system, and the creation of **an analytical monitoring instrument** in Excel for data collation and report generation.

Substantial **efforts were invested in designing measurability of output indicators for the 179** measures outlined in the Strategy Action Plan, developing instructions and templates for relevant contributing institutions at the central and local levels, and providing coaching to ASLG staff throughout the development of and use of the monitoring framework.

Several challenges were identified during the process, including the lack of measurable elements in the NCSDLG Action Plan, insufficient knowledge at the local level regarding strategy measures and indicative costs, and overlapping responsibilities among institutions for specific measures.

The technical assistance provided recommendations for the mid-term review of the Strategy, particularly regarding ways to establish clear indicators and baseline values for measures and objectives.

The project believes the ASLG has staff equipped with sufficient know-how and instruments to conduct the first monitoring report of the new NCSDLG. However, while significant progress has been made, the full development of a comprehensive monitoring system still has a long way to go. The activity has laid the foundation for building such capacities further; continued efforts are needed to refine and improve the monitoring and reporting system for effective policymaking and accountability in decentralization reform.

II. Introduction

A. Purpose of the Report

This narrative report represents a full account of the progress of STAR3 for the entire implementation period of the Action, July 2021 – June 2024, in accordance with Article 3 of the General Conditions accompanying the EU Contribution Agreement IPA 2021 / 424-514.

B. Project Background and Developments during the Implementation

Particularly in the last decade, starting with the conduct of a deep administrative and territorial reform, decentralization and local government reform agenda has been in the focus of the successive governments of Albania and of many international development partners through several ongoing projects assisting in part or in full the Albanian municipalities in strengthening various strategic, institutional, and operational aspects of municipal activities.

A pooled donor funding (Italy, Sweden, Switzerland, USAID and UNDP), subsequently co-funded by the Government of Albania, was established in late 2013 to support the development and implementation of the administrative and territorial reform. The pooled fund constituted the STAR (Support to Territorial and Administrative Reform) project, implemented by UNDP under the leadership of the then Minister of State for Local Issues.

The STAR project arrangement was a novelty in donor coordination and a valuable instrument to the Government for resourcing and managing the various aspects of the reform, ensuring a structured approach and enabling expertise inputs in the development and implementation sequence. The STAR project provided technical assistance and capacity support to the government to carry out the reform.

STAR project was immediately followed by a second phase, STAR2, starting from mid-2016 and ending in March 2020. STAR2 followed in the same steps of a pooled fund, representing a joint initiative of five donors (EU, Sweden, Italy, Switzerland, and UNDP) and was designed to support the advancement of Decentralization and Local Government reforms. During its lifecycle, the project supported the government's efforts to ensure the functioning of TAR and the efficient operationalization of the newly elected municipalities.

A renewed joint commitment under STAR3 was proposed in mid-2020, to align development partners in supporting the further consolidation of STAR2 achievements, but also with a view to better respond to the objectives of the NCSDLG 2015-2022 and its accompanying Action Plan, in consideration of the current context of development assistance dynamics.

The overall aim of the STAR3 Project was to strengthen local government effectiveness and efficiency by enhancing the supporting framework, consolidating systems, standards, and organizational capacities in place, expanding and sustaining service delivery innovation and best practices, and institutionalizing local government accountability to women and men for enhanced participatory governance. STAR3 is made possible thanks to the joint contributions of the European Union, the Governments of Sweden and Switzerland, USAID, UNDP Albania, and the Government of Albania.

This broad-based support underscores the importance placed on strengthening local governance as a crucial instrument for strengthened local democracy, accountability and responsiveness as well as for Albania's progress towards key priorities related to European Union integration.

Decentralization and local government reform have been constantly featured in the EU Progress Reports on Albania as part of the progress toward meeting key priorities of integration. The following summarizes reviews at key milestones of STAR implementation where STAR attributable contribution to progress is underlined:

	<i>Progress</i>	<i>Weaknesses</i>	<i>Recommendations</i>
EU Report 2013 (before STAR implementation)	Territorial administrative reform and decentralization have marginally evolved.	Local government units with low budgets and limited human resources especially have difficulties implementing relevant legislation and development programs.	Promoting local democracy and fiscal decentralization, along with efforts to enforce effectiveness, transparency, inclusiveness, and strategic planning, is necessary.
EU Report 2014 (1st year of STAR implementation)	<u>Substantial efforts have been made to advance territorial administrative reform.</u> <u>A Law on Territorial and Administrative Reform was adopted.</u> <u>Decentralization reforms progressed and work has started on clarifying the functions of local government units in the preparation of amendments to the Law on the Organization and Functioning of Local Government.</u>	Local government units experienced difficulties exercising their competencies in the period leading up to the adoption of the Law on Territorial and Administrative Reform. The implementation of the new Civil Service Law by the newly established local government units has not been fully launched. Local government human resources management and financial control remain weak.	Further action is needed to strengthen the administrative capacity of local government units, enforcing transparency, effectiveness, and inclusiveness. Local governments should significantly increase their capacity to generate mature projects to benefit from national and IPA support.
EU Report 2016 (start of STAR2)	<u>Implementation of the territorial reform continued.</u> <u>Some progress was made on policy coordination with the adoption of the new Organic Law.</u> On fiscal decentralization, the proportion of resources allocated to local government units increased, which is the largest budget ever allocated to local government in Albania. <u>One stop shops for public services were piloted in five municipalities.</u>	Despite the largest budget allocation, the 2016 budget does not represent a net increase in municipalities' resources.	Substantial efforts are needed to increase the administrative capacity of local government units to carry out their expanded competencies and provide them with the necessary financial resources. Adoption of a new law on local finances and local taxes is needed, based on the principles of predictability and transparency of funds allocation. Full application of the law on civil servants at local government remains to be ensured.
EU Report 2020 (start of STAR3)	<u>Municipalities have made further progress on public participation in local decision-making, especially in participatory budgeting.</u> An increasing number of municipalities disclose public information, with all having appointed a local coordinator for the right to information. <u>A roll-out of 'front desks' delivering administrative services at local level now covers 50 of the 61 municipalities.</u> <u>On transparency, all municipalities publish regularly decisions of their municipal councils online.</u> <u>Five municipalities have piloted and adopted integrity plans with measures to combat corruption at the local level.</u>	The new legislation affecting local government is not fully harmonized and implemented. Local government units still lack sufficient financial resources and administrative capacity to exercise the given policymaking powers effectively. The LGUs' fiscal autonomy is also at risk, as most of their budget is dependent on national transfers. Implementation of the Civil Service Law (CSL) remains incomplete at local level. Implementation of the Law on public consultation remains unsatisfactory. The overall ability of local institutions to deliver quality public services remains limited	The territorial administrative reform needs to be further consolidated as part of the wider decentralization agenda and full political support is needed to bring the decentralization reform forward. The institutional framework for effective and inclusive participation needs further strengthening. National minimum standards for services have still to be established.
EU Report 2023 (last year of STAR3)	<u>The new 2023-2030 cross-cutting strategy on decentralization and local governance was adopted in April 2023.</u>	Conflicting and overlapping legal provisions and policies and the division of responsibilities between local, regional and central	The territorial administrative reform remains to be further consolidated as part of the wider decentralization agenda.

	<i>Progress</i>	<i>Weaknesses</i>	<i>Recommendations</i>
	<i>On transparency, some improvement has been noted: for example, the Consultative Council has adopted an integrity index methodology. 21 LGUs have developed and approved local integrity plans.</i>	government remain areas of concern. Local government units still lack sufficient financial resources and administrative capacity to perform all their devolved responsibilities in a fully satisfactory manner. The delivery of quality public services at local level remains limited	The annual monitoring report for 2022 on the implementation of the decentralization and local governance strategy was published in June 2023. A systematic and timely monitoring of this process, and of the mechanisms to carry it out, needs to be ensured. Further efforts are needed to expand integrity plans to all LGUs and to ensure that the existing integrity plans are fully implemented and adequately monitored

STAR3 implementation has been difficult and needed the most consensus for flexibility and agility in face of external changes and developments.

First, from the funding perspective, the project experience a delayed start, affected by the partial and incremental funding. While the project officially started on 1st Sep 2020, thanks to the initial UNDP contribution, Sweden and Switzerland contributed half of their pledged funds respectively in Nov and Dec 2020, preconditioning the full amounts on the Government of Albania payment of its share to the project budget. The European Union joined the project financially in June 2021, making their funds available for spending from 1st July 2021. The Government of Albania contribution was disbursed in two tranches, respectively in Nov 2021 and July 2022, followed by the remaining Swiss and Swedish contributions. USAID joined in June 2022 as a new partner. The implementation was brought to full speed only after receiving the substantial portion of EU pledged contribution in June 2021.

On the other hand, from a programmatic perspective, external changes had to be imposed soon after the implementation began. The year 2022 brought significant developments that influenced and impacted the pace and direction of the project. In March 2022, the Ministry of Interior, the project's main beneficiary and counterpart, requested project partners to consider redirecting some project activities towards assisting in the formulation of the new NCSDLG 2023-2030.

In April 2022, following the Government decision on the closure of central public service delivery offices and the exclusive shift to online services modality with effect from 1 May 2022, the Ministry of Interior requested the project to suspend the ongoing procurement process for the OSSIS rollout to Administrative Units and remain ready for consultations on how to tackle the digital transformation of service provision at the local level.

A special Steering Committee Meeting convened on 09 June 2022, where the Government presented its vision and plans for extending the digital transformation at the local level. Following the meeting, a letter from the Minister of Interior addressed the partners, including a set of assessments necessary to design a roadmap to embark the local government into the digital transformation and shift to online services. The aim of these readiness assessments was to introduce to decision makers the situation at the local level and provide recommendations for Albania's municipalities digital transformation for improved efficiency, transparency and accountability. This shift is seen as critical in enabling local governments to maintain and improve the quality of services provided to citizens.

In consideration of these developments and in coordination with the project partners, UNDP undertook a substantial project revision to reflect the new realities. An expert team from UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub was fielded in Albania in early September 2022 to help outline the digital orientation of some project activities. A revised project document was presented to the project partners and beneficiaries and was endorsed by the Project Steering Committee Nr.3 on 30 September 2022.

Key changes brought to the project included:

- 1) the articulation of the assistance for the formulation of the new NCSDLG,

- 2) the commitment to undertake a series of government (national and local) and public digital readiness assessments to inform the development of a Roadmap for the digital transformation of Albanian Municipalities, and
- 3) the cancellation of activities related to the expansion of one-stop shops to administrative units.

Alongside these new strategic priorities, the STAR3 project has continued to implement its originally planned activities, such as providing capacity building for strengthening local democracy and local government integrity.

UNDP coordinated and completed the revision approval procedures with the counterpart Ministry of Interior and partners during the last quarter of 2022.

During 2023, along with the implementation of the originally planned activities, the project supported the drafting of the new Decentralization and Local Government Strategy (officially approved in April 2023) and the design and implementation of the field work of the digital readiness assessment exercise across the 61 municipalities of the country.

In September 2023, the government reorganization led to the creation of a new ministerial position, the Minister of State for Local Governance, who became the project's new institutional counterpart. The new government leadership was swift in reviewing and reconfirming the relevance of the project activities and advised their full pursuance with particular emphasis on the activities related to integrity planning knowledge transfer, the digital readiness assessment, the capacity building for monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the NCSDLG as well as the addition of a pilot exercise on reengineering selected municipal services in the Municipality of Tirana.

In order to do so, and based on the project progress, a revision to extend the project implementation until the end of June 2024, was endorsed by all the stakeholders and partners on the Project Steering Committee Nr.6 on 25 October 2023. Hence, STAR3 project is officially completed by the end of June 2024.

C. Project Objectives

STAR3 project's Overall Objective is: to strengthen local government effectiveness and efficiency through enhancing the supporting framework, consolidating systems, standards, and organizational capacities in place, expanding, and sustaining service delivery innovation and best practices, and institutionalizing local government accountability to women and men for enhanced participatory governance.

The Action will aim to contribute to the Overall Objective by achieving the following Specific Objectives:

1. Local government participatory governance practices are in place and functional and encourage civic engagement.
2. Municipal systems and standards are enhanced, expanded, and consolidated for improved service delivery and overall municipal performance.
3. Government institutions, responsible for decentralization and local government, are capacitated to effectively drive policy development, coordination, and monitoring.

D. Project Scope

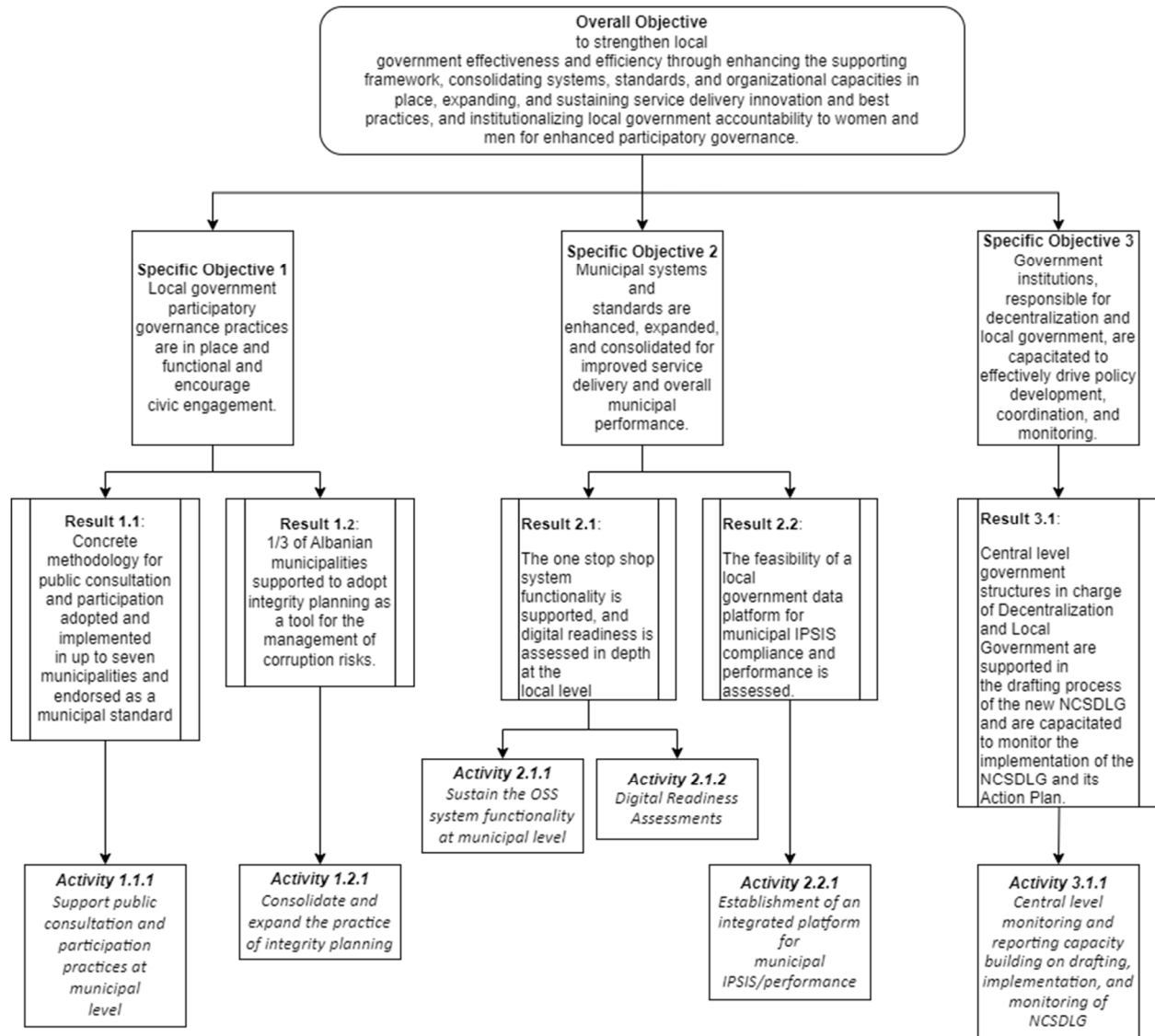
STAR3 had a quasi-national coverage in supporting initially best practices in civic engagement, municipal integrity, and innovative service delivery, adding later support for the formulation of the new Decentralization and Local Government Strategy and its monitoring and reporting requirements as well as for conducting a digital readiness assessment at the local level.

In more specific detail, the following were the cumulative and revised key project tasks and targets for accomplishment:

E. Project Factsheet

Project Title	STAR3 – Sustaining and Advancing Local Governance Reform		
Official Start & End Date	01 July 2021	30 June 2024	36 months
Contributions	Original Currency	USD Equivalent	Expenditures (in US\$)
EU Delegation	EUR 2,500,000	2,932,290 USD	2,931,491 USD
SIDA	kr 3,000,000	406,135 USD	405,254 USD
SDC	USD 460,426	460,425 USD	456,788 USD
UNDP	USD 96,671	96,671 USD	96,632 USD
USAID	USD 99,010	99,010 USD	93,397 USD
GoA	ALL 27,662,000	256,755 USD	252,119 USD
Total		4,251,285 USD	4,235,681 USD
Target Groups	Albanian Municipalities and the Ministry of Interior as the central institution responsible for decentralization and local government policy and reform		
Final Beneficiaries	The Project will directly benefit the reforming and modernization of the public administration, municipalities, as the first tier of local government, citizens and local communities as service receivers and participants in decision-making through inclusive and transparent decision-making processes and improved local service delivery.		
Implementing Agency	United Nations Development Programme in Albania (UNDP)		
Partners	Albanian Association for Local Autonomy & Association of Albanian Municipalities Other regional and local development stakeholders Central Government institutions and agencies such as: the PM Office, relevant line ministries such as Finance, Justice, etc., Agency for Support of Local Self-Government (ASLG), National Agency for Information Society, INSTAT, Commissioner for the Right to Information and Protection of Personal Data, various Civil Society Organizations, etc.		
Outcomes of the action	The Overall Objective is to strengthen local government effectiveness and efficiency through enhancing the supporting framework, consolidating systems, standards and organizational capacities in place, expanding and sustaining service delivery innovation and best practices, and institutionalizing local government accountability to women and men for enhanced participatory governance. Specifically, the Project aims to ensure that: 1. Local government participatory governance practices are in place and functional and encourage civic engagement. 2. Municipal systems and standards are enhanced, expanded, and consolidated for improved service delivery and overall municipal performance. 3. Government institutions, responsible for decentralization and local government, are capacitated to effectively drive policy development, coordination, and monitoring		
Expected results.	1.1: Concrete methodology for public consultation and participation adopted and implemented in up to seven municipalities and endorsed as a municipal standard (linked to Sp. Obj. 1) 1.2: 1/3 of Albanian municipalities supported to adopt integrity planning as a tool for the management of corruption risks. (linked to Sp. Obj. 1) 2.1: The one stop shop system functionality is supported, and digital readiness is assessed in depth at the local level (linked to Sp. Obj. 2) 2.2: The feasibility of a local government data platform for municipal IPSIS compliance and performance is assessed. (linked to Sp. Obj. 2) 3.1: Central level government structures in charge of Decentralization and Local Government are supported in the drafting process of the new NCSDLG and are capacitated to monitor the implementation of the NCSDLG and its Action Plan. (linked to Sp. Obj. 3)		

F. Structure of the (revised) Description of the Action



III. Implementation Progress

A. Progress Overview

In a nutshell, by the end of the project, the following has been achieved:

Activity 1.1.1 - Operationalize participatory governance in practice in 7 selected LGUs and disseminate good practices in the other municipalities.	The project supported the development of annual public consultation plans and facilitated real-life public consultations in seven municipalities, as well as organizing workshops to disseminate best practices. In addition, an electronic platform for municipal public consultations was developed and used by over 20 municipalities, though long-term institutionalization has not occurred.
Activity 1.2.1 - Expand Standard Integrity Instruments in 15 additional municipalities	The project exceeded its target of supporting 15 municipalities with integrity planning, having supported the development and approval of integrity plans in 28 municipalities total.
Activity 1.2.2 - Develop an integrity index to be integrated in the performance system	An integrity index was developed and guidance was provided to municipalities on integrity risk assessment and plan development.
Activity 2.1.1 - Upgrade and expand the municipal one-stop shop system to about 240 administrative units	The OSS system has been kept running "as is" and the further expansion of the OSS was suspended due to a shift to online services. However, some IT equipment was provided to municipalities and some of them have voluntarily extended the system to their administrative units. Efforts are still ongoing to transfer the system as an interim solution to ASLG and AKSHI.
Activity 2.2.1 - Undertake 1) a national digital ecosystem assessment, 2) a Municipal e-government readiness, and 3) a Public e-government readiness	E-readiness assessments were conducted across all 61 municipalities to evaluate digital readiness of local government and public acceptance of online services.
Activity 2.2.2 - Pilot the re-engineering of selected municipal services in the municipality of Tirana	Analysis and recommendations were provided for re-engineering municipal statistics in Tirana.
Activity 3.1.1 - Support the process of preparation of the new NCSDLG 2023-2030	The project supported formulation of the new national Decentralization strategy through consultation and expert engagement. The Strategy was approved in April 2023
Activity 3.1.2 - Develop a monitoring framework for the NCSDLG and provide coaching to the ASLG staff	A monitoring framework for the strategy was developed and coaching provided to the ASLG.
Activity 3.2.1 - Assess the applicability of IPSIS at the municipal level	An assessment was conducted and found the national IPSIS system premature for expansion to local government level.

B. Progress in detail

Activity 1.1.1 – Support public consultation and participation practices at municipal level

Action Reference: Specific Objective 1 - Local government participatory governance practices are in place and functional and encourage civic engagement.

Result 1.1: Concrete methodology for public consultation and participation adopted and implemented in up to seven municipalities and endorsed as a municipal standard.

Implementing Partner: INFOCIP

Accomplished Deliverables:

- ✓ Assessment report for seven targeted municipalities
- ✓ Annual Consultation Plans supported for seven targeted municipalities
- ✓ Fourteen real consultation processes (2 for each target municipality)
- ✓ Public consultation practice dissemination, including <https://konsultimivendor.al/> platform

Progress narrative

Public consultation and participation are essential elements of democratic governance. In Albania, the significance of meaningful public engagement and consultations has been recognized, leading to the establishment of legislation that mandates municipalities to carry out public consultations for their decisions.

The current legislation in Albania sets out the obligation of municipalities to carry out public consultations for almost every decision they make. Among the main laws sanctioning obligation for civic engagement in local decision-making, the most important are Law No.146/2014 "On public information and consultation", Law No.119/2014 "On the Right of Information", Law No. 139/2015 "On Local Self-Government", Law No.68/2017 "On Finances of Local Self-Government", and Law No.107/2014 "On planning and development of the territory". Law No. 146/2014 "On public information and consultation" as well as Law No.139/2015 "On Local self-government" obliges local self-government bodies to guarantee public participation in the decision-making processes. In addition, COM Decision No. 828, dated 7.10.2015, sanctioned the creation, operation, management and monitoring of the Electronic Register for Public Notices and Consultations in the form of an electronic portal: <http://www.konsultimipublik.gov.al>.

In line with the above, the scope of this project activity was to coach and support seven municipalities (executive branch) in the full cycle of public consultation and participation. The project also committed to supporting the conduct of 14 real public consultations in the above-selected municipalities and concluding the assistance with sharing the best experiences with the other nonparticipating municipalities.

The activity was closely consulted with the Swiss "Bashki te Forta" (BtF) project, as the latter also worked with the municipal councils in the same area. The draft Terms of Reference were shared with BtF, and a call was issued in early August 2021. The process concluded by awarding INFOCIP as the winning bidder in Nov 2021.

The previous STAR2 contribution to this area was also considered, taking into account the STARZ products, inter-alia:

- ✓ A guide on effectively planning, running, and reporting consultation processes, including capacity building and raising awareness among local government officials.
- ✓ A self-assessment tool for municipalities to gauge compliance with seven essential minimal standards set by the legal framework on public consultation.
- ✓ A particular focus on gender mainstreaming throughout these tools by addressing issues of equal access, representativeness, and inclusiveness of all groups in local decision-making

The inception phase was concluded by January 2022, focusing on the overall situation of public consultations at the local level vs. the national legal requirements, European principles and standards, and other international obligations. As part of the inception phase, follow-up consultations with project partners, including the SDC-funded initiatives BtF and Leviz Albania, took place.

For the selection of the beneficiary municipalities, the following selection criteria were developed and adopted:

- ✓ **Human Resources Capacities** - presence of designated coordinators for public notification and consultation and for the right to information, IT staff as part of the Municipality's organization, etc.
- ✓ **Technical and Infrastructural Capacities** - Availability of a functional and regularly updated municipal website, active municipal accounts on popular social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, or others, adequate technical infrastructure for public consultation processes (available/suitable physical space, IT equipment)
- ✓ **Previous Experience in Public Consultations**- demonstrable track record of engaging with the community and interest groups, experience in collaborating with civil society organizations at the local level.
- ✓ **Formal Commitment** - formal submission of an "Expression of Interest", commitment to approve an annual public consultation plan, presentation on the official website of the list of partners in developing public consultations, etc.

A call for expression of interest was issued in February 2022, based on the aforementioned criteria, and led to the selection of the municipalities of Shkoder, Lezhe, Berat, Patos, Roskovec, Kolonje, and Permet.

During June- September 2022, in-depth assessments of the situation were completed in the seven municipalities. The assessments provided detailed processes and opportunities for participatory and consultative decision-making. The analysis was conducted in each municipality, employing a participatory approach. Working groups established in each municipality contributed to identifying topics of interest for consultation as part of the annual consultation plans.

All seven selected municipalities developed annual consultation plans endorsed by the responsible entities in each municipality. Target municipalities were supported to plan, organize, and report 14 real life consultation processes in compliance with the protocols developed for organizing such processes. Coaching has been provided to those consultations, on how to ensure engagement of various groups of interest, document the processes, and implement a feedback mechanism.



During the 1st quarter of 2023, right before the local elections, four regional dissemination workshops, aiming at exchanging the experience accumulated in the seven pilot municipalities with other municipalities that were not part of the STAR3 support, were organized respectively in Gjirokaster, Korce, Shkoder, and Berat. In total, high representatives from 35 municipalities from 8 regions/qarks, participated in the four regional meetings. The qarks were selected based on the criteria of adjacency with the target seven municipalities.

In parallel, in the framework of the efforts to identify the most effective approach for the dissemination and sustainability of the established practice, an e-platform <https://konsultimivendor.al/> has been developed and has been operational since autumn 2022. The platform is user-friendly and was populated by the participating municipalities. Thirteen additional municipalities of Devoll, Dibër, Divjakë, Durrës, Elbasan, Fier, Kukës, Lushnje, Pukë, Shijak, Tropoje, and Vlore have voluntarily joined the platform as of June 2023. The electronic platform is still functional, and the latest use is from the Municipality of Permet on May 8, 2024.

However, the institutionalization of this instrument has not taken place as the government envisages integrating municipal public consultations into the national register (konsultimipublik.al) in the future.

Exit Strategy

The project activity on Public Consultation and Participation was limited in scope, targeting only seven municipalities due to budget availability. Since its outset, this component relied on piloting and identifying best practices and concluding with a knowledge dissemination activity. From the project's standpoint, these objectives have been successfully achieved.

The development of the electronic platform, as a tangible tool for showcasing municipal activities related to public consultation, was well-received and populated with content from the seven pilots and additional 13 municipalities, which shows a good uptake. However, the communicated government plan to integrate local public consultations into the national electronic register, konsultimipublik.al, has ruled out the possibility of institutionalization of this ready and viable alternative.

STAR3 recognizes that there is still a lack of uniformity and consequences for non-compliance with legal requirements in this domain, and thus, it may be necessary to provide additional support to refine this aspect of municipal operations in the future. Nonetheless, the project also acknowledges that public consultation and participation are gaining traction within municipal operations, both in the executive and legislative (council) branches.

Activity 1.2.1 – Consolidate and expand the practice of integrity planning

Action Reference: Specific Objective 1 - Local government participatory governance practices are in place and functional and encourage civic engagement.

Result 1.2: 1/3 of Albanian municipalities supported to adopt integrity planning as a tool for the management of corruption risks.

Implementing Partner: IDM - Institute for Democracy and Mediation

Accomplished Deliverables:

- ✓ Assessment of the implementation of Integrity Plans in 6 pilot municipalities from STAR2
- ✓ Integrity Plans for 15 new municipalities
- ✓ Endorsement of the Integrity Plan by each municipality
- ✓ Integrity Index developed
- ✓ Integrity Plan practice dissemination
- ✓ Guide on Municipal Integrity Plan
- ✓ Final implementation report and future recommendations
- ✓ Established capacities at ASLG for Integrity Planning expansion and monitoring

Progress narrative

Transparency International qualifies integrity, along with transparency and accountability, as the three key overarching elements needed to effectively prevent corruption in a public office: "When key public actors at the local level fulfill their mandates according to strict ethical and moral codes and conduct themselves honestly, corruption has little space to take root".

Integrity not only strengthens the ability of institutions to prevent corruption through the treatment of its symptoms, but also enables a culture of public management which puts ethics and integrity as the cornerstones of good governance. Strengthening integrity and adopting systematic anti-corruption measures are also vital in the context of public administration reform.

STAR2 set an important milestone in supporting the introduction of an Integrity Risk Assessment Methodology and a Standard Code of Conduct for local governments. The Integrity Risk Assessment (IRA) methodology was drafted by the Institute for Mediation and Democracy (IDM) in consultation with several local governments as well as central institutions and was endorsed by the National Coordinator Against Corruption (Ministry of Justice) and the Agency for Support to Local Government.

The integrity risk assessment approach consists in reviewing and assessing internal documents, sources and evidence, and policies and procedures. The whole process is based on 'insider' knowledge of the internal environment and working processes and helps to develop confidence of public officials in what they are doing well. This approach also provides a comprehensive overview of key integrity risk areas by:

- ✓ assessing the level of vulnerability or exposure of individuals to corruption risks and other unlawful or unethical behavior or practice,
- ✓ identifying risk factors for corruption and other unlawful or unethical behavior or practice in individual working fields of an institution, and
- ✓ defining measures to reduce, eliminate or control identified risks and risk factors.



Assessment of the implementation of Integrity Plans in 6 pilot municipalities -

STAR3 assistance for furthering local integrity planning started in June 2021 with evaluating the Integrity Plans performance in the six pilot municipalities from STAR2. An Evaluation Report on the implementation of Integrity Plans in 6 pilot municipalities was completed in July 2021. The report provided information on the findings and feedback received during the focus groups, individual interviews, and three thematic workshops held in the six pilot municipalities, and the desk work analysis regarding the implementation of the integrity plans.

Further, the report highlighted some good practices identified in the pilot municipalities, including an analysis of three critical areas (regulatory framework, human resources, transparency) and recommendations for improvement. The report found that transparency and regulatory framework are the areas in which pilot municipalities have progressed better. On the other hand, implementing measures regarding human resources resulted in the weakest and should be given additional

attention.

Selection of municipalities participating in the rollout - The selection and engagement of the new municipalities took place in July 2021. The selection criteria included geographical location, population size, level of commitment, urban and rural profile, and ethnic minority representation. This approach aimed to ensure diversity and preserve the principle of voluntarism.

Fifty-five municipalities were invited to participate in this initiative via personalized emails, official letters, and social media. In response to the call, 32 municipalities expressed a participation interest.

A selection committee, including representatives from UNDP, the STAR3 project, IDM, the Ministry of Justice, and the ASLG, selected the following 14 municipalities: Berat, Bulqiza, Shijak, Belsh, Përmet, Maliq, Pogradec, Has, Kukës, Lezha, Puka, Kavaja, Tirana, and Himara. The Municipality of Roskovec was added later to the list as an in-kind contribution of IDM, the Responsible Partner for implementing this activity. Furthermore, additional municipalities were added, serving as on-the-job learning platforms for capacity building for ASLG staff (see below).

Rollout of integrity plans - The assistance for the integrity plans in the new municipalities started with a joint introductory meeting with representatives from the leadership and staff of the selected municipalities and representatives from the Ministry of Justice and ASLG. An overview of the overall process was provided to the municipalities to understand the methodological approach and expected results and officially formalize the commitment of municipalities to the integrity planning process. As a result, the selected municipalities established their Integrity Working Groups (IWGs) and appointed coordinators through formal internal orders of the respective mayors by August 2021.

Each municipality was coached to apply the standard of Integrity Risk Assessment Methodology and identify the individual integrity measures and, therefore, the integrity plan. This phase involved setting objectives, identifying risks, conducting risk assessments, treating risks, and establishing monitoring and reporting mechanisms.

Dissemination and knowledge transfer - Approximately 300 municipal staff from municipalities across Albania underwent on-the-job training as part of the project. This training aimed to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively implement integrity plans within their respective municipalities. The municipal staff were involved in the process of discussing ethical dilemmas and integrity risks in the institution. Additionally, a total of approximately 1960 public officials from these municipalities were made aware of the integrity plans during the integrity risk assessment conducted in their municipalities. This broad awareness ensured that key stakeholders within the municipalities understood the importance of integrity planning and were actively engaged in the process.

During October November 2022, a package guiding municipalities on conducting an Integrity Risk Assessment and drafting an integrity plan was developed. The package was disseminated to municipalities through the four Regional Workshops organized in Korçë, Gjirokastër, Shkodër, and Tirana during the 1st quarter of 2023.

To date, under STAR3, **17 integrity plans have been successfully drafted** and adopted by municipal councils, with all plans published on respective municipal websites. **Five additional** municipalities are in the approving process of integrity plans. Currently, through STAR2 and STAR3, 28 municipalities out of 61 (46%) have developed integrity plans.



Development of Integrity Index - In parallel, an Integrity Index was developed as a novel product that STAR3 project committed to deliver based on the critical mass of municipal integrity plans to be developed. The development of the Index would be based on converging measures, frequency of information, and data generation and undergo through a participatory approach including consultation with beneficiaries and key stakeholders at the central and local levels, to identify (i) the principal areas of the anti-corruption agenda to be monitored, (ii) linking monitoring areas with the assessment instrument, (iii) fine-tuning assessment indicators, and finally (iv) identify the practical protocols of measuring and reporting on the assessment indicators.

Initially, UNDP commissioned a short-term consultancy for the development of various alternatives of the Integrity Index, a quantification measure of the municipal integrity performance that the project was about to introduce. This study was then provided to IDM for consideration in the development of the Index.

A draft integrity index was developed in September 2022 and underwent a first round of consultation. Further, the draft was shared with representatives of municipalities who provided written feedback. Between October and November 2022, the project followed with a broader consultation and validation of the Integrity Index. The exercise aimed to test the Index for clarity, friendliness, easiness, and compliance with the needs of local government. The feedback and findings from the validation process were used to improve the Index and presented in four regional consultation workshops. The feedback and results from all the consultation and testing processes were incorporated into the final integrity index document.

Additionally, efforts were focused on devising a monitoring instrument for Integrity Plan implementation. The Integrity Plan Monitoring and Reporting Instrument is designed in compliance with the nature and content of integrity plans, the methodology of integrity planning monitoring and reporting published and recommended by the Ministry of Justice. Following a comprehensive review of existing methodologies and plans, the index and the monitoring instrument were delivered to the Agency for the Support of the Local Government (ASLG) for application. For this purpose, it was designed a simple Microsoft-based application.

The final Integrity Index document was also introduced to the staff of AMMV as an instrument to measure the performance of municipalities in this dimension. ASLG tested the instrument in four municipalities of Tirana, Maliq, Mat, and Shijak, which conducted a self-evaluation process.

The recommendation for ASLG is to make full use of these instruments along with the expansion of the integrity plans in all the Albanian municipalities.

Exit Strategy

As part of the exit strategy and knowledge transfer, STAR3 has co-developed with ASLG a training plan. The plan takes into consideration that the Agency is since end 2022 the institution responsible for supporting and supervising the adoption of integrity plans by the local governments in the framework of the National Strategy for the Fight Against Corruption.

The training plan entailed learning by doing and coaching ASLG staff through a practical process of developing an Integrity Risk Assessment and Integrity Plan, initially in two additional municipalities of Lushnje and Librazhd. Given the limited human resources, ASLG requested the training of a pull of experts, including staff of ASLG and champion experts identified during the integrity planning process with different municipalities, in order to establish a nucleus of qualified

domestic expertise that allow also for peer-to-peer support for the drafting process of Integrity plans. To facilitate this capacity-building effort, 17 experts were identified and participated in an intensive training program conducted during March-April 2023. The 17 trainees attending the Training of Trainers (ToT) program include the following:

ASLG-5 staff (Specialists)

Municipality of Tirana - 3 staff (Specialist, Head of Sector, Director)

Municipality of Patos - 1 staff (Specialist)

Municipality of Mallakaster - 1 staff (Head of Sector)

Municipality of Mat - 2 staff (Director HR and Support Services)

Municipality of Kukes-2 staff (former Deputy Mayor and Head of EU and Foreign Aid Unit)

Municipality of Elbasan-1 staff (Director HR)

Municipality of Shijak - 1 staff (Mayor's Councilor)

Municipality of Maliq - 1 staff (Deputy Mayor)

With the change of leadership and the reorganization of the ASLG staff in late 2023, the new ASLG dedicated team was involved in the collaborative development of integrity plans in the last five municipalities. A Training of Trainers (TOT) was held with ASLG staff and some municipal officials who have already gone through the process of drafting the integrity plan. This training aimed at gaining knowledge about this process and distributing it to the staff of other municipalities in the country that will go through this process. Capacity building activities with ASLG staff were held for the monitoring instrument on the implementation of integrity plans. Through targeted training programs and workshops, staff members were equipped with the necessary knowledge and tools to effectively support integrity planning initiatives at the municipal level. ASLG's capacity for knowledge sharing and dissemination was strengthened, facilitating the exchange of best practices and lessons learned with other stakeholders in the integrity sector.

Further advancement in this area is theoretically clear, however, in practice there are still important challenges.

- ✓ Resistance to change within municipalities, resource constraints, and the need for sustained commitment from local government officials are among the key challenges.
- ✓ Effective integrity planning requires prior commitment and support from municipal leadership, including the executive, key municipal staff, and the municipal council. However, ensuring such commitment often necessitates a clear understanding of integrity principles and their significance for local governance.
- ✓ Municipalities need to proactively demonstrate commitment to effective integrity management by integrating it into their internal strategic objectives and institutional policy documents.
- ✓ Local anti-corruption structures, such as internal audit units, responsible authorities for conflict of interests and reporting mechanisms, lack clear mandates and sufficient resources to function effectively.
- ✓ Existing internal regulations within municipalities often lack comprehensive provisions for integrity management, including procedures for reporting, investigation, conflict of interest, declaration of gifts, and prevention of corrupt practices.
- ✓ Internal communication within municipal structures is often inadequate, hindering the establishment of a transparent and accountable organizational culture. Municipalities also face challenges in providing timely, accessible, and comprehensive information to the public, which undermines trust in the institution and hampers effective local governance.

The ASLG has already taken steps in piloting the monitoring of the integrity plans by making use of the integrity index. These efforts need to be stepped up, and the ASLG should plan on how to engage the pool of experts and staff in supporting the expansion of the integrity planning in the remaining municipalities and the overall monitoring of their implementation.

ASLG may need additional support / capacity building to design instruments that facilitate communication and understanding with municipalities, such as i) drafting a workplan for the rollout of Integrity planned within the deadline in 2025, ii) prepare budget estimates for the drafting process of integrity plans as well as iii) establishing a monitoring mechanism to enable ASLG to respond to the needs for reporting on the status of integrity plans implementation.

One vital recommendation for ALSG staff is to prioritize continuous professional development. This entails actively seeking out training opportunities, workshops, and knowledge-sharing sessions to deepen their understanding of integrity planning methodologies and best practices. Additionally, fostering a culture of innovation and adaptability within ALSG teams can enable them to respond effectively to evolving integrity challenges.

Activity 2.1.1 - Sustain the OSS system functionality at municipal level

Action Reference: Specific Objective 2 - Municipal systems and standards are enhanced, expanded, and consolidated for improved service delivery and overall municipal performance.

Result 1.2: 2.1: The one stop shop system functionality is improved overall supported, and made operational digital readiness is assessed in up to 240 administrative units in depth at the municipalities in the scope for STAR3 OSS assistance.

Implementing Partner : IKUBiNFO; Infosoft Systems, Landmark Communications; short term consultant

Accomplished Deliverables:

- ✓ OSS Awareness Raising –(Started & cancelled)
- ✓ Municipal OSS IT infrastructure procured
- ✓ Maintenance and support OSS central server
- ✓ Maintenance and support municipal OSS operations
- ✓ Business Intelligence platform
- ✓ OSISS rollout to administrative units (Cancelled in April 2022)

Progress narrative

The predecessor to STAR3, STAR2 project, introduced a standard one-stop-shop information system (OSSIS) for municipal administrative services' delivery from the year 2018. The process started with a review of the service delivery workflows across municipalities, identification of common workflow features and potentials for standardizing them, the development of an IT solution for capturing the workflow sequence, its testing and fine-tuning, and then the rollout in the municipalities.

OSSIS was introduced in 40 municipalities within the STAR2 project life until the end of March 2020 and then extended to 8 additional municipalities by the end of August 2020 under a STAR2 follow-up phase. The system proved itself worth in several municipalities and encountered various subjective problems in others. Nevertheless, the benefits of using such a system were evident in the well performing municipalities and included some or all of the following:

- ✓ Standard and automated procedures
- ✓ Avoidance of unnecessary contacts with various municipal departments for the citizen
- ✓ Less internal paperwork and time for document circulations
- ✓ Possibility of tracking applications along the sequence
- ✓ More transparency through enabling application digital recording and tracing
- ✓ Improved management through possibility of aggregate service delivery analysis and data
- ✓ Bringing services one step closer to e-services, etc.

Another important potential benefit of the system was that it could be operational in any location if linked with the municipal IT network, allowing for the citizen or business to apply for services from the respective administrative unit without the need to come to the central office of the municipality. The benefits of this expansion would be a direct impact on accessibility and time savings for the citizens.

During STAR2, the system was tested and made operational in 14 administrative units, however, this expansion remained of secondary importance as the OSSIS rollout focused on addressing challenges in municipal centers first. One of the major challenges was the deficient IT readiness in almost all municipalities. The OSS rollout plan was forced to adapt to this situation and took an incremental approach of working with the most promising municipalities, addressing issues and finding joint solutions with the remaining ones on an individual basis. The lack of IT equipment was the prevailing difficulty, but not the only challenge. Local human capital, specifically computer literacy, despite tailored training and capacity building, was also an issue, compounded also with a degree of staff resistance to departing from the old traditional paper-based work. These challenges were gradually overcome with the OSS system expanding across the country as demonstrated by the results.

As a successor of STAR2, STAR3 committed to achieve an ambitious objective of consolidating and expanding further the OSS system. Within STAR3, the objective was to further the results with a focus on the following:

- ✓ Support the system operation in 50 municipalities and expand it to about 240 administrative units.
- ✓ Upgrade the OSS information system, including development of an OSS Mobile App.
- ✓ Support the expansion of integrated OSS-ADISA offices at the local level, and
- ✓ Contribute to securing basic IT infrastructure for administrative units' one-stop shops.

STAR3 made smooth progress in OSS implementation until early 2022. In April 2022, when the Government decided to close of central public service delivery offices and shift exclusively to online services modality effective from 1 May 2022. As a consequence, on 1 May 2022, ADISA offices were closed, and the Ministry of Interior requested the STAR3 project to suspend the ongoing procurement process for the OSSIS rollout to Administrative Units and prepare for consultations on how to address the digital transformation of service provision at the local level.

By the end of April 2022, progress was made in several directions:

- ✓ The number of municipalities adopting the OSS increased to 52 with the addition of the municipalities of Has and Pustec in December 2021 and Patos and Korca in the first half of 2022 (the latter submitted formal requests to UNDP/STAR3 to enroll in the STAR3 OSS scheme).
- ✓ A tender for the OSS expansion to the Administrative Units was launched in early 2022, reaching the stage of evaluation of offers in April 2022.
- ✓ In individual agreement with each participating municipality, STAR3 procured half of the needed OSS IT equipment and distributed them to the respective municipalities by mid-April 2022.
- ✓ Joint ADISA-municipal one-stop-shops were established in about 20 municipalities, adopting ADISA standards for service delivery.
- ✓ Contractual arrangements and preparations for an OSS public awareness campaign were completed by April 2022 with the campaign scheduled to launch in May 2022.

More specifically:

OSSIS Rollout in Administrative Units

A comprehensive RFP on OSSIS Roll Out to Administrative Units, including specifications on OSSIS enhancement and e-services has been finalized and submitted since November 2021 to AKSHI, the latter being the key partner institution regarding national IT standards, for final endorsement prior to the publication of an invitation to bid for the implementation of this activity. With AKSHI's feedback, UNDP launched the tender in February 2022, and the procurement reached the evaluation stage in April 2022. The bid was subsequently cancelled as the GoA announced the closure of all physical service desks, and the Ministry of Interior's requested to stop the OSS rollout to the administrative units. This activity was discontinued, and efforts were put into reviewing the project approach to respond to the government's new vision toward online services as per the request of the Minister of Interior to project partners and the endorsement of the extraordinary SC meeting which took place in June 2022.



Procurement of OSS IT equipment

To facilitate the expansion of the OSS in the administrative units, STAR3 provided a substantial quantity of IT equipment to almost all municipalities. The needs for IT infrastructure were identified through a preliminary assessment carried out by the project team in the initial 50 target municipalities. A process of consultation with the mayors of these municipalities took place to reconfirm needs and ensure goodwill for the expansion of OSS in the administrative units, including the commitment of the municipalities to cover a share of the required IT infrastructure costs. The agreement with each municipality was formalized into a Memorandum of Understanding signed by the mayor and the UNDP Resident Representative. As a result of these agreements, STAR3 committed to secure a total of 133 PCs and 139 printers/scanners, while the municipalities themselves would cover the remaining needs, which represented approximately half of the identified needs.

Through an open competitive procedure, UNDP selected an international service provider, "ATEA," to furnish, distribute and install the bulk of equipment, complemented by a local service provider, Sinteza shpk. As a result, both procurement processes were completed by March 2022, and the equipment was delivered to the respective local governments during April 2022.

As the objective of expanding the OSS to administrative units became irrelevant after April 2022, the equipment usage was left at the discretion of the beneficiary municipalities with a suggestion to use them for OSS at central municipality or administrative unit offices. From the later project's collected information, the equipment was being used in central OSS offices (40%), administrative unit offices (25%), and the remaining quantity was still kept in municipal storage facilities.

OSS public awareness

Starting from early 2022, implementation comprised an inception phase, conducting visits in 5 municipalities to understand the perception of staff on OSSIS use, culture, and behaviors, and understand the audience of the awareness campaign better. Following the approval of the inception report, in collaboration with the project team, the contractor developed key messages and video scripts. The shooting was realized in three municipalities, Malesi e Madhe, Roskovec, and Gjirokaster, and one administrative unit, of Lunxheri. Two video testimonials were produced following these visits, aimed at citizens and municipal staff. The contractor also produced key visuals and promotional videos and developed the online campaign. The online and TV campaigns were scheduled to start in May 2022. However, to respond to the changing context of service delivery front offices closure, STAR3 decided to stop the campaign, and in agreement with the service provider, the contract was terminated.

OSSIS Maintenance and Support

OSSIS warranty and maintenance service, including 2nd and 3rd level support, has been provided to 50 participating municipalities since July 2021, subcontracted to IkubInfo. A help desk to ensure maintenance support to LGUs has been established and responds to municipal calls, while in parallel, the service provider provides ad-hoc on-the-job training when required.

Despite the request for suspension of further OSSIS expansion at the administrative unit level, the government recognized the results achieved and advised that STAR3 continues to support the existing municipal OSS system, as it contributes to culture change and the strengthening of local government capacities to cope with increasingly complex IT-supported systems. Thus, the system maintenance and support service for municipalities continued as per the project's revised lifespan.

Maintenance of municipal OSS and OSS central hardware was provided by third parties service providers until the end 2023, including all updates, upgrades, and security checks necessary for the system's hosting. At the end of 2023, these contracts were not renewed as the STAR3 project was preparing for its full completion and closure.

Following the end of the OSS maintenance contracts, STAR3 project provided each municipality with a full technical documentation package, including:

1. Manual for the use of the system for each job position that has access to this system
2. System administration manual from your IT
3. The source code (Source Code) of the system
4. System architecture and design document
5. List of current services implemented in the system
6. Categories of services and their specific configuration (work flows)
7. The most recent organizational chart (organizational chart) provided by you and used by the system.
8. Document with recommendations on system maintenance options
9. Local Administrative Services Manual

In addition, STAR3 project engaged a local consultant to provide hands-on support and organize several online sessions with the municipal IT staff to provide more detailed instructions on how municipalities can independently continue to maintain the system. This last assistance ended in May 2024.

OSS current status

The overall number of applications in the system has increased throughout the implementation period, with periods of decrease related to summer and winter vacations and other local developments. Since the initial rollout in 2018 the OSS system has processed over 160,000 total applications with an average of 2500 applications per month. The OSS has included 168 services available to the citizens saving about 1,900 hours of traveling to the municipal centers for the citizens and businesses. To date, the OSS is operational in about 30 Albanian municipalities.

Exit strategy

The project has made all efforts to handover the central hardware to AKSHI, requesting only that AKSHI keep this central hardware running, providing power, internet and troubleshooting in case of software malfunction. Despite all efforts to date to engage with the AKSHI and AMMV, this exercise has not succeeded.

Consequently, the central hardware remains operational but without any assurance of continued functionality. The government has explicitly stated since 2022 that it does not intend to support the OSS system. However, as the system is still in use by municipalities to deliver services, this practice could be supported to continue until a more robust and comprehensive replacement is implemented according to government plans.

Although the project has taken several steps to ensure the municipalities can maintain the system independently, the immediate sustainability of the system remains uncertain due to the lack of centralized support.

Activity 2.1.2 - Digital e-Readiness Assessments (linked to Result 2.1)

Action Reference:

Specific Objective 2 - Municipal systems and standards are enhanced, expanded, and consolidated for improved service delivery and overall municipal performance.

Result 1.2: 2.1: The one stop shop system functionality is improved overall supported and made operational; digital readiness is assessed in up to 240 administrative units in depth at the municipalities in the scope for STAR3 OSS assistance.

Implementing Partner: Consortium: IDRA-Communication Progress

Accomplished Deliverables:

- ✓ Inception Report
- ✓ Municipal Assessment Reports
- ✓ Public Assessment Reports
- ✓ National Report on Municipal e-Readiness
- ✓ National Report on Public e-Readiness
- ✓ Roadmap Report
- ✓ Final Narrative Report
- ✓ Recommendations Report: Re-engineering of Municipal Statistics

Progress narrative

The Government's request for comprehensive municipal digital readiness assessments became the new project task, formally communicated to UNDP and the partners in late June 2022. The Ministry of Interior requested the undertaking of three assessments: 1) an overall assessment of the country's digital ecosystem, 2) an assessment of the digital readiness of municipalities, and 3) an assessment of the public's readiness and acceptance of online services.

Based on this expressed need, formalized through a letter addressed to STAR3 partners by the Minister of Interior on 27 June 2022, UNDP started to adapt the relevant project activities. As part of this process, several consultations took place with the UNDP Regional HUB during July - August 2022 to explore similar practices of assessment exercises and methodologies related to digital transformation. In light of these consultations, UNDP Albania arranged for a scoping mission of UNDP regional experts, which took place in the week of September 12th, 2022. The Mission had the following main objectives:

- ✓ Understand the scope, scale, and extent of the digital transformation needs and capacities at the local level to cope with adopting e-government practices.
- ✓ Identify the critical elements and parameters for the three requested assessments and the most appropriate tools or approaches to apply for these assessments.
- ✓ Assess the adoption of the UNDP's Digital Transformation framework that focuses on i) people, ii) infrastructure, iii) business, iv) regulation, and v) government pillars of digital transformation at the local level in the context of Albania.

The final aim of the Mission was to inform the development of ToRs for conducting the requested digital readiness assessments for effective online public service delivery at the local level.

The Mission held a series of consultation meetings with stakeholders at the central and local levels. The findings of the scoping Mission informed the drafting of the ToRs for municipal and public readiness assessment, which UNDP has further detailed and submitted for review and endorsement to AKSHI. The latter endorsed them with minor comments in late December 2022, enabling UNDP to launch the tender in January 2023.

The first assessment, the Country's digital ecosystem assessment, which had a scope beyond the local level, was reviewed with AKSHI. However, AKSHI did not find it relevant or necessary and therefore this assessment was not conducted.

The contract for carrying out the municipal and public e-readiness assessments was awarded to the Consortium IDRA & Communication Progress on 5 May 2023.



The municipal and the public e-readiness assessments were conducted in all 61 municipalities in Albania. They aligned with UNDP's Digital Strategy and its Digital Transformation Framework. The exercise was a comprehensive due diligence in each municipality about the preparedness of municipalities and their citizens for digital transformation and the adoption of e-governance services. This comprehensive exercise assesses various elements across multiple pillars, providing a holistic understanding of the current state and identifying areas for improvement. The uniqueness of these assessments lies in their comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach, encompassing both the municipal administration and the public perspective.

The assessment encompassed 61 municipalities and involved a detailed methodology, extensive stakeholder engagement, and the development of a roadmap for digital transformation.

Inception Phase

The inception phase began in May 2023 and involved mobilizing teams, preparing necessary materials, and drafting the methodology for the assessments. The exercise started with a kick-off meeting with stakeholders, including representatives from UNDP, the Ministry of Interior, and the National Agency for Information Society (NAIS).

In June 2023, as part of the inception phase, the methodology was refined in close collaboration with UNDP. The methodology includes various elements, such as i) a definition of standard questions to be answered; ii) an approach to access/include vulnerable groups; iii) data collection and survey instruments design; iv) data and interpretation approaches; v) a reporting outline; vi) the work plan of implementation and vii) the format, frequency, and timeline of consultations.

Simultaneously, on June 5, 2023, the Deputy Minister of Interior issued a letter to all Mayors, requesting them to prepare for the upcoming digital readiness assessment and the appointment of focal points from their managerial levels. The response rate was high (89%).

To initiate the exercise, the service provider conducted five preparatory online meetings in mid-June, attended by approximately 45 municipalities.

Municipal e-readiness assessment

The Municipal Assessment Team underwent thorough training on the assessment methodology. Information packages were collected from municipalities, followed by fieldwork and audit visits to gather firsthand insights. Data was meticulously processed and analyzed to derive meaningful insights, leading to the preparation of draft reports. Technical meetings were held across the 61 municipalities, involving Mayors or Deputy Mayors and other municipal representatives. These meetings facilitated the collection of data and ensured a collaborative approach to the assessment.

Municipalities were scored on a scale of 0-100 based on five pillars: Government, Regulation, Infrastructure, Economy, and People. The overall Municipal Score was the average of the scores of these pillars, categorized into five groups: Low, Limited, Moderate, Advanced, and Full Digital Readiness.

Draft reports were prepared based on the findings and shared with municipalities for their input and comments, ensuring a collaborative and iterative process. This feedback loop continued until the reports were finalized.

Public e-Readiness Assessment

Physical interviews were conducted with citizens in each municipality to assess their perception, behaviors, and readiness regarding online services. A comprehensive questionnaire was administered, covering seven pillars: Cultural Norms, Adoption, Digital Literacy Skills, Usage, Access, Protection, and Trust. A multi-stage stratified cluster sampling method was used, with a total of 11,000 interviews conducted. Each municipality was assigned a score based on the quantification of survey responses. The assessment provided insights into the public's readiness and willingness to adopt e-government services.

Roadmap

Based on the assessment findings, a roadmap was prepared to identify capacity gaps and actions to be addressed by municipalities, the Ministry of Interior, NAIS, and other stakeholders. The roadmap focused on practical and actionable measures, emphasizing the importance of building on strengths and addressing systemic problems through integrated efforts. It aimed to operationalize practical steps for local governments to adopt the digital transformation journey.

Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder engagement was a crucial component of the project. A series of regional and national workshops were conducted to discuss and validate the findings of the digital e-readiness assessment. These workshops provided platforms for the validation of findings and recommendations with representatives from all 61 municipalities and other stakeholders. Stakeholders included representatives from UNDP/STAR3, the National Agency for Information Society (AKSHI), and other relevant public and non-public actors.

The assessment produced 61 reports for each Municipality, a National aggregated report and a Roadmap report, which is the final product released in June 2024.

While these reports provide a detailed information on several dimensions of digital maturity, a summary of the key findings from the Municipal e-readiness assessment indicated the following:

Governance

- ✓ "Digitalization" or "digital transformation" is a terminology well used at the local level but with little to no strategic approach or documentation. With very few exceptions of some large Municipalities (such as Tirana or Korca to a certain extent) such a concept is not part of any local strategy developed at municipal level.
- ✓ In general, there are no structures at municipal level that are in charge of "digitalization" or "innovation". The difference is Tirana Municipality which as a General Directorate all dedicated to Innovation, Information Technology and GIS. Also, the Municipality of Shkodra and Elbasan are a bit different than the rest in terms of this structure, as they have a directory on IT and IT system management. In other municipalities, the structures "deal with Information Technology" basic tasks (maintenance of computers, internet and peripheral devices).
- ✓ There is no consistency in digital efforts. There have been several "initiatives/projects" funded by donors that have touched upon digitalization at the local level, but the overall conclusion from the evaluation is that in general these initiatives have not produced sustainable results. Information systems have been built for municipal purposes; software programs developed; only to be discontinued once the project has been completed.
- ✓ In general, the staff of municipalities are of younger age (so a generational shift has happened at the local level) and "digital literacy" of this new generation is quite acceptable as they are familiar with the use of technology in general.



- ✓ In terms of “digital administrative service delivery” there are now practices in place which show that with the right tools and most importantly with specific regulations in place which ensure the procedures and responsibilities of users, local governments are able to provide such “digital” services.

Human Resources

- ✓ Regarding IT-related positions within municipalities, recruitment generally adheres to the established civil service law procedures. There is no well define job description for IT a more comprehensive and precise job description in line with the legal requirements is needed.
- ✓ Regarding the employment of IT experts with appropriate qualifications, no significant issues are encountered in most cases. Nevertheless, certain challenges arise in smaller, remote municipalities due to limitations in the salary scales associated with the relevant category of municipalities.
- ✓ Across municipalities, there is no universal code of ethics specifically dedicated to service delivery.

Awareness & Knowledge

There is a significant gap in municipal knowledge and preparedness regarding strategic documents in force at the national level. Very few municipalities are aware of the existence of the Decentralization Strategy, only recently approved.

- ✓ Lack of knowledge on essential legal framework governing data management privacy and cyber security across almost all municipalities.

Data & Transparency

- ✓ While awareness of transparency requirements is evident in all municipalities, there remains a notable gap in the adoption of regulations and practices related to data protection.
- ✓ There is a general lack of understanding across municipalities regarding to awareness of open data laws and their associated requirements.

Citizen-Centric Service Delivery

- ✓ There is a noticeable absence of practices aimed at evaluating the user-friendliness of service delivery platforms or assessing citizen satisfaction across municipalities, with the exception of Municipality of Tirana which has established a dedicated structure focused on monitoring citizen satisfaction.

The municipal e-readiness assessment exercise in Albania was a novel and comprehensive effort to evaluate the digital readiness of municipalities and the public. The findings and the developed roadmap provide valuable insights and recommendations for improving digital services and governance, paving the way for a more digitally mature and efficient public administration in Albania.

Re-engineering of selected municipal services in the municipality of Tirana

In the last SC of October 2023, the Minister for Local Government, requested an additional task for reviewing and recommending reengineering actions on municipal statistics, an area of municipal operations fed by and affecting all other activities as well as the quality of the local decision making.

Taking into account that Tirana is the most complex municipality representing all possible scenarios replicable in part in all other municipalities, the re-engineering process had to be implemented in the General Directorate of Information Technology, Communication, Innovation and Statistics (DITCIS). The Directorate within the central apparatus of the municipality is in charge of collecting, processing and reporting data and statistics for different internal and external needs and purposes ranging from information decision-making, public information, reporting to the central government, and responding to different requests from other stakeholders.

The need for re-engineering this business process, besides the size and complexity of Tirana Municipality, was evidenced because of observed shortfalls in data reporting, regularity, frequency, etc. which hampers the responsiveness of the

Municipality toward the public as well as to the internal and external requests. The scope of this exercise is to prepare the modalities and the path for "re-engineering" this internal service.

The primary aim of the project was to review and recommend re-engineering actions for the Data Directorate of the Municipality of Tirana. The focus was on enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of data collection, processing, and reporting functions managed by the General Directorate of Information Technology, Communication, Innovation, and Statistics (DITCIS). The assistance also aimed to possibly create a model that could be replicated in other municipalities.



The exercise started with a desk review of existing documents to understand the current state, engaging in face-to-face meetings with DITCIS staff from April to May 2024 to gain insights into existing procedures, processes, and systems. Detailed analysis of the organizational structure, metadata, indicators, and the Tirana Data Store Platform were carried out.

The project proposed changes for improved efficiency, including standards for data management and a minimum set of indicators, and a guide for replicating the improvements in other municipalities.

The recommendations for Tirana Municipality and other municipalities include measures for improving the organizational structure (establishing a Data Directorate with distinct sectors for data collection and analysis), developing comprehensive metadata and updating the list of indicators, improving the user interface and functionality of the Tirana Data Store Platform and the Open Data

platform, implementing regulations to ensure consistent and accurate data entry, and updating and approving SOPs for data management and reporting.

This assistance was specific and a novelty, nevertheless, it was appreciated by Tirana municipal staff. The support was provided within time limitations, which may have impacted the depth of analysis and the breadth of recommendations. Nevertheless, this was a positive attempt to bring in focus the important issue of municipal data management improvement.

Activity 2.2.1 – Establishment of an integrated platform for municipal IPSIS/performance

Action Reference:

Contribution to RESULT 2.2: The feasibility of a local government data platform for municipal IPSIS compliance and performance is assessed. (Original doc) Result 4 on original doc

Contributing to Result 4 - A local government data hub, inclusive of local level IPSIS module requirements is in place

Implementing Partner: International Individual Consultant

Accomplished Deliverables:

✓ IPSIS compliance review

Progress narrative

The Central Government has prioritized the overall adoption of the National Integrated Planning System (IPSIS) in the public administration and its local extension as a centralized standard planning monitoring and performance measurement instrument.

STAR3 was called in to support the assessment of the feasibility of this adoption and to pilot it at the local level eventually. In consultation with the government counterparts and given the complexity of the task, it was agreed to engage short-term international expertise to contribute to the evaluation of the feasibility and the design of a roadmap on the way forward.

Thus, in agreement with the partner institution (Good Governance Department at Prime Minister Office), an international consultant was engaged in a short assignment of 15 working days during Oct - Nov 2021, working to 1) Assess and evaluate the current National Systemic Data Plan (NSDP) 2027 implementation practices and state of affairs at the central level, 2) Evaluate IPSIS expandability at local self-government units and the ability of the latter to adopt the system, and 3) Provide strategic advice on consolidation and expansion of IPS by developing recommendations that need to be taken into consideration for the updated NSDP 2027, including an assessment of the resources for expansion at the local level.

The assessment implied consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, primarily central government institutions recommended by the counterpart and a few local governments. GGD accompanied the field evaluation process, including the selection and interviewing of central government institutions. A firsthand validation with GGD occurred during the field mission after each meeting and the interviewing process.

By the end of the consultancy, the expert provided a draft report on "Integrated Planning System consolidation and extension at the local level in Albania" and shared it with the main counterpart, the DGG at the Prime Minister's Office." The report was not favorable to adopting IPSIS at the local level.

The Government counterpart critically reviewed the expert report. However, it felt a deeper assessment was needed before coming to final conclusions, also taking into consideration the Government's internal restructuring in late 2021 – early 2022, leading to the establishment of SASPAC, which affected some institutional hierarchies, including the Good Governance Department. Following this request, UNDP brought back the same international expert to revisit the analysis and reflect on the feasibility in light of the re-confirmed government priorities.

This second review was carried out in June 2022 and concluded that the introduction of the IPS to LGUs is currently neither feasible nor warranted.

Significant institutional hurdles prevent a fluid institutional relationship between LGUs and the central government. Legal and regulatory adjustments are likely necessary to adjust these dysfunctions. Elements of such dysfunction include

unclear requirements, lack of standards, absence of local government participation in the design and the choice of indicators and targets, and weak institutional channels of communication between LGU and central government. Extending the system could be possible over the long run beyond the lifespan of the STAR3 project. Still, mechanisms in place to ensure inter-government policy dialogue would have to be strengthened. The Government is carrying out multiple significant institutional reforms which continue to affect the overall set-up of the State. All these elements make the introduction of a national IPS, in addition to the system's complexity, a challenging endeavor.

Considering the lack of feasibility, the revised STAR3 project document endorsed by the Project SC on 30 September 2022 discontinues any additional effort to support IPSIS expansion at the local level.

Activity 3.1.1 – Central level monitoring and reporting capacity building on drafting, implementation, and monitoring of NCSDLG

Action Reference:

Specific Objective 3 - Government institutions, responsible for decentralization and local government, are capacitated to effectively drive policy development, coordination, and monitoring.

Result 3.1: Central level government structures in charge of Decentralization and Local Government are supported in the drafting process of the new NCSDLG and are capacitated to monitor the implementation of the NCSDLG and its Action Plan

Implementing Partner: National Individual Consultants, FLAG - Foundation for Local Autonomy and Governance

Accomplished Deliverables

- ✓ Technical contribution to stocktaking and NCSDLG formulation and consultation
- ✓ NCSDLG monitoring instrument and capacity building

Progress narrative

Support to Drafting Process of the New Cross-cutting Strategy on Decentralization and Local Governance -

Following the request of MoI/ASLG and the approval of the project partners to support the drafting process of the New Cross-Cutting Strategy on Decentralization and Local Governance, the project adapted the assistance for supporting this exercise.

STAR3 project engaged expertise in support of the stocktaking processes in the fields of i) Water and Transport, ii) Local and Rural Development, iii) Social Services, iv) Environment, Forests, and Greening; v) Delegated functions, vi) Legal Framework, and vii) a facilitator for the strategy chapter related to “Local Economic and Rural Development”.

STAR3 assistance was provided in complementarity to other partners’ engagement; namely, SDC Strong Municipalities and SECO Local Finances took the lead in facilitating the finalization of the chapters addressing issues related to Services and Local Finances based on the accumulated specific experience in these areas, while the pillar on Local Democracy and EU accession integrated contributions from EU’s Municipalities for Europe, SDC’s Strong Municipalities and STAR3 projects. Furthermore, OECD SIGMA supported the drafting process of the strategy with orientation and advice related to the methodological and content-wise aspects.

Also, STAR3 supported the Ministry of Interior/Agency for the Support of Local Governance in ensuring a consultative and inclusive decision-making process. This involved facilitating and supporting various consultations and brainstorming meetings among experts and, notably, organizing four regional consultative meetings from November to December 2022, involving participants from all 61 municipalities.

Finally, STAR3 supported the iterative editing of the NCSDLG drafts until the last version, which was formally approved in April 2023.

Capacity building for NCSDLG monitoring and reporting - This activity aimed to support the Mol/ASLG and other relevant institutional stakeholders in establishing a system for coordinating, monitoring, and reporting on the progress of implementing the National Strategy for Decentralization and Local Governance (NCSDLG) 2023-2030.

An approach has been developed to achieve this objective after extensive consultation with ASLG and the Local Government Directorate of the then Ministry of the Interior. The approach encompassed the following steps:

Reviving the NCSDLG technical group: reactivating the technical group established during the formulation of the NCSDLG, ensuring active participation and collaboration from relevant stakeholders, now on implementing the Strategy.

Developing a monitoring system: the support included the search for developing and adopting a structured and possibly IT-supported monitoring system to facilitate tracking the implementation progress and analyzing the data and information.



In parallel, the support aimed to enhance the capacities of key stakeholders in areas such as data collection, analysis, aggregation, and other related activities and to create standardized templates and layouts for data collection and reporting.

Following an open call issued in July 2023 to implement this activity, FLAG was selected as the service provider in September 2023. However, the activity did not start immediately as planned, as the government engaged in September in a reorganization of the institutional responsibilities for local government, establishing the position of Minister of State for Local Government and revamping the Agency for Support to Local Government. As a result, the activity's inception report was completed by the end of December 2023.

From January until May 2024, several workshops were organized with the relevant central and local stakeholders to discuss, test, and gather feedback on the monitoring framework's design and accurately define the outputs for Strategy Action Plan measures.

The approach involved developing a comprehensive monitoring framework, including standard operating procedures, reporting templates, and an analytical monitoring instrument. Capacity-building activities were conducted through workshops, training sessions, and hands-on support to ASLG staff and other stakeholders involved in strategy monitoring and reporting. A core team of ASLG staff received focused training and day-to-day coaching on conducting all aspects of strategy monitoring.

Several challenges were identified during the work undertaken to draft the monitoring framework.

Lack of measurable elements of the Strategy: The measures contained in the NCSDLG Action Plan often cannot be quantified and, therefore, measured. Key indicators of performance and annual target values are expressed in different ways in the strategy annex: as percentage points, as a yearly cumulative value expressed as a numeral, as a cumulative value expressed as a percentage, but in many cases undefined for which the parameter is intended and missing the baseline value and target value. The project invested a lot of effort to improve or establish this "measurability" in intensive consultations with institutional stakeholders.

As a recommendation, the first monitoring report should also specify the starting point for measures, objectives, and indicators. Based on the level reported in 2023, the Strategy should be revised to assess and determine indicators for the measures and objectives. The strategy review can also facilitate the review of the methodology and values of indicative costs, thereby clarifying the role of responsible institutions in the budgeting process.

Responsible coordinators and insufficient information at local level for the Strategy - The municipality's responsible directorates reported little knowledge of the measures and the indicative costs provided for their implementation from

various sources, as well as a lack of knowledge of monitoring and reporting the implementation of the Strategy's measures.

As a recommendation, the implementation and monitoring of the Strategy will be more effective through training of LGUs' staff on the medium—and long-term measures. In particular, finance departments should be familiar with the budget for implementing the Strategy measures, the methodology for calculating current and capital costs, and the differentiated recording of expenditures according to the sources of financing.

Funding and Budgeting - Reporting by line ministries and municipalities shows a lack of budgetary programme codes and financial resources dedicated to implementing planned measures in the Strategy Action Plan. The implementation and monitoring of the Strategy will, therefore, be deficient if they are not budgeted. Budgeting will testify to the importance of the process and enable its implementation.

Overlap of responsibilities in implementation - The Strategy defines up to three central institutions responsible and up to six contributing institutions for implementing a specific measure. In cases where the primary responsibility is shared among several central institutions, accurate reporting and taking responsibility or merit for progress or lack of progress is difficult.

It is recommended that during the mid-term review of the Strategy, a revision be made to link measures with the main responsible institution. This institution bears responsibility for accurate reporting on the measure's implementation and financing its implementation.

Strengthening the horizontal ministerial role in cross-sector monitoring of the Strategy - For the process of implementing the Decentralisation Strategy to improve its functioning and consequently its monitoring, a responsible cross-sectoral structure at the central level would be needed. This structure, in fulfillment of the government policy for decentralization led by the Minister of State for Local Government, will carry out its mission by exercising the competencies in line ministries and other independent institutions.

The project delivered a monitoring framework with standardized tools and procedures aligned with the national system IPSIS. An analytical monitoring instrument (in Excel) is integral to the framework. It is designed to collate the data retrieved through reporting templates and generate the diagrams included in the report outline to monitor the status of Strategy implementation, financing, and risk. The instrument provides details at the measure level, as well as a dashboard at the overall Strategy and policy goal levels.

ASLG now has a dedicated Sector for Strategy Monitoring with staff trained in the monitoring process. Standard operating procedures are in place, and staff have experience using monitoring templates and analytical tools. However, the full development of a comprehensive monitoring system is still in progress. Institutional memory and individual capacity will provide the basis for the sustainability of the capacities developed.

In practice, the development of a strategy monitoring and reporting system may take time before it can comprehensively and efficiently serve the purposes of policymaking and accountability for the decentralization reform. Once monitoring tools and frameworks are utilized, they should improve over time the depth and quality of the information generated during the process and eventually be used for decision-making.

IV. Results Framework

GoA - UN Programme of Cooperation for Sustainable Development (2017 – 2021) Outcome 1. State and civil society organizations perform effectively and with accountability for consolidated democracy in line with international norms and standards.
GoA - UN Programme of Cooperation for Sustainable Development (2017 – 2021) Output 3.1: Local Government Units (LGUs) are able to deliver equitable, quality services and strengthen the influence of citizens in decision-making. Indicator: 1.3 Perceptions of performance of public institutions; Baseline: Local Government 13%; Target: Local Government 50%; Current Status: Strategy approved in 2015 and under implementation
Applicable Output (s) from UNDP Strategic Plan 2018-2021: Signature solution 2: Strengthen effective, inclusive, and accountable governance. Innovative support for improved regulatory capacities, enhanced legal frameworks, strengthened institutions and local governance capacities.
Project title: STAR3 – Sustaining and Advancing Local Governance Reform

EXPECTED OUTPUTS	ACTIVITIES	OUTPUT INDICATORS ¹²	BASELINE		TARGET INDICATORS	Achieved Indicators	DATA SOURCE	DATA COLLECTION METHODS
			VALUE	YEAR				
1. Concrete methodology for public consultation and participation adopted and implemented in seven municipalities and endorsed as a municipal standard	1.1 <i>Support public consultation and participation practices at municipal level</i>	# of Municipalities developing consultation plans and instruments	0	2020	At least 7 municipalities develop and implement consultation plans and instruments	7municipalities developed and implemented consultation plans and instruments	STAR3 project reports	Project reports Municipality reports
		# of municipalities getting acquainted with the identified good practices	0	2020	54 municipalities get acquainted with the good practices	Consultation practice is disseminated to other 54 municipalities through 4 regional workshops and the online platform konsultimivendor.al	STAR3 project reports Platform: konsultimivendor.al	Project reports
2 Equip 1/3 of Albanian municipalities with	1.3 <i>Consolidate and expand the practice of integrity planning</i>	# of municipalities developed and adopted Integrity Plans	6	2020	Additional 15 municipalities develop and adopt	23 municipalities developed and	STAR3 project reports	Municipality reports Project reports

EXPECTED OUTPUTS	ACTIVITIES	OUTPUT INDICATORS ¹²	BASELINE		TARGET INDICATORS	Achieved Indicators	DATA SOURCE	DATA COLLECTION METHODS
tailored and functional integrity plans and promote such standards for all					Integrity Plans bringing the total number to 1/3 of Albanian Municipalities.	adopted Integrity Plans		
		# of integrity Indexes for measuring LG integrity Performance developed	0	2020	1 integrity index for measurement of municipal integrity performance developed.	1 Integrity Index for measurement of municipal integrity performance developed	STAR3 project reports	Municipality reports Project reports
		# of guides developed for adopting IP # of municipalities getting acquainted to the guide	0	2020	1 guide developed 40 municipalities get acquainted with the IP guide	1 guide developed Four regional workshops organized with the participation of 61 municipalities	STAR3 project reports	Municipality reports Project reports
3.1 Digital readiness is assessed in depth in all three key dimensions (Ecosystem, Local Government and citizens readiness), while the one stop shop system functionality is sustained ss	3.1 – Improving and sustaining OSS system usage at municipal level	# number of public awareness campaigns % of women reached	0	2020	1 awareness-raising campaign At least 50%	1 awareness-raising campaign prepared Campaign not implemented as project underwent a revision	STAR3 project reports	Project reports
		# AUs for which basic IT infrastructure is procured	0	2020	Aus of 49 Municipalities	50 municipalities are equipped with minimum OSSIS infrastructure for 139 AUs	STAR3 project reports	Project reports
		# contracts for software and hardware maintenance service # OSS BI Monitoring	0 0	2019 2019	1 software and hardware maintenance contract for 3 years 1 BI serving for OSS monitoring	1 software and hardware contract until December 2023 1 BI solution developed and used for OSS monitoring	STAR3 project reports	Project reports
	3.2 Digital Readiness Assessment	# Country's Digital Ecosystem Assessment	0	2022	At least one assessment report	Not conducted, considered not	STAR3 project reports	Project reports

EXPECTED OUTPUTS	ACTIVITIES	OUTPUT INDICATORS ¹²	BASELINE		TARGET INDICATORS	Achieved Indicators	DATA SOURCE	DATA COLLECTION METHODS
					of the Digital Ecosystem	relevant by the government counterpart (NAIS)		
		# Municipal E-government readiness Assessment	0	2022	At least 61 individual municipal Reports on Municipal e-government Readiness	1 national and 61 individual municipal Reports on Municipal e-government Readiness	STAR3 project reports	Project reports
		#Public e-Government Readiness	0	2022	At least one report on public e-government readiness	1 national and 61 individual municipal reports t on public e-government readiness	STAR3 project reports And UNDP Albania Web-page	Project reports
		# Roadmap on Digital Transformation of local Services	0	2022	1 roadmap	1 Roadmap developed	STAR3 project reports	Project reports
4 Develop consensually a local data platform framework, inclusive of a local IPSIS module	4.1 Evaluation of feasibility for IPSIS expansion at local level (linked to result 4)	# Evaluation Report informing further steps	0	2020	1 Report	Two Feasibility Reports were prepared and consulted with the Government; recommendations acted upon	STAR2 project reports	Project reports
5. Central-level government structures in charge of decentralization and local governance are capacitated to monitor the implementation of the NCSDLG and its Action Plan	5.1 Central level policymaking, monitoring and reporting capacity building	# strategies drafted # consultation processes # of women stakeholders consulted	0	2022	1 7 70 40%	New NCSDLG approved in April 2023 4 formal regional consultations and several technical consultations with the participation of 61 municipalities and several central government institutions, CSOs and International partners	Project Reports, Strategy Document Attendance List of consultations	Project Reports

EXPECTED OUTPUTS	ACTIVITIES	OUTPUT INDICATORS ¹²	BASELINE		TARGET INDICATORS	Achieved Indicators	DATA SOURCE	DATA COLLECTION METHODS
						78% (7 out of 9) of STAR3 NCSDLG experts were women		
		# monitoring and reporting systems serving to Mol	0	2020	1 monitoring system developed and endorsed by Mol	1 Monitoring system developed	STAR3 project reports; Mol reports	Project reports
		# of CG officials trained % of women trained	0	2020	At least 5 CG officials trained on the use of the system At least 50%	All 3 ASLG officials, part of the Strategy Monitoring Unit, trained and coached on the use of the monitoring system	STAR3 project reports. Mol	Project reports

V. Risks Overview and Management

The project successfully managed and mitigated most of the identified risks through a series of concrete actions. The risk mitigation measures outlined in the Description of the Action were implemented effectively, resulting in strengthened capacities, enhanced government ownership, coordination with other initiatives, inter-institutional collaboration, and adaptation to institutional changes.

However, Risk 5 has indeed materialized in a sharper form than expected. The Government's decision to switch to online services from 1 May 2022 directly affected the project. It caused first a project halt and then a comprehensive project revision that removed OSS support for administrative units and replaced it with the task of undertaking several national e-readiness surveys. The project managed the situation by adapting its activities, although the challenge remains the limited time available for completing the new activities.

Risk Number	Risk	Concrete Mitigation Actions Taken
1	Risk 1: Limited institutional and technical capacities at central level	- Seconded qualified staff complemented MoI and subsequently MSLG capacities, who in turn supported policymaking and monitoring processes facilitated institutional coordination and were key in the formulation of the new NCSDLG - Assistance was provided to build ASLG in-house capacities for integrity planning. - Support was provided to improve the NCSDLG monitoring and reporting systems through institutional coordination, capacity building, and technology adoption.
2	Risk 2: Lack of national and sub-national government ownership	- The project established and maintained strong collaboration with MoI/MSLI and ASLG, assuring understanding of their problems and needs and responding to them effectively - Close cooperation and communication was established with the National Project Director, discussing various matters regularly. - Selected majors were engaged in the project's steering committee meetings, ensuring ownership of LGs on the STAR3 project assistance. - Close contact was maintained with all municipalities, responding to their demands within project limitations. - The public awareness could have been more intense and capillary; it has also been somehow affected by the COVID restrictions while complementary efforts were undertaken through the use of alternative sources as the social media
3	Risk 3: Overlapping or contradictory initiatives from other donors/government	The project has taken actions in line with the proposed mitigation measures: - Consultations, coordination, and division of labor have been undertaken to address areas of potential overlap, specifically related to municipal performance and public consultation. - Matters related to overlapping were discussed in the project steering committee and ad hoc technical meetings during implementation. - An increased use of national counterparts for coordination among stakeholders was ensured during the STAR3 project implementation.
4	Risk 4: Institutional rigidity and resistance to inter-institutional collaboration	- The project has not encountered significant problems or suffered from inter-institutional collaboration directly. - MoI/ MSLG could have played a more active role in mobilizing municipalities to be proactive in response to project offers. - On the other hand, MoI/MSLG has put its efforts into facilitating project communication and cooperation with AKSHI, a complex and novel project partnership.

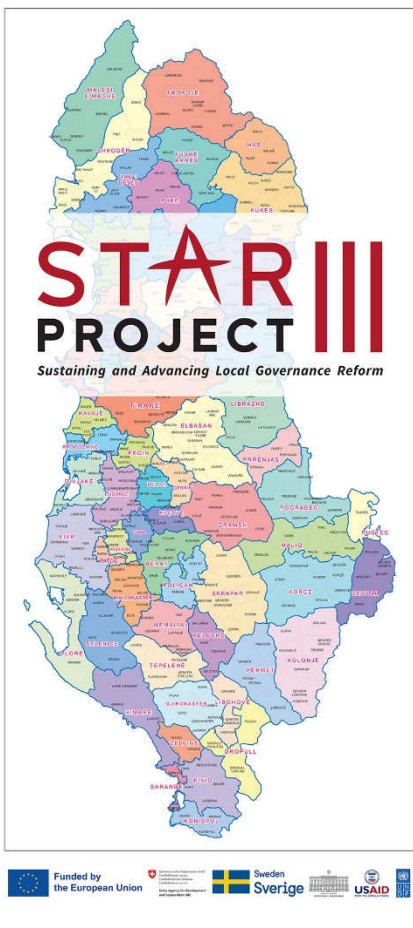
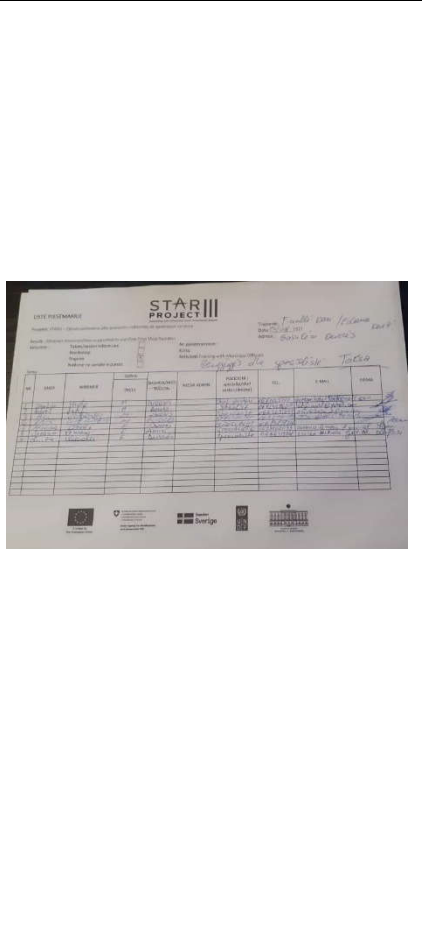
Risk Number	Risk	Concrete Mitigation Actions Taken
5	Risk 5: Government institutional changes impacting project implementation pace	– This risk was proven true and directly affected the project implementation pace. – Project adapted and revised, accommodating the need for a national readiness survey. – The last mile extension, January- June 2024, assured adequate time for the implementation of the last project activity, ensuring preparation of the relevant institution for taking over the project results
6	Risk 6: Reluctance to adopt behavioral changes among local communities	– STAR3 successfully introduced novel practices and instruments. - Project approach has been to call for voluntary participation, and this has worked satisfactorily. – Municipalities have widely accepted and used the municipal OSS, demonstrating their understanding of its benefits and advantages. – Municipalities continue using the OSS despite its future replacement, indicating their recognition of its value.
7	Risk 7: Insufficient consideration of gender perspectives by local stakeholders	– Mainstreamed gender in all capacity-building and data analysis activities. – Efforts made to distinguish gender perspectives, with further potential for improvement. – Ensured gender considerations are integrated into project assessments and recommendations. – Probably more could be done in this respect, although the project has suffered several setbacks during its implementation.
8	Risk 8: Municipalities' views and needs not considered	– Raised awareness about the project's activities and benefits among municipalities, resulting in a satisfactory response. – In general, municipalities have proven to be cooperative and welcoming, although the project does not address many areas of needed support and operates within its time and financial limits.

VI. Communication and Visibility (more in supporting documents)

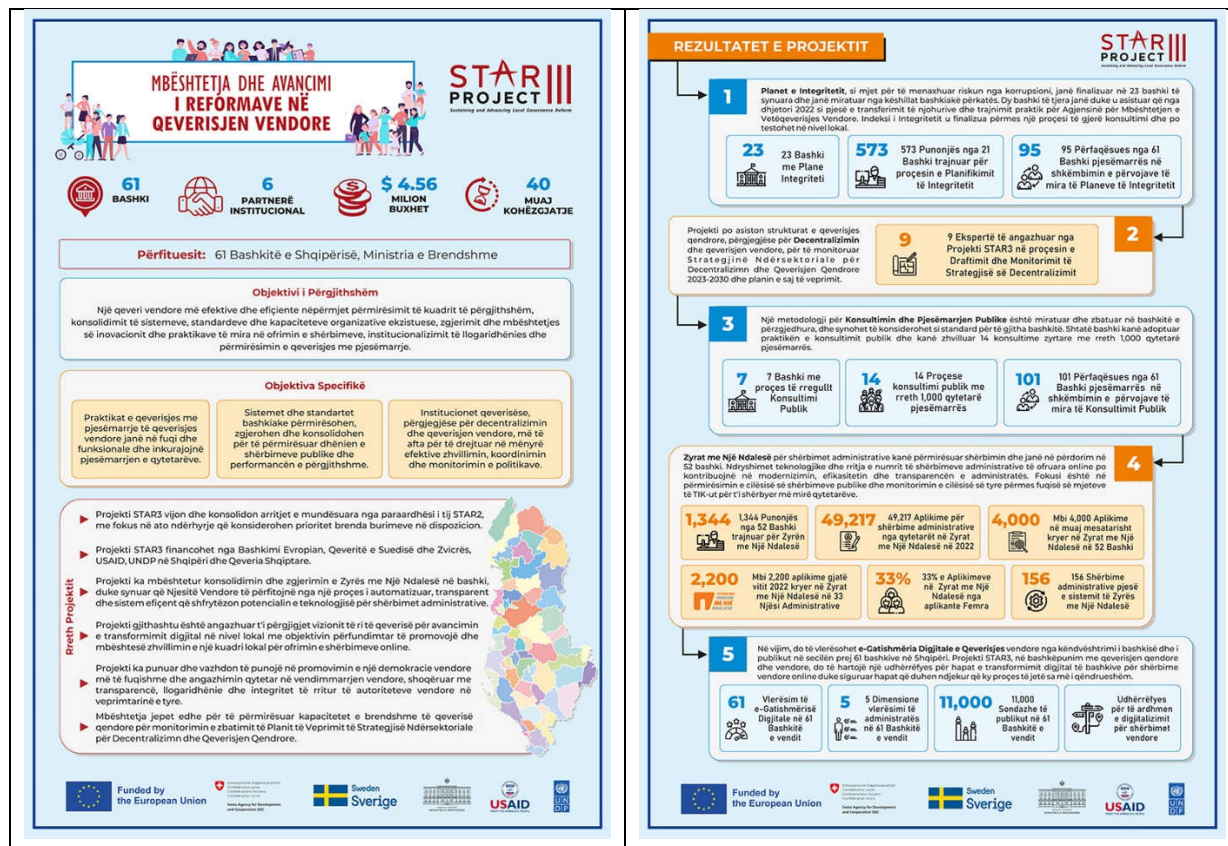
The project has designed and is using its branding and identity materials with particular evidence of project funding partners. In all its communications.

The project applies a policy of its branding and identity with all partners and service providers implementing the project activities:

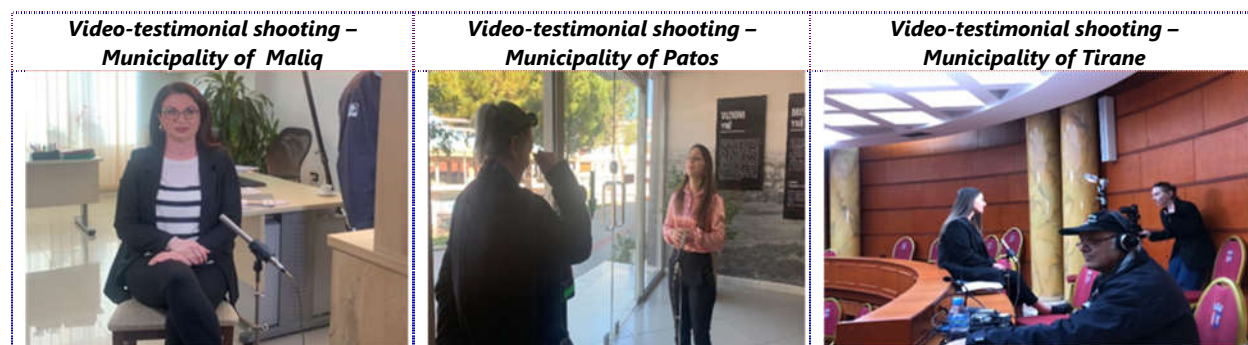
- ✓ A project Banner is designed and is mandatory to be used by all the service providers organizing public events and training during the implementation of project activities.
- ✓ A Communication Guideline for service providers has been drafted providing detailed instruction on project branding, communication, and visibility.
- ✓ Project templates for official letters, power points presentations, reports, and other deliverables include the project identity and are of mandatory use from the project implementing partners and service providers.
- ✓ A list of participants with the project identity is designed and is mandatory for all the service providers reflecting the elements of the result framework the project regularly monitors.

		
Cover page Communication and Visibility Guide	Roll-up Banner of STAR3 Proejct	Template List of Participants

A project fact sheet is designed, aiming at informing various audiences on project objectives, expected results and progress.



In the framework of the efforts to promote the best practices of Integrity planning at the local level and the benefits of municipalities from this practice, 7 video testimonials are in production to be used during the Integrity planning dissemination events and campaign, with testimonials from municipalities of Tirana, Maliq, Mat, Shijak, Elbasan, Kukes and Patos. The testimonials promote the aspects and impact of the Integrity planning processes and implementation.

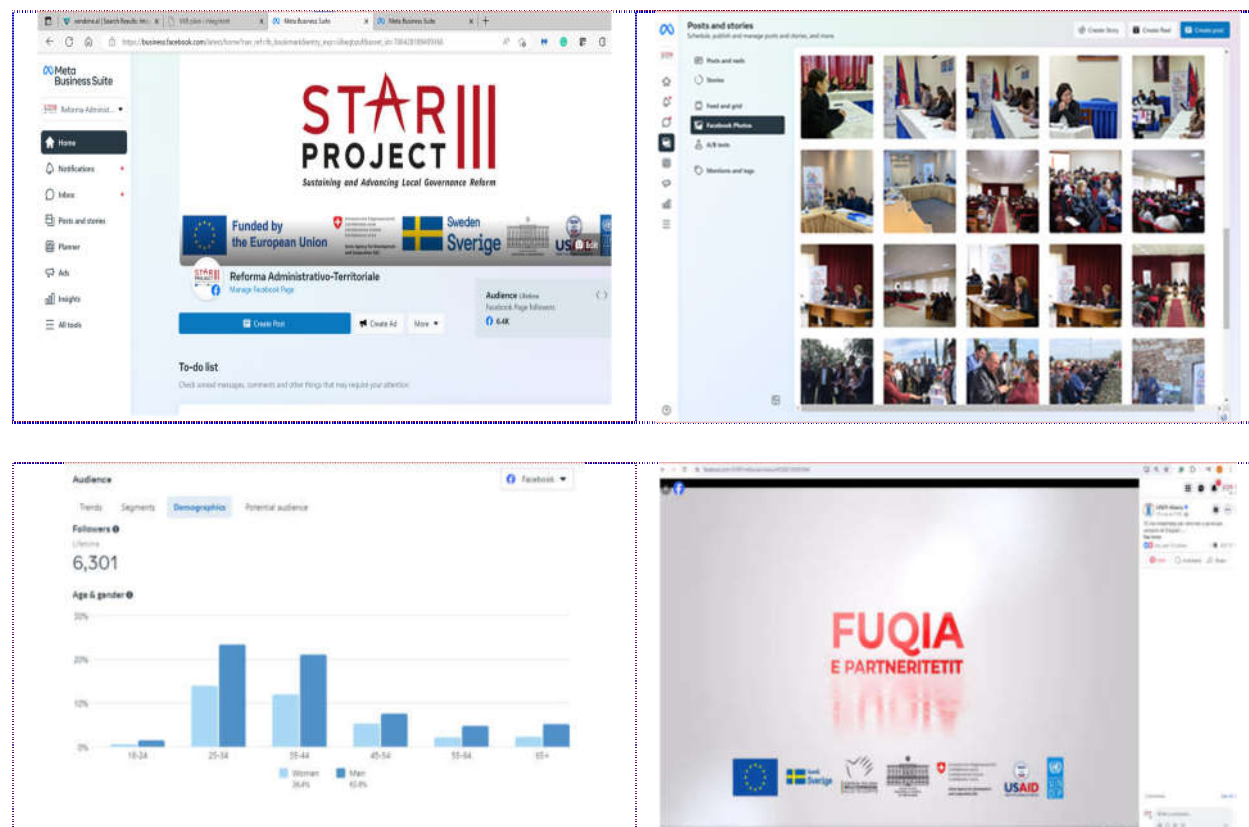


Promotional videos and presentations were prepared by the project and Implementing Partners in the framework of the final Event of STAR3, marking “Ten Years of Partnership in Support of Local Government Reforms”



The project ensures its on-line presence through its own social media and the ones of UNDP:

- A dedicated [Facebook page](#) is active for STAR3 with about 6.3 K followers. Key visual and narrative activities are shared through this communication channel achieving a post reach of 3,423.



- UNDP in Albania [UNDP Albania | Facebook](#) with about 33K followers page and UNDP [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) accounts.

VII. Provisional Project Expenditures

OFFICIAL BUDGET (Amendment 2)		Exp 2021	Exp 2022	Exp 2023	Exp 2024	Total exp	Variations by line	%
EXPENDITURE LINES	TOTAL COST (in USD)							
1. Human Resources								
1.1 Salaries (gross salaries including social security charges and other related costs, local staff)								
1.1.1 Technical								
1.1.1.1 National Project Manager (Action staff)	100,800	17,200	32,444	30,303	20,320	100,266	534	
1.1.1.2 Quality Assurance Expert (Action staff)	42,522	13,600	25,652	3,031	-	42,283	239	
1.1.1.3 Local Government Coordinator (Action staff)	81,000	11,801	24,840	30,154	17,400	84,194	(3,194)	
1.1.1.4 OSSIS National Expert (Action staff)	75,110	21,273	25,575	24,694	10,143	81,685	(6,575)	
1.1.1.5 Local Data Expert (Action staff)	61,800	11,910	22,509	27,315	(63)	61,672	129	
1.1.1.6 Mol Support Expert (Action staff)	168,912	30,642	50,248	61,061	35,989	177,941	(9,029)	
1.1.1.7 PR and Communications Expert (Action staff)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
1.1.1.8 Regional Coordinators (Action staff)	278,430	58,603	111,559	109,987	-	280,149	(1,719)	
1.1.1.9 CO Policy Advisory and Support		-	-	-	-		-	
1.1.1.9.1 National Prog Officer (UNDP staff, 20%) (not eligible for EU financing)	50,040	10,452	15,932	14,785	3,090	44,259	5,781	
1.1.1.9.2.Comms Officer (UNDP staff, 15%) (not eligible for EU financing)	38,880	11,132	11,171	10,745	-	33,048	5,832	
1.1.1.9.3 Prog Associate (UNDP staff, 10%) (not eligible for EU financing)	11,880	660	2,422	7,871	-	10,953	927	
1.1.1.10 ST Consultants	50,840	-	-	19,100	24,403	43,504	7,336	
1.1.1.11 National IT Analyst (Action Staff)	56,800	-	5,760	35,610	20,920	62,290	(5,490)	
1.1.2 Administrative/ support staff		-	-	-	-			
1.1.2.1 Senior Finance Assistant (Action staff)	64,764	10,327	19,533	23,658	12,105	65,624	(860)	
1.1.2.2 Senior Admin Assistant (Action staff)	64,764	10,330	19,666	23,839	14,204	68,039	(3,275)	
1.1.2.3 Project Assistant (Action staff)	34,500	6,490	12,701	15,279	-	34,470	30	
1.1.2.4 Drivers (Action staff)	85,104	13,976	25,813	30,989	17,292	88,071	(2,967)	
1.2 Salaries (gross salaries + social security charges, expat/int. staff)								

OFFICIAL BUDGET (Amendment 2)		Exp 2021	Exp 2022	Exp 2023	Exp 2024	Total exp	Variations by line	%
EXPENDITURE LINES	TOTAL COST (in USD)							
1.2.1 Int'l S/T OSSIS Expert	75,582	19,190	4,893	25,725	25,725	75,533	50	
Subtotal Human Resources	1,341,728	247,585	410,719	494,146	201,528	1,353,979	(12,251)	-1%
2. Travel								
2.1 Per diem	13,500	1,061	4,673	5,528	2,578	13,840	(340)	
Subtotal Travel	13,500	1,061	4,673	5,528	2,578	13,840	(340)	-3%
3. Equipment and supplies								
3.1.1 Office IT equipment	11,660	-	8,923.40	2,735.76	-	11,659	1	
3.1.2 Office furniture	0.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Subtotal Equipment and supplies	11,660	-	8,923	2,736	-	11,659	1	0%
4. Local office								
4.1 Vehicle costs						-		
4.1.1 Fuel	9,000	1,005	2,333	1,014	1,246	5,598	3,402	
4.1.2 Vehicle maintenance	15,336	1,021	8,385	4,584	3,497	17,487	(2,151)	
4.2 Office rent & cleaning	53,136	8,523	17,241	19,078	10,361	55,202	(2,066)	
4.3 Office supplies and sundries	7,776	830	3,216	2,010	1,273	7,328	448	
4.4 Office utility services	21,600	2,416	12,645	4,154	3,167	22,383	(783)	
Subtotal Local office	106,848	13,796	43,820	30,840	19,543	107,998	(1,150)	-1%
5. Other costs, services								
5.1 Audit costs	14,600	0	6,600	0	11,800	18,400	(3,800)	
5.2 Evaluation costs	8,000	0	0	0	0	-	8,000	
5.3 Translation, interpreters	2,600	0	1,198	1,314	767	3,278	(678)	
5.4 Financial services (bank charges/commissions)	2,736	850	296	865	66	2,076	660	
5.5 Costs of conferences/seminars	19,000	0	8,436	0	8,491	16,928	2,072	
5.6. Visibility actions	34,000	1,500	7,772	13,561	12,881	35,714	(1,714)	
Subtotal Other costs, services	80,936	2,350	24,302	15,739	34,005	76,396	4,540	6%
6. Other								
RESULT 1								

OFFICIAL BUDGET (Amendment 2)		Exp 2021	Exp 2022	Exp 2023	Exp 2024	Total exp	Variations by line	%
EXPENDITURE LINES	TOTAL COST (in USD)							
6.1.1 Contract Participation and Consultation	127,038	12,835	65,994	38,172	-	117,001	10,037	
6.1.2 Contract Thematic Consultations events	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
RESULT 2		-	-	-	-			
6.2.1.1 Rollout Integrity Planning to new municipalities	274,371	88,954	109,456	38,433	54,981	291,824	(17,453)	
RESULT 3		-	-	-	-			
6.3.2 Contract Public Awareness on OSSIS Utilization	17,232	4,089	13,143	-	-	17,232	-	
6.3.4 Contract Municipal IT Procurement & Installation	229,500	-	229,400	-	-	229,400	100	
6.3.5 Contract OSSIS functionality and maintenance	458,000	139,328	137,557	185,889	(1,037)	461,737	(3,737)	
6.3.6 Contract OSSIS Central Hardware maintenance and support	213,000	-	94,961	119,208	(335)	213,834	(834)	
6.3.7 Country's digital ecosystem assessment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
6.3.8 Municipal & Public e-government readiness assessment	746,598	-	5,038	524,799	216,760	746,598	-	
Piloting Municipal service re-engineering	76,000	-	-	-	75,898	75,898	102	
RESULT 4		-	-	-	-			
6.4.1 Contract Development & Capacity Building on Data Platform	29,240	14,620	14,620	-	-	29,240	-	
RESULT 5		-	-	-	-			
6.5.1 Government Support formulation and monitoring new NCSDLG	210,427	-	93,337	5,937	116,213	215,486	(5,059)	
Subtotal Other	2,381,406	259,827	763,505	912,438	462,481	2,398,250	(16,844)	-1%
		-	-	-	-			
7. Subtotal direct eligible costs of the Action (1-6)	3,936,077	524,618	1,255,942	1,461,427	720,135	3,962,122	(26,045)	-1%
8.Remuneration (maximum 7% of 7, subtotal of direct eligible costs of the Action)	261,217	35,318	86,543	101,918	49,192	272,972	11,755	
9. Total eligible costs of the Action, excluding reserve (7+ 8)	4,197,294	559,936	1,342,485	1,563,345	769,327	4,235,094	(37,799)	-1%
10. Provision for contingency reserve (maximum 5% of 7, subtotal of direct eligible costs of the Action)		-	-	-	-			
11. Total eligible costs (9+10)	4,197,294	559,936	1,342,485	1,563,345	769,327	4,235,094	(37,799)	-1%
12. - Taxes - Contributions in kind		-	-	-	-			
13. Total accepted costs of the Action (11+12)	4,197,294	559,936	1,342,485	1,563,345	769,327	4,235,094	(37,799)	-1%

IX. Conclusions

Overall, the Sustaining and Advancing Local Governance Reform (STAR3) project has significantly contributed to supporting decentralization and local government reforms in Albania. Despite encountering challenges and changes in the local government reform landscape, the project has successfully adapted its scope and implemented key activities in the past and present.

The project has effectively managed and mitigated the identified risks through concrete actions, such as seconding qualified staff, strengthening close collaboration with the Ministry of Interior (Mol) and other stakeholders, and addressing potential overlaps with other donor initiatives. These measures have enhanced institutional capacities, coordination, and ownership, contributing to the project's success.

The project's support for formulating the new National Strategy for Decentralization and Local Governance (NCSDLG) has been a crucial undertaking. The collaboration with other partners has ensured a consultative and inclusive decision-making process.

The project's efforts in public consultation and participation have yielded positive outcomes, with several municipalities developing annual consultation plans and conducting public consultations. Utilizing an electronic platform for consultation activities has been successful, reaching beyond the seven targeted municipalities. A lesson learned here is that municipalities are increasingly adopting a culture change, demonstrated by their voluntary and willing participation in the project activities, accepting more transparency and inclusion. This area still needs support and nurturing for adopting best practices and strengthening the participatory decision-making culture across municipalities.

Building upon the piloting of municipal integrity plans in STAR2, the integrity planning activity has been instrumental in supporting additional municipalities in developing their integrity plans. Developing an Integrity Index and a training plan for knowledge transfer to the Agency for the Support of Local Governance (ASLG) will further strengthen the integrity planning processes. Despite the support, the project believes there is a need to continue providing technical support and capacity building to ASLG and promote the adoption and implementation of integrity plans by all municipalities if we want to ensure the sustainability of these efforts.

The project's support for the expansion of one-stop shops (OSS) to administrative units faced challenges due to the Government's decision to shift to online service delivery. This was the project's second major stumbling block, and, as a result, the project had to suspend its OSS expansion-related activities. The encouraging element here is that most targeted municipalities widely use OSS, and this practice demonstrates the municipality's eagerness to embrace new approaches.

The inclusion of digital readiness assessments as a new project task has responded to the Government's request and the evolving digital landscape. This task is a novelty never undertaken before, and there is a high expectation the findings would be of interest to both the Government and the development partners as well as the municipalities themselves.

The capacity-building support for NCSDLG monitoring and reporting is considered critical and essential project support. This is also a novel intervention, and the project expects to contribute to sustainable coordination and data collection for monitoring the implementation of the strategy.

Overall, the STAR3 project has demonstrated resilience and adaptability in navigating the changing local government reform landscape. By effectively managing risks, collaborating with stakeholders, and responding to evolving needs, the project has contributed to advancing decentralization and local governance reforms in Albania. The pooled funding instrument and approach have proven successful so far, and there is potential to advance in this direction through new synergies and partnerships.

As the country progresses in its EU accession process, having completed the chapters' screening, it is critical to ensure the continued reform momentum. Continued focus on strengthening local governance will be crucial while addressing challenges in areas like municipal capacities, fiscal decentralization, and digital transformation.

The STAR3 project have contributed to Albania's readiness for EU accession in areas like public administration reform and anti-corruption and supported the development of new frameworks, systems and capacities that need to be fully embedded within government institutions. For example, the integrity planning process should be expanded to all municipalities under ASLG leadership. The NCSDLG monitoring framework needs to be operationalized and refined over time by ASLG and other stakeholders.

Continued investment in human resources is needed, especially at the local level, to sustain and build on achievements. This includes further training on integrity planning, public consultation, digital skills, etc.

Building on the e-readiness assessments and the roadmap for municipal digital transformation, concrete actions must be taken to modernize local governance.

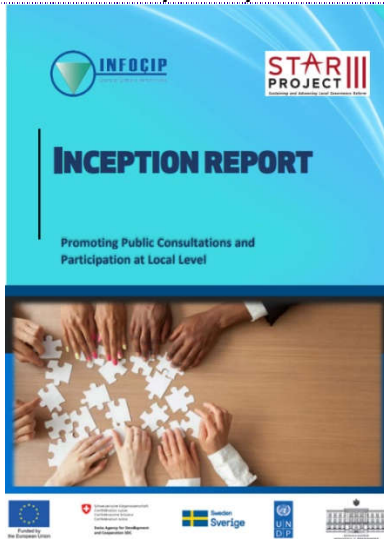
To ensure sustainability, reforms must remain people-centered, respecting principles of social inclusion and access and leaving no one behind. Continued efforts are needed to strengthen overall good governance, transparency, integrity, efficiency and professionalism at both central and local levels.

STAR3 has laid important groundwork, but sustained commitment from government, donors, and local stakeholders will be essential to fully realize Albania's decentralization and EU integration goals.

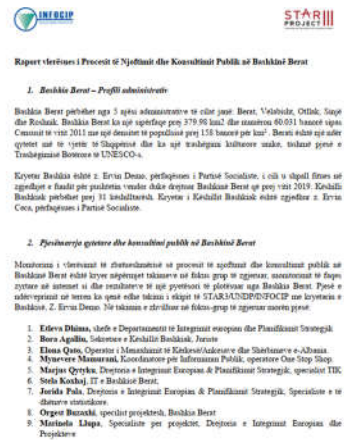
X. Annexes

Annex 1: Public Consultation

Inception Report



Situational Analysis Berat Municipality



Public Consultation Web Platform



Real Life Consultation Meeting – Municipality of Patos



**Real Life Consultation Meeting –
Municipality of Roskovec**



Meeting with Municipality of Lezhe



Regional Dissemination Workshop – Berat



**Regional
Dissemination Workshop – Gjirokastr**



Regional Dissemination Workshop – Korce



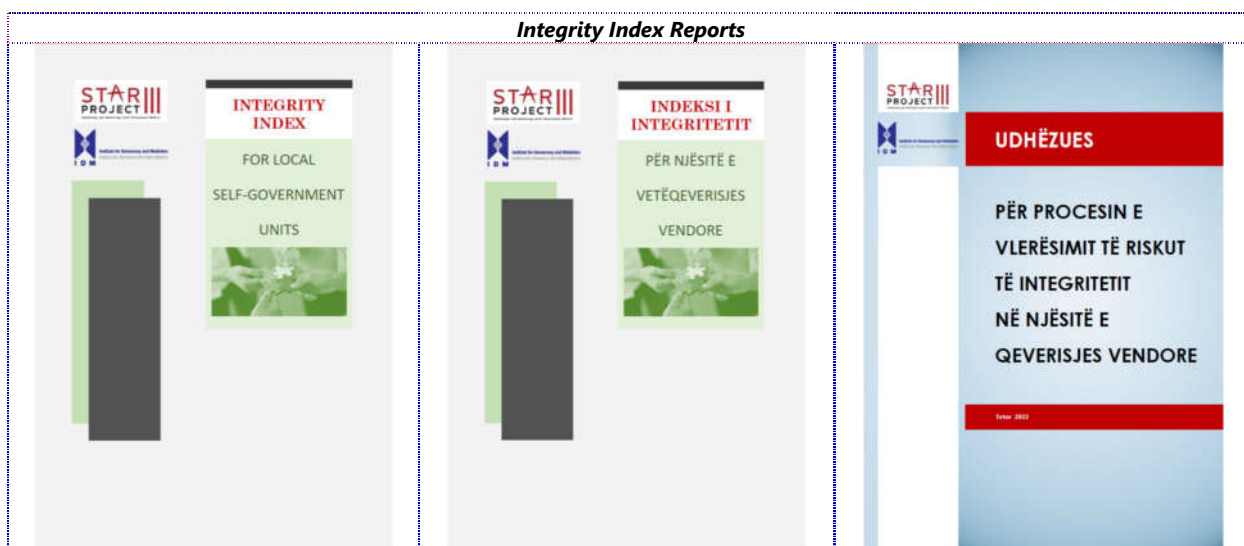
Regional Dissemination Workshop – Shkoder



Annex 2: Integrity Planning

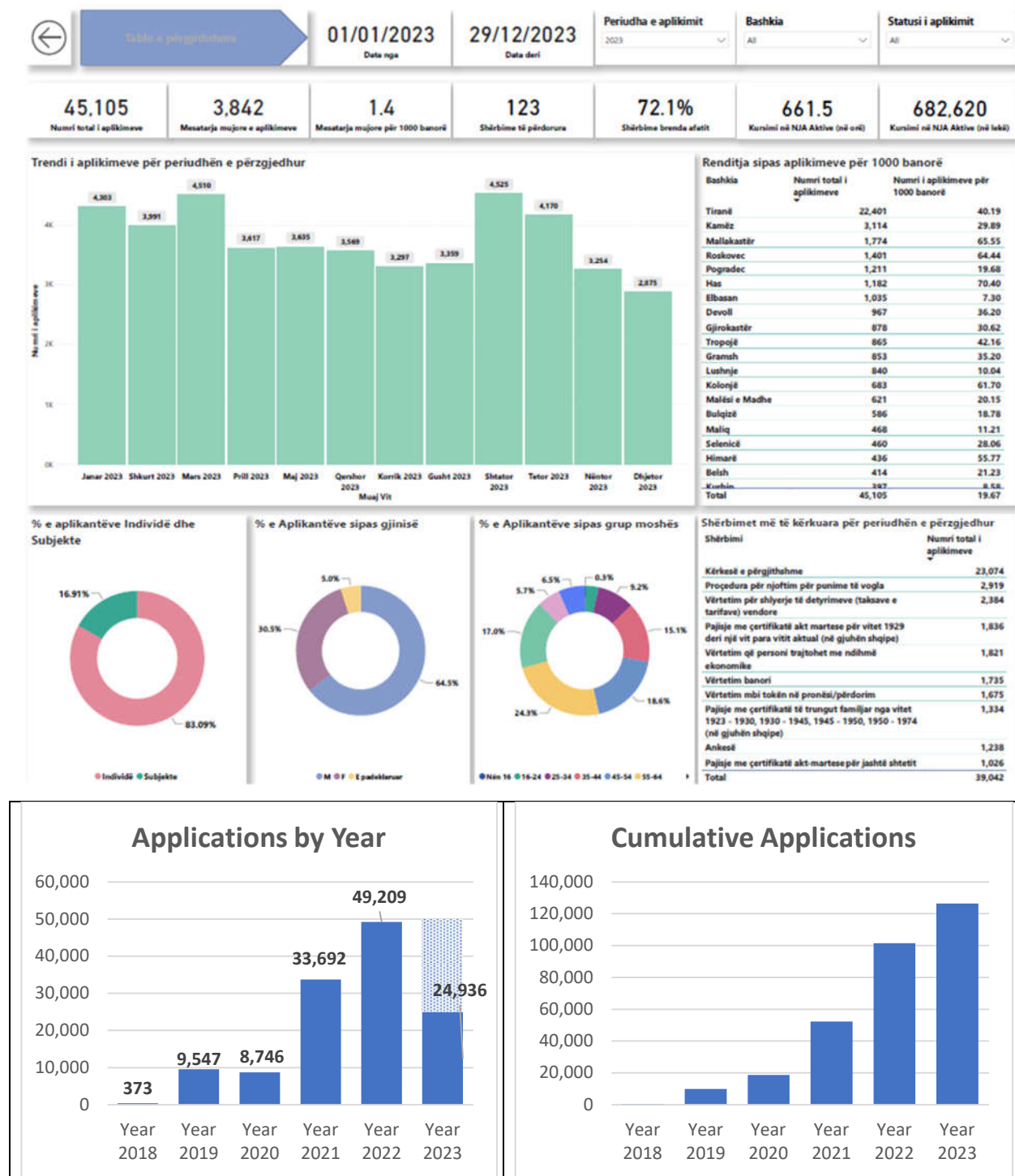
List of approved municipal integrity plans

	Municipality	Municipal Council approval decision
1.	Bulqize	https://www.vendime.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/VENDIM-I-KESHILLIT-BASHKIAK-BULQIZE-NR.-300-DATE-01.02.2022.pdf
2	Belsh	https://www.vendime.al/vendim-i-keshillit-bashkiak-belsh-nr-nr-10-date-31012022/
3	Përmet	https://www.vendime.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Vendim-Nr.6-Per-miratimin-dhe-zbatimin-e-Planit-te-Integritetit-per-Bashkine-Permet-1.pdf
4	Pogradec	https://www.vendime.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/vendimi-nr-18-dt.18.02.2022_compressed.pdf
5	Berat	https://www.vendime.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Vendim-i-Keshillit-Bashkiak-Nr.9-date-02.03.2022.pdf
6	Lezhe	https://www.vendime.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/vkb-lezhe-nr-32-2022.pdf
7	Tiranë	https://www.vendime.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/vkb-tirane-nr-35-2022.pdf
8	Shijak	https://www.vendime.al/vendim-i-keshillit-bashkiak-shijak-nr-20-date-01-06-2022/
9	Maliq	https://www.vendime.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Vednim-nr.54-date-31.05.2022.pdf
10	Has	https://www.vendime.al/vendim-i-keshillit-bashkiak-has-nr-44-date-29-06-2022/
11	Kukës	https://www.vendime.al/vendim-i-keshillit-bashkiak-kukes-nr-35-date-31-05-2022/
12	Puke	https://bashkiapuke.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Projekt-Vendim-04-date-29.06.2022-Plani-i-integritetit-.pdf
13	Kavajë	https://www.vendime.al/vendim-i-keshillit-bashkiak-kavaje-nr-52-date-24-05-2022/
14	Himarë	https://www.vendime.al/vendim-i-keshillit-bashkiak-himare-nr-28-date-27-05-2022/
15.	Roskovec	https://www.vendime.al/vendim-i-keshillit-bashkiak-roskovec-nr-4-date-27-01-2023/
16	Lushnje	https://www.vendime.al/vendim-i-keshillit-bashkiak-lushnje-nr-87-date-27-10-2023/



Annex 3: One-Stop Shop assistance

OSS BI snapshot



Annex 4: Digital Readiness Assessment

***IRH Scoping Mission:
Meeting with CSOS***



***IRH Scoping Mission:
Focus Group with LGs representatives***



STAR3 Kickoff Meeting with IDRA and Communication Progress

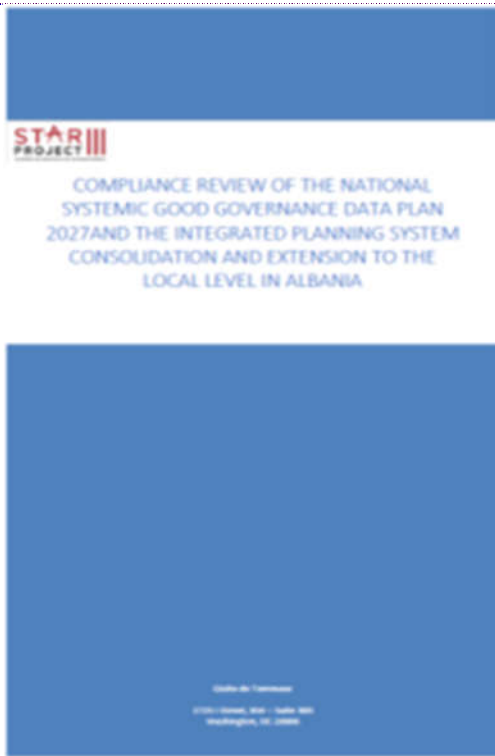


STAR3 Meeting with IDRA and Communication Progress on DRA methodology fine-tuning



Annex 5: IPSIS local feasibility

IPSIS feasibility assessment reports

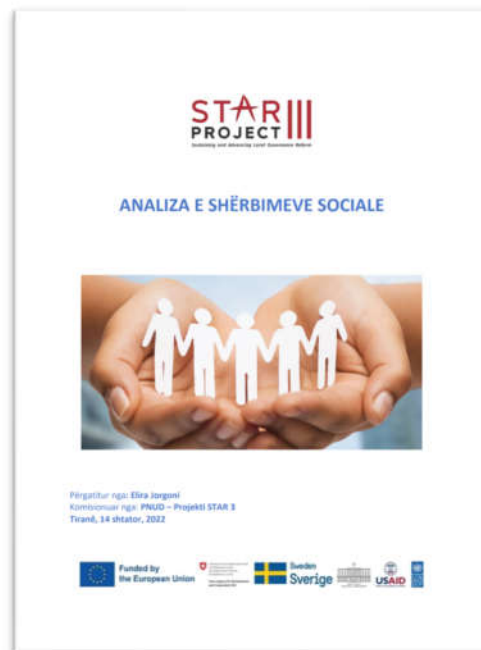


Annex 6: NCSDLG formulation and monitoring support

Report EU Acquis and the Environment



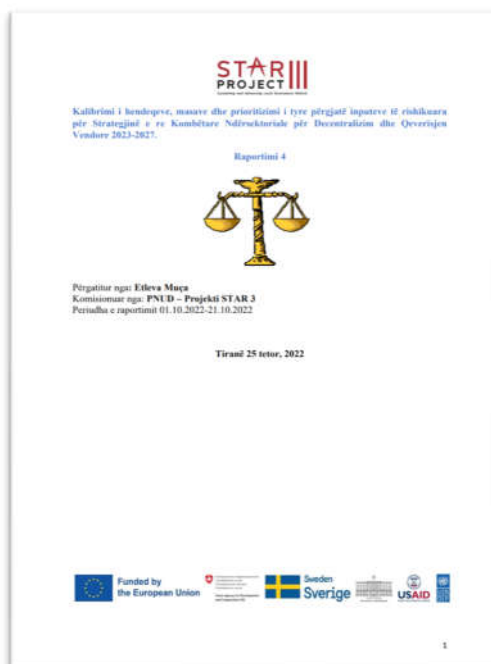
Report Analysis of Social Services



Report Analysis of the Local Economic Development



Report Sustainable Local Economic Development - gaps, measures and prioritization



Annex 7: List of supporting documents (provided electronically)

I. PROJECT MANAGEMENT

11. STAR3 Original EU Agreement

111 EU-UNDP - STAR 3 Contribution Agreement 062021.pdf

12. STAR3 EU Agreement Addendums

121. STAR3 EU Agreement Addendum1

1211 UNDP Request for Addendum1 151122.pdf

1212 Annex I - Revised Description of the Action 151122.pdf

1213 Annex III - Revised Budget of the Action 151122.xlsx

1214 EU Cover Letter Addendum 221222.pdf

1215 STAR3 signed Addendum1.pdf

122. STAR3 EU Agreement Addendum2

1221 Annex I - Revised Description of the Action.pdf

1222 Annex III - Revised Budget of the Action.pdf

1223 EU Cover Letter Addendum2 240208.pdf

1224 STAR3 EU Agreement Addendum2.pdf

13. Steering Committee Meetings

131 210604 STAR3 SC1 MoM.pdf

132 210604 STAR3 SC1 Presentation.pptx

133 220121 STAR3 SC2 MoM.pdf

134 220121 STAR3 SC2 Presentation.pptx

135 220928 STAR3 SC3 MoM.pdf

136 220928 STAR3 SC3 Presentation#1 - Implementation Progress.pptx

137 220928 STAR3 SC3 Presentation#2 - Project Revision and Way Forward.pptx

138 230406 STAR3 SC4 MoM.pdf

139 230406 STAR3 SC4 Presentation.pptx

1310 231025 STAR3-SC5 MoM.pdf

1311 231025 STAR3 SC5 Presentation.pptx

1312 240711 STAR3 SC6 Presentation.pptx

14. Progress reports

141 STAR3 Progress Report Jun-Dec 2021.pdf

142 STAR3 Progress Report Jul 2021 - Jun 2023.pdf

143 STAR3 Final Progress Report Jul 2021 - Jun 2024.pdf

144 STAR3 Final Financial Report.xlsx

15. STAR3 Audit Reports

151 STAR3 (IPA 2021-424-514) External Audit Report 2021

152 STAR3 (IPA 2021-424-514) External Audit Report 2023

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21 Gov request for supporting NCSDLG formulation

211 Govt Letter request STAR3 for NCSDLG formulation.pdf

22 Gov request for revising the project and engaging in digital readiness assessment

221 Govt Letter request STAR3 for Project Revision and engagement in DRA.pdf

23 Act 1.1.1 – Public consultation and participation

231 Selection criteria municipalities

2311 STAR3 Public Consultation_Selection Criteria.pdf

2312 STAR3 Public Consultation Selection Application Form.pdf

232 Public Consultations Inception Report

2321 STAR3 Public Consultations Inception Report.pdf

233 Municipal Situational Analysis

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23508 Videoclip Public Consultation on Budget 2023 Lezhe Municipality.mp4
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236 Public Consultation practice dissemination

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237 Public Consultation templates

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2372 Complaint Form.docx
2373 Complaint to Commissioner Form.docx
2374 Minutes Public Hearing and Consultation Meetings.docx
2375 Notification of Public Consultation Session.docx
2376 Summary of Comment and Feedback on Recommendations.docx
2377 Transparency Annual Report structure.docx
2378 Written Comments for Consultation of Municipal Acts.docx

24 Act 1.2.1 – Integrity planning

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243 Integrity Planning Regional Dissemination

2431 Gjirokaster Regional Meeting

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244 Training Module on Ethics and Integrity

2441 ToT Training Module Ethics and Integrity at LG Level.pdf

2442 The Regulatory Framework on Local Self-government in Albania.pptx

2443 Right to Information and Consultation with the Public.pptx

2444 Ethics in Public Administration.pptx

2445 Conflict of Interest Prevention and Resolution, Asset Disclosure and Whistleblower Protection.pptx

2446 Integrity Index for Local Government Units .pptx

2447 Integrity Risk Assessment Methodology.pptx

2448 Assessment of Integrity Risks and Design of Integrity Plans in Local Government Units.pptx

2449 Monitoring of Integrity Plans - ToT.pptx

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2511 OSS PA proposed communication and visibility.pdf

2512 OSS PA proposed communication and visibility.pptx

2513 Videoclip Gjirakastër OSS.mp4

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2521 OSS Central Infrastructure Maintenance Q1 2022.pdf

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2523 OSS Central Infrastructure Maintenance Q3 2022.pdf

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2525 OSS Central Infrastructure Maintenance Q1 2023.pdf

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253 OSS Municipal Maintenance

2531 OSSIS Municipal Maintenance and Support Dec 2021.pdf

2532 OSSIS Municipal Maintenance and Support Jan May 2022.pdf

2533 OSSIS Municipal Maintenance and Support May-Aug 2022.pdf

2534 OSSIS Municipal Maintenance and Support 2022.pdf

2535 OSSIS Handover Support to LGs_Final Report.pdf

254 OSS IT infrastructure procurement

2541 OSS IT infrastructure procurement_MoUs_Annexes

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Bulqize_MoU+Annex_Signed.pdf

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2542 List of IT equipment procured by STAR3

25421 IT Equipment Delivered to Municipalities.docx

255 OSS handover to municipalities

2551 Sample Communication to Municipalities

25511 Letter to Mayor - Municipality of Devoll.pdf
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25514 Letter to Mayor - Municipality of Cërrik.pdf
25515 Letter to Mayor - Municipality of Delvinë.pdf

26 Act 2.1.2 – Digital Readiness Assessments

261 DRA Preparation

2611 DRA Terms of Reference.pdf
2612 DRA Inception Report.pdf
2613 Mol Letter to Mayors for Digital Readiness Assessment preparations.pdf

262 DRA Consultations and Workshops

2621 UNDP_Report_Workshop Korca.pdf
2622 UNDP_Report_Workshop Shkoder.pdf
2623 UNDP_Report_Workshop Tirane.pdf
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2625 UNDP_Report_National Workshop.pdf

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2632 DRA National Report

26321 DRA National Report.pdf

2633 Roadmap on Digital Transformation

26331 Roadmap on Digital Transformation of Municipalities.pdf

2634 Service Re-engineering Tirana Municipality

26341 Service Re-Engineering Statistic and Data Directory Tirana Municipality.pdf

27 Act 2.2.1 – Municipal IPSIS feasibility

271 IPSIS Feasibility Report 1.pdf

272 IPSIS feasibility Report 2.pdf

28 Act 3.1.1 – Support NCSDLG formulation

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2802 Analysis of the legal and strategic framework of decentralization Vol 2.pdf

2803 Analysis of the legal and strategic framework of decentralization Vol 3.pdf

2804 Analysis of the legal and strategic framework of decentralization Vol 4.pdf

2805 Drinking water supply, wastewater treatment and local public transport.pdf

2806 Analysis of Social Services Aug 2022.pdf

2807 Inputs for social protection and social housing Sep 2022 .pdf

2808 Analysis of local economic development function Aug 2021.pdf

2809 Sustainable LED - gaps, measures and prioritization Oct 2022.pdf

2810 Local Rural Economic Development.pdf

2811 Environmental standards, measurable indicators and measures.pdf

2812 EU Acquis and the Environment.pdf

2813 Fire Protection and Rescue Local Functions in Local Government Units.pdf

29 Act 3.1.2 – Support NCSDLG monitoring

291 Monitoring Framework for SCDLG.pdf

III. PUBLIC AWARENESS AND VISIBILITY

31 Sample Municipal Factsheets

311 Municipal Factsheet Dropull.pdf

312 Municipal Factsheet Diber.pdf

313 Municipal Factsheet Elbasan.pdf

314 Municipal Factsheet Gjirokaster.pdf

315 Municipal Factsheet Gramsh.pdf

32 STAR3 project promotion

321 STAR3 Factsheet 1 Oct 2021.pdf

322 STAR3 Factsheet 2023.pdf

323 STAR3 Banner - RollUp.jpg

324 Sample of municipal OSS sign.jpg

325 Sample of OSS desk cube used in municipal OSS offices.jpg

326 Video Celebrating 10 Years of Partnership in Support of Local Governance Reforms.mp4

33 Compendium field visits

331 Compendium of project donor field visits.docx

34 Compendium social media on STAR3 activities

341 Compendium Social Media.docx