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**RCDN**  
Regional Capacity  
Development Network  
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Sanitation Services

# TRAINING NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR THE 61 MUNICIPALITIES OF ALBANIA

## FINAL REPORT

30 MARCH 2026  
THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF  
MUNICIPALITIES OF ALBANIA



Implemented by  
**giz**  
Deutsche Gesellschaft  
für Internationale  
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
Confederaziun svizra

Federal Department of Economic Affairs,  
Education and Research EAER  
State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO

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## List of Abbreviations

ASPA	Albanian School of Public Administration
EU	European Union
GIS	Geographic Information System
GIZ	German Agency for Development and Cooperation
NALAS	Association of Local Authorities of South-East Europe
NAMA	National Association of Municipalities of Albania
OJQ	Non-governmental organization
PESTLE	An analytical framework used to assess external factors influencing an organization, project, or policy. The term derives from the initials of the six key dimensions: Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal, and Environmental
SDC	Swiss Agency for Cooperation and Development
SIDA	Swedish Agency for International Cooperation and Development
TALGA	Local Self-Government Training Academy
TNA	Training Needs Assessment
UNDP	United Nation Development Program

## **Introduction**

The Training Needs Assessment (TNA) for the National Association of Municipalities of Albania (NAMA) constitutes a fundamental process for strengthening the institutional capacities of local government and improving the effectiveness of local public services. In a rapidly transforming political, institutional, and socio-economic context-including the decentralization process, European integration, and the digitalization of public administration-the identification of real training needs has become a prerequisite for modern governance and alignment with European Union (EU) standards. For this reason, the TNA aims to analyze in a structured manner the existing capacities of municipalities, the gaps in knowledge and skills, as well as the alignment of these capacities with the strategic objectives of local governance and national development priorities.

The methodology underpinning this assessment is based on three complementary analytical levels: (i) the organizational level, which examines the link between training programs and national and local strategies; (ii) the functional level, which analyzes the technical and professional requirements of municipal departments; and (iii) the individual level, which assesses employees' competencies and the gap between required and existing skills. These three levels ensure a comprehensive analytical approach and enables the development of a clear map of training priorities for all NAMA member municipalities.

To ensure methodological accuracy and reliable results, the assessment is based on a combination of data collection methods. The structured online questionnaire aims to collect standardized information from all 61 municipalities across the country regarding current skills, challenges, and emerging needs. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions serve as qualitative instruments to deepen the understanding of sector-specific issues and to identify specific demands according to the functional areas of each municipality. In addition, the analysis of national strategies, municipal performance reports, documents of international organizations, and regional references complements the evidence base upon which the assessment is built.

The methodological process is structured into several clear steps: preparation and planning, data collection, gap analysis, prioritization of needs, and, in the final phase, the formulation of recommendations and the development of the training plan. The defined timelines ensure the sustainable and systematic implementation of the process, encompassing the context analysis phase, distribution of questionnaires, interviews, data processing, and the finalization of the report.

In this way, the TNA serves as a strategic instrument that not only identifies training needs, but also guides the development policies of NAMA and its member municipalities, contributing to the professional development of local administration, the improvement of service quality and the strengthening of the role of local government within the framework of European integration. This

document aims to establish a clear pathway for capacity building, positioning NAMA and its member municipalities in a sustainable position to address the current and future challenges of local governance.

## **Methodology**

The Training Needs Assessment methodology is built upon a combined approach that employs both qualitative and quantitative methods, ensuring validation, representativeness, and an in-depth analysis of the actual capacities of municipalities.

### **1. Thematic structured questionnaires**

The questionnaire was distributed to all 61 municipalities and completed responses were received from 56 municipalities, covering a total of 165 respondents.

The questionnaire were distributed through sectoral forums, as follows:

- Social Forum
- Education Forum
- Performance Forum
- Transport, Energy & Climate Forum
- Finance Forum
- Human Resources Forum

These forums are represented by directors of the respective municipal departments, with each forum comprising approximately 61 members.

### **2. Questionnaires with Focus group from five municipalities**

In addition to the thematic structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews were used as part of the training needs assessment. The process of collecting information through focus group questionnaire involved senior-level representatives from five municipalities and aimed to:

- (1) confirm the key findings of the structured questionnaire distributed to all 61 municipalities;
- (2) gather information on topics of high interest to municipalities; and
- (3) establish a solid foundation for capacity-building efforts.

The ultimate objective was to create a clear, reliable and representative overview of the capacity situation of Albanian municipalities in relation to the current challenges of local governance and the obligations arising from the European integration process.

The interviews were conducted with the following municipalities:

- Mat Municipality

- Berat Municipality
- Pogradec Municipality
- Elbasan Municipality
- Vlorë Municipality

### **3. Processing and Analysis of Questionnaire Data**

The structured questionnaire was designed with 24 questions using the Google Forms format. The data collected through the structured questionnaires underwent a detailed process of categorization and harmonization, with the aim of ensuring a solid analytical foundation. Following the verification of the completeness and consistency of responses, the data were processed using Google Forms charts, enabling multidimensional data analysis. Through data processing, it was possible to:

- group data by themes, functions, staff profiles, and inter-municipal representation;
- automatically calculate percentages, distributions, and synthetic indicators;
- conduct horizontal comparisons (between municipalities) and vertical comparisons (across sectoral forums);
- generate standardized visualizations to support clearer and measurable interpretation.

This data processing methodology ensured that the results were accurate, measurable, and easily convertible into analytical findings, usable for formulating recommendations and translating identified needs into training modules.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face via the Zoom platform (12–18 March 2026) and served as a mechanism for verifying questionnaire findings, while also enabling direct communication and providing a safe environment for participants. Each interview lasted an average of 30 minutes out of the 45 minutes planned, and, with the consent of participants, all interviews were recorded for analysis purposes. After the completion of the data collection process, the audio recordings were fully transcribed. Transcription was carried out manually, ensuring the accuracy of the information. The transcribed texts were subsequently analyzed using thematic analysis in order to identify patterns, key issues, and significant interpretations relevant to the study.

## **I. Analysis of the Local, Regional, and International Context (2026–2030)**

### **1. Local Context**

#### **1.1. Strategic Transformations of Local Governance in Albania**

The period 2026–2030 marks a critical moment for local governance in Albania, driven by strong internal dynamics and an ambitious target for accession to the European Union by 2030. According

to the PESTLE<sup>1</sup> analysis, the country's 61 municipalities are at the epicenter of reform implementation, as they are responsible for applying up to 70% of the *acquis communautaire*. This expanded role requires stronger administrative, fiscal, and technical capacities at the local level.

However, the institutional reality reveals significant gaps:

- a lack of harmonization between Law No. 139/2015 and sectoral legislation, with more than 400 legal acts<sup>2</sup> still not updated;
- unclear functional responsibilities between the central and local levels<sup>3</sup>, leading to overlaps or functional gaps, particularly in the areas of environment, agriculture, culture, and social housing;
- an still ineffective central–local consultation system, which discusses draft policies only at the final stage<sup>4</sup>.

These dynamics directly affect training needs, particularly in:

- the interpretation of European Union (EU) legislation;
- the clarification of competencies;
- capacity building in policy opinion drafting and participation in multilevel dialogue.

## 1.2. Economic and Fiscal Challenges of Municipalities

The local context presents pronounced fiscal challenges that seriously constrain the capacity of municipalities to perform their functions. According to the PESTLE<sup>5</sup> study:

- fiscal autonomy is among the lowest in the South-East Europe;
- own-source revenues are minimal and municipalities rely heavily on unconditional transfers;
- the fiscal equalization mechanism is very limited and fails to address the disparities between urban and rural municipalities.

Furthermore, the property tax reform based on market value (2025–2029) will require:

- new standards for property valuation;
- technical expertise in fiscal administration;

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<sup>1</sup> Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal, Environmental analysis for Albania's local governments.

<sup>2</sup> Albanian Municipalities in 2035: Three Scenarios for the Future, page 3

<sup>3</sup> European Commission, Albania 2024 Report, page 24, [https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/a8eec3f9-b2ec-4cb1-8748-9058854dbc68\\_en?filename=Albania%20Report%202024.pdf](https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/a8eec3f9-b2ec-4cb1-8748-9058854dbc68_en?filename=Albania%20Report%202024.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Albanian Municipalities in 2035: Three Scenarios for the Future, page 12

<sup>5</sup> 2025 PESTLE (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal, Environmental) analysis for Albania's local governments

- the use of digital taxation systems (the Financial Management Information System – AFMIS).

### **1.3. Social and Demographic Dynamics and Human Capacities**

Albania has experienced a demographic decline of 17% over the past decade<sup>6</sup>. This reality creates significant pressure on municipalities, particularly rural ones, which are facing:

- shortages of labor;
- youth emigration;
- rapid population aging;
- increasing costs of social services without a corresponding increase in financial resources.

This situation requires the strengthening of municipal capacities in:

- social planning;
- the provision of services for vulnerable groups;
- the development of youth policies;
- the management of long-term care services.

### **1.4. Digital Transformation and Innovative Governance**

Based on the PESTLE analysis, Albania is pursuing an ambitious digitalization agenda, with more than 1,240 online services<sup>7</sup> delivered through the e-Albania platform. However, significant challenges remain:

- a wide urban–rural digital divide in the use of technology;
- a lack of digital skills within local administration;
- the absence of a clear legal framework on artificial intelligence and data protection.

These challenges generate training needs in the following areas:

- cybersecurity;
- the use of artificial intelligence and smart systems;
- data management and administration;
- digital service delivery for citizens.

## **2. Regional Context (Western Balkan)**

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<sup>6</sup> Albanian Municipalities in 2035: Three Scenarios for the Future, page 2

<sup>7</sup> PESTLE Analysis for Albania's Local Governments (2025-2030), page 9

## 2.1. Regional Trends in Decentralization and Local Government Finance

According to regional data from the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS)<sup>8</sup>:

- the region is characterized by a declining trend in the fiscal autonomy of local governments;
- unconditional transfers and conditional grants which dominate local government financing;
- capital investments in Albania are five times lower than the EU average<sup>9</sup>;
- Albania's local government financing model is among the most restrictive in the region.

NALAS, the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), and other regional donors are promoting inter-municipal cooperation models as a solution for municipalities with limited capacities, the regional provision of public services (such as waste management, water supply, and emergency services), and the strengthening of professionalism within local government.

At the regional level, particular emphasis is placed on:

- fiscal reforms;
- EU standards for water supply and wastewater systems;
- the circular economy;
- digitalization and artificial intelligence in public services.

Albania lags behind the regional average in many of these areas, making training an urgent requirement for:

- understanding EU chapters that affect the local level;
- environmental and economic management in line with EU directives;
- the transposition of regional policies at the municipal level.

## 3. International Context (EU, Donors, Global Practice)

### 3.1. The EU Agenda as the Main Driver of Change and the Role of Donors

The EU remains the primary influence on local development, with strong requirements related to:

- the rule of law;
- a professional local public administration;
- public procurement in line with EU directives;
- environmental protection and the circular economy;
- transparency and public participation.

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<sup>8</sup> Network of Associations of Local Authorities in Southeast Europe

<sup>9</sup> Albanian Municipalities in 2035: Three Scenarios for the Future, page 4

The European Commission's 2024 Report highlights:

- the need to strengthen municipal capacities in public procurement, financial management, and oversight;
- persistent issues related to property rights;
- gaps in the implementation of environmental standards.

Organizations such as SDC (Switzerland), the EU Delegation, SIDA, GIZ, the World Bank, UN Women, and UNDP have consolidated a common agenda that includes:

- modernization of local public financial management;
- digitalization of public services;
- gender equality;
- the circular economy;
- capacity building for accessing and managing EU funds.

These programs create a clear necessity for municipalities to develop solid technical capacities to absorb funds, design and implement projects, and effectively use modern technological systems.

### **3.2. Global Tendencies that Affect Local Government**

According to international analyses included in the PESTLE framework, several global trends are influencing Albanian municipalities:

- the digitalization of public services;
- the use of artificial intelligence in urban management;
- global warming and increasing climate-related risks;
- rapid urbanization;
- rising standards of public transparency.

## **4. Implications for the Training Needs Assessment**

Based on the analysis of the three levels (local, regional, and international), it is clear that the training needs for the National Association of Municipalities of Albania (NAMA) and its member municipalities are concentrated in five critical areas:

1. EU Integration & Acquis Capacities: transposition, consultation processes, and EU project management.
2. Local Finance & Fiscal Autonomy: local taxation, asset management, and budget planning.
3. Management of Local Services and Infrastructure: water supply and wastewater systems, waste management and the circular economy.

4. Digital Transformation & AI in Local Governance: e-government, cybersecurity and data standardization.
5. Human Resources & Democratic Governance: modern human resource management, gender equality, community engagement, and change management.

## **II. Summary Analysis of Structured Questionnaires**

### **Executive Summary**

This section presents the key findings derived from 165 responses collected from 56 municipalities. The analysis of the questionnaires indicates that the majority of respondents are women, while the experience profile reflects a solid institutional foundation. Participation in training activities is generally moderate and the perceived usefulness of the trainings is rated very highly.

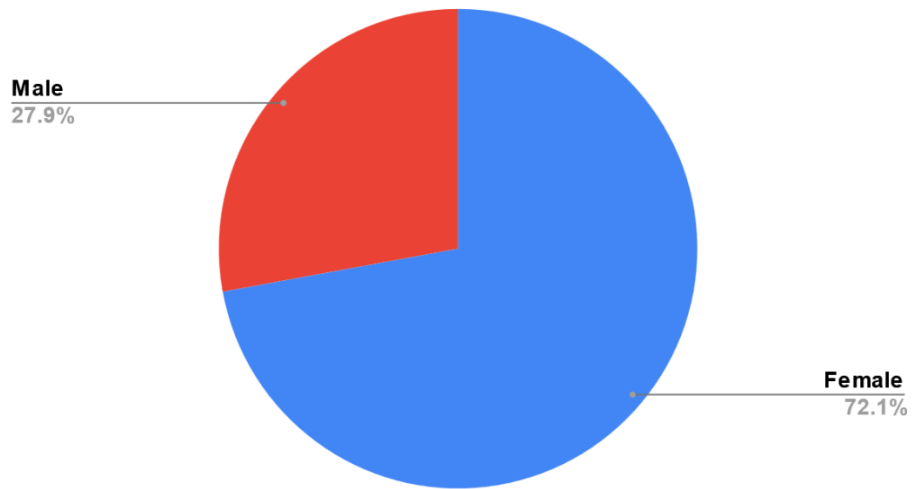
Capacities in strategic management and leadership are assessed as moderately strong (average score 3.54/5), with clear room for further improvement. Training priorities focus primarily on technical-level specialists and mid-level managers. In-person and hybrid formats, along with 2–3 day training modules are the most preferred. The main barriers to participation remain workload constraints and the lack of sufficient budgetary resources and clear policies.

The National Association of Albanian Municipalities (NAMA) is evaluated positively in terms of its role, influence and the quality of services provided. The conclusions drawn from the questionnaires are presented in the following section.

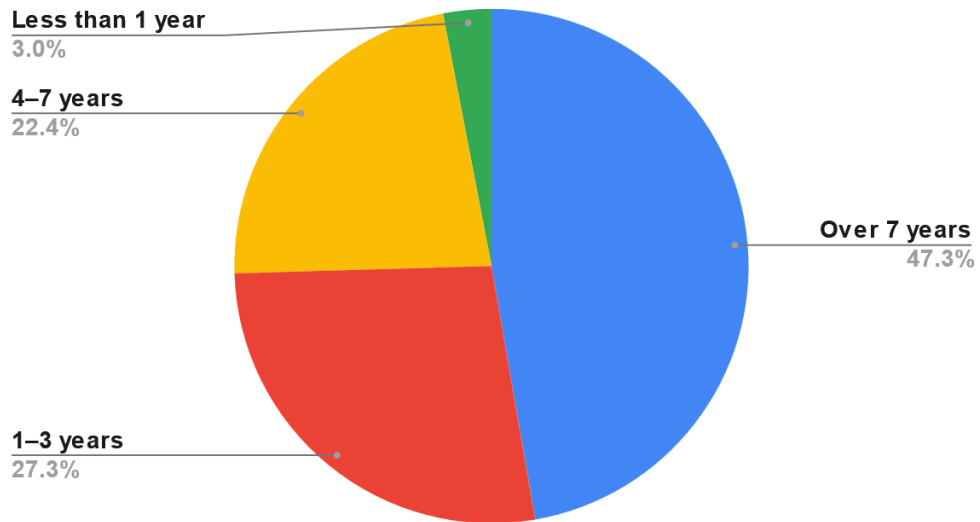
### **1. Respondent Profile**

The gender distribution indicates a high level of female participation, accounting for 72% of questionnaire responses, while years of experience reveal a mix of long-serving employees and newer staff within the administration. Approximately 50.2% of respondents with more than seven years of experience have participated in advanced training programs, as illustrated in the charts below.

## Gender



## Years of experience at Municipality



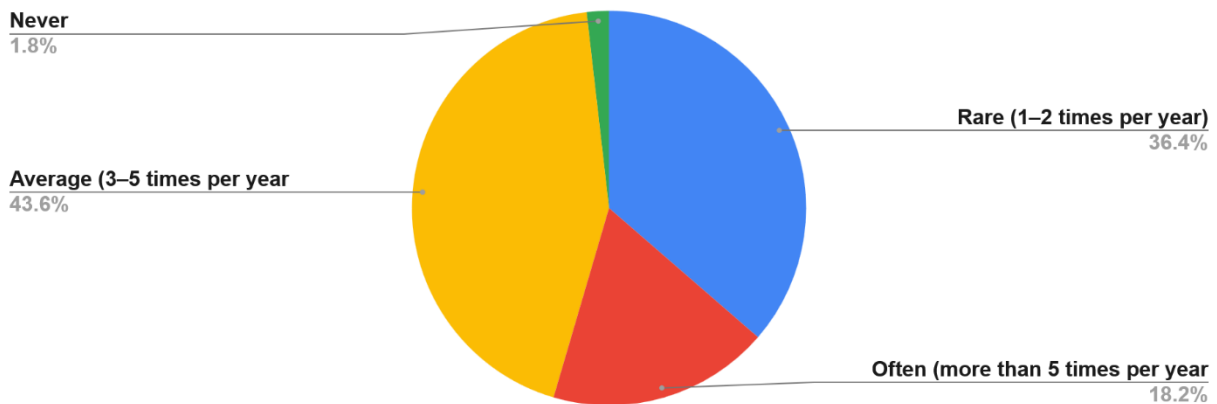
**If you have more than 7 years of experience, have you undertaken any advanced training during this period?**



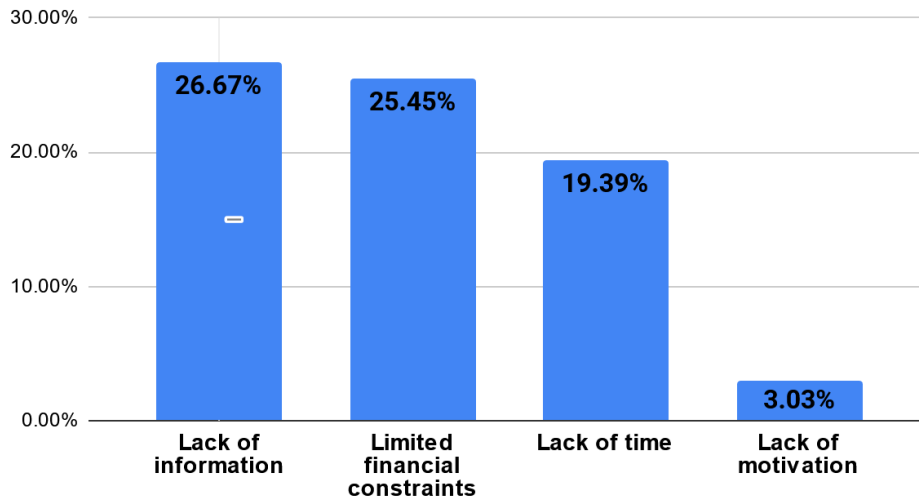
## 2. Training Participation and Usefulness

The most common frequency of participation in training activities is 3–5 times per year, although a significant segment attends training rarely. The main reasons for infrequent or no participation include lack of information, financial constraints, and time limitations. Nevertheless, when trainings are conducted, they are perceived as highly useful for professional work.

### Frequency of participation in professional training



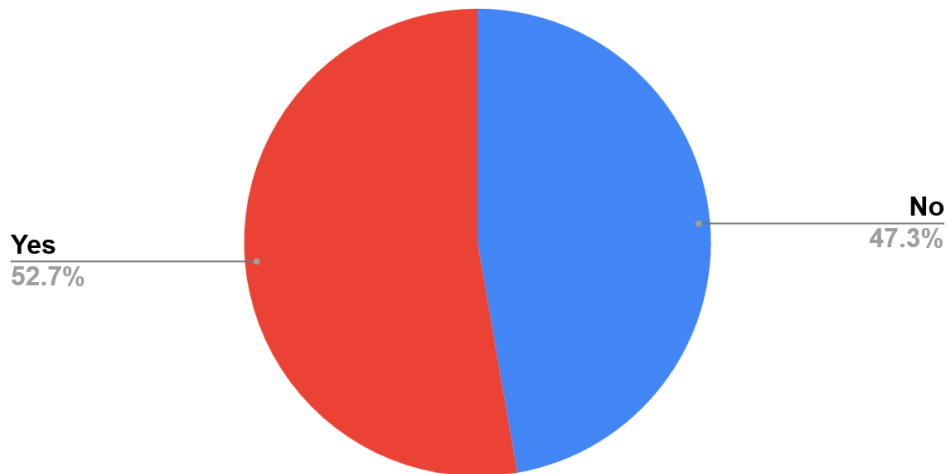
### Main Reasons for Non-Participation in Training



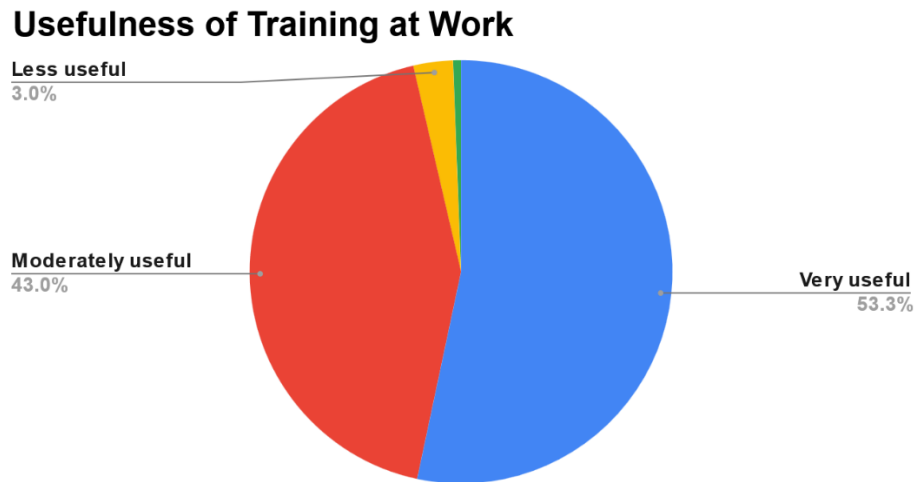
Regarding participation in trainings organized by NAMA, approximately 52.7% of respondents have taken part in such activities. Those who have not participated identified two main reasons: lack of information about the trainings and insufficient time to attend them. A smaller share of respondents indicated that they perceived the training topics as not directly relevant to their job responsibilities.

The training programs covered a range of thematic areas, including management and leadership, digital technologies, local finance and budgeting, public services, legislation and administrative procedures, public procurement, citizen communication, and related fields.

### Have you participated in training programs organized by the National Association of Municipalities of Albania?

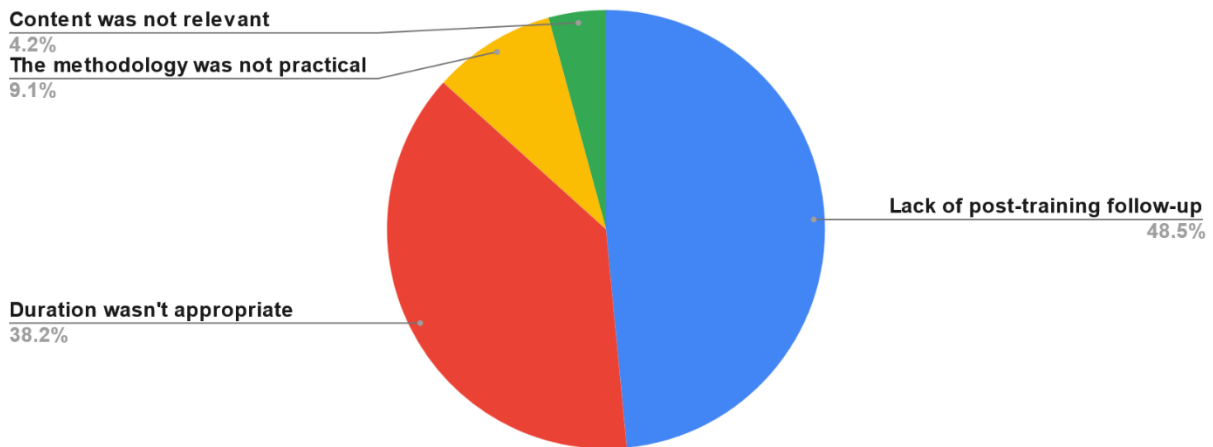


Approximately 53% of respondents rate the trainings as very useful, while 43% consider them useful



In response to the question regarding the reasons why trainings may be perceived as insufficiently useful, respondents highlighted several factors, including the lack of follow-up after the training, inappropriate duration, non-practical methodologies, and content that was not adequately relevant, as illustrated in the chart below.

### Reasons for the Low Impact of Training Programs

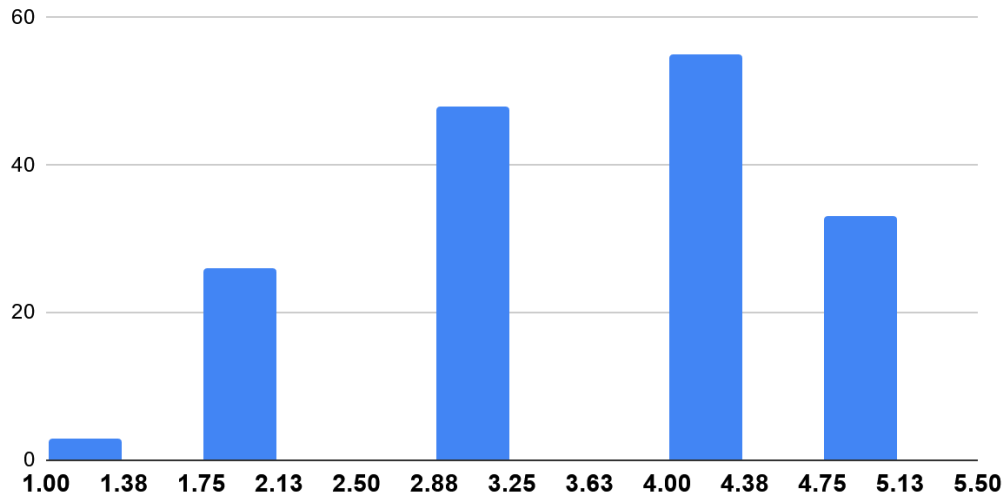


### 3. Current Capacities & Training Needs

The assessment of municipal capacities across several areas-including strategic management and leadership, finance and budgeting, technology and e-government, public services such as water supply, transport, and sanitation, urban development and territorial planning, social services and culture, public communication and transparency and emergency and crisis management-indicates a solid average score of 3 out of a maximum of 5, with clear potential for improvement toward

higher performance levels (rating scale from 1 to 5, where 1 represents the lowest level and 5 the highest). Training needs are identified primarily for technical-level specialists and mid-level managers.

**Municipal staff capacities in service areas (assessment on an absolute scale from 1 – lowest to 5 – highest)**

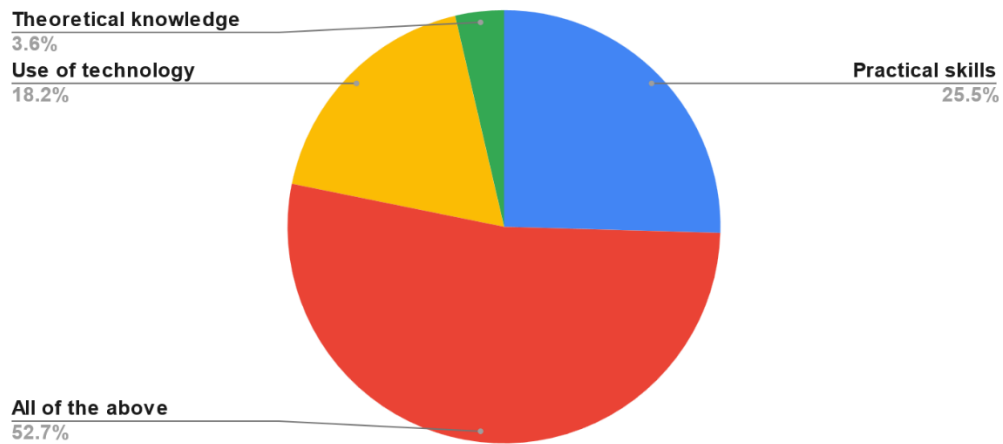


The priority areas for training in 2026 focus on the core municipal service sectors, including:

- Waste management, irrigation and drainage, social services, digitalization of local services, and pre-university education;
- Drinking water supply and sewerage, energy, climate-related issues, urban transport, and mobility;
- Public asset management, culture, and cultural heritage;
- Local taxes and revenues, and civil emergencies.

For the selected priority areas listed above, when respondents were asked which specific skills are lacking, approximately 25.5% indicated a lack of practical skills; 52.7% reported deficiencies across a comprehensive set of competencies, including practical skills, technology use, and theoretical knowledge; 18.2% identified gaps primarily in technology-related skills; and 3.6% stated that theoretical knowledge is lacking.

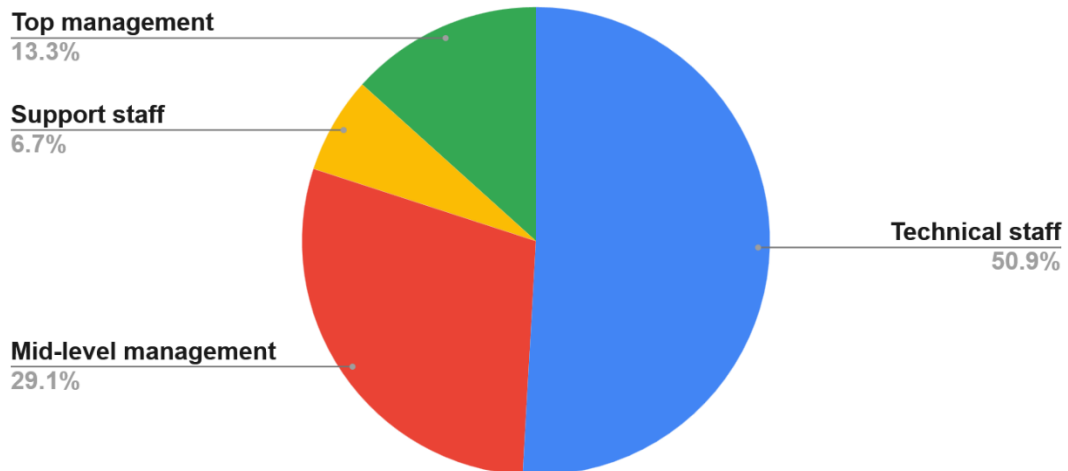
### For the selected fields, which specific skills are lacking?



The staff levels with the greatest training needs, ranked by priority, are as follows:

- Technical-level specialists
- Mid-level managers
- Senior managers
- Support staff

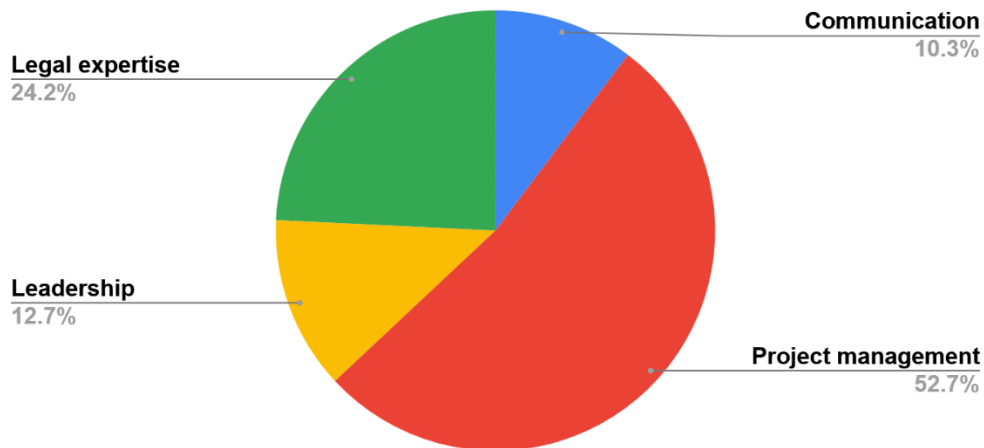
### At which levels of staff is there the highest need for training?



The thematic areas and specific skills identified as lacking are related to:

- Project management (52.7%)
- Legal knowledge (24.2%)
- Leadership skills (12.7%)
- Communication skills (10.3%)

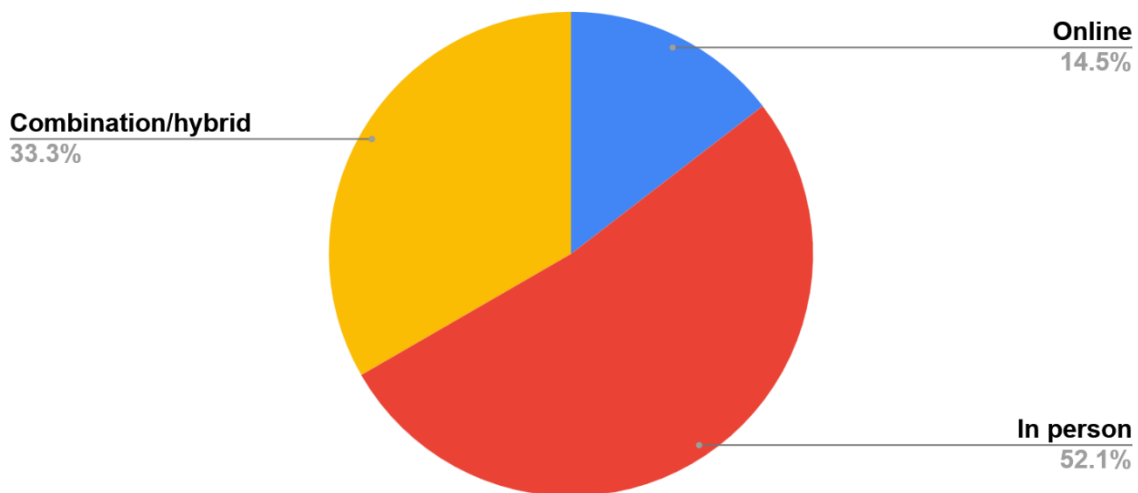
### Which specific skills are lacking at this level?



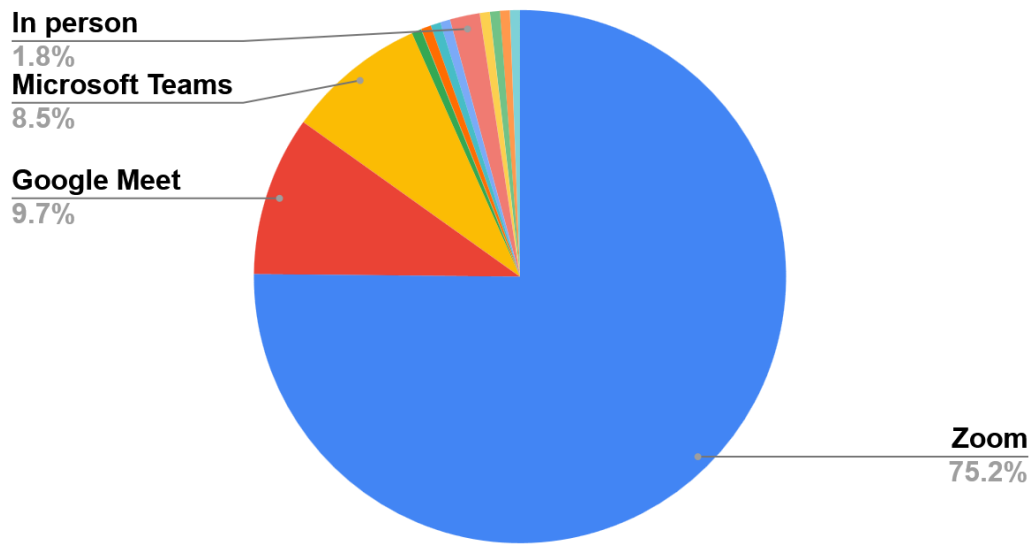
## 4. Learning Preferences: Formats, Duration and Methods

The most preferred learning formats are in-person trainings and hybrid formats (a combination of in-person and online delivery), while for online participation, Zoom results the most commonly used platform. The optimal training duration is 2–3 days, and separate modules are the most preferred approach. From a methodological perspective, there is a strong preference for practical exercises and case studies.

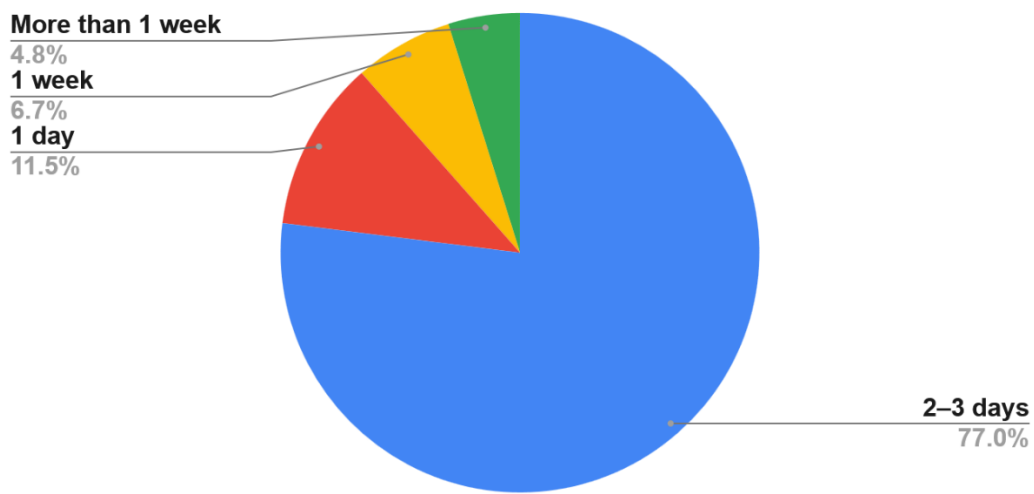
### Which training format do you prefer?



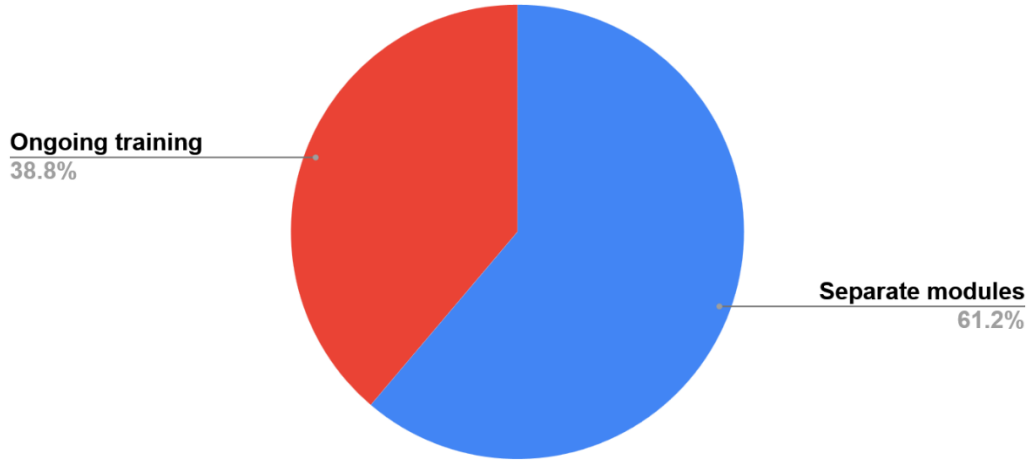
### Preferred platforms for online attendance



### Duration of the training

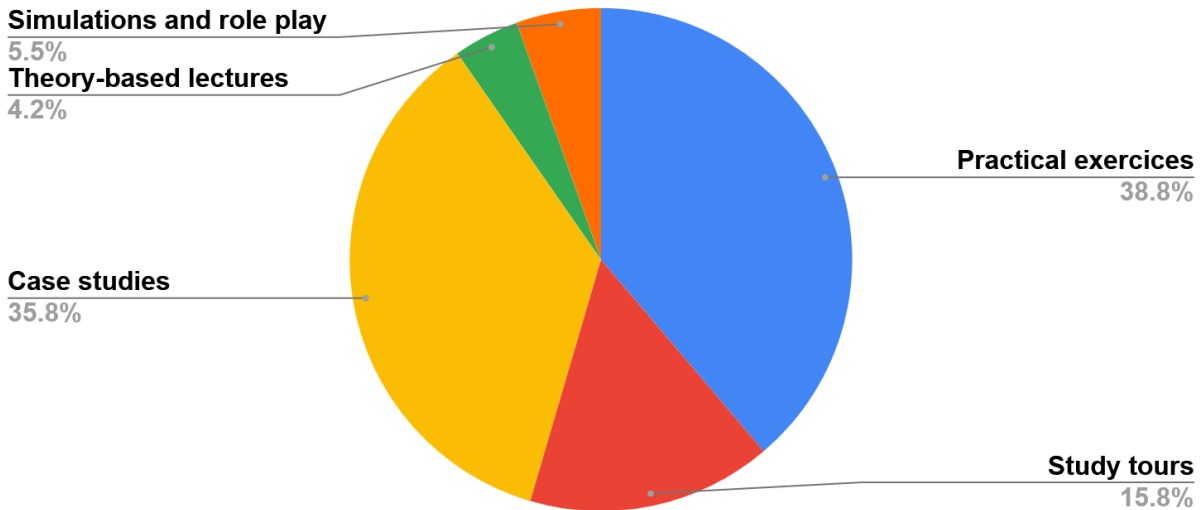


### Preferred learning method



Regarding preferred teaching methods, respondents identified practical exercises, case studies, study visits, simulations and role-playing, as well as theoretical lectures as the most effective approaches.

### Preferred teaching methods

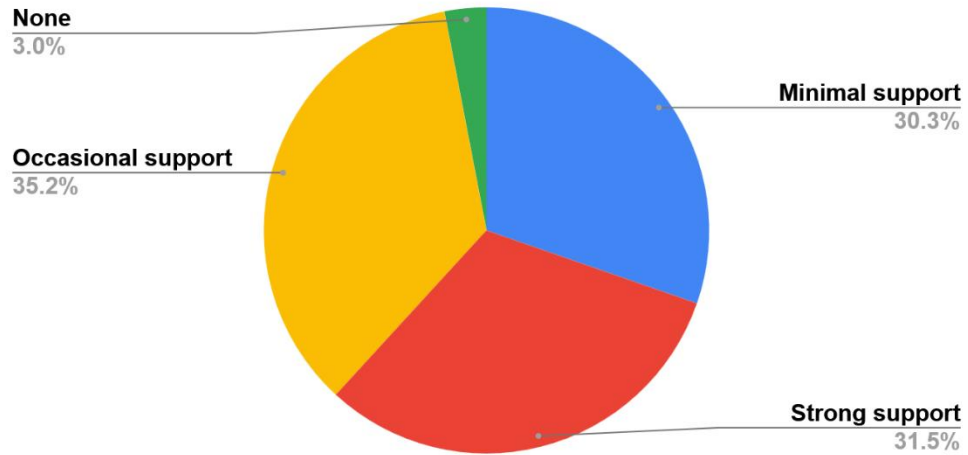


## 6. Organizational Support & Barriers”

Institutional support for training activities is perceived as moderately strong; however, a portion of staff report limited or no support. Areas where institutional weaknesses are identified include:

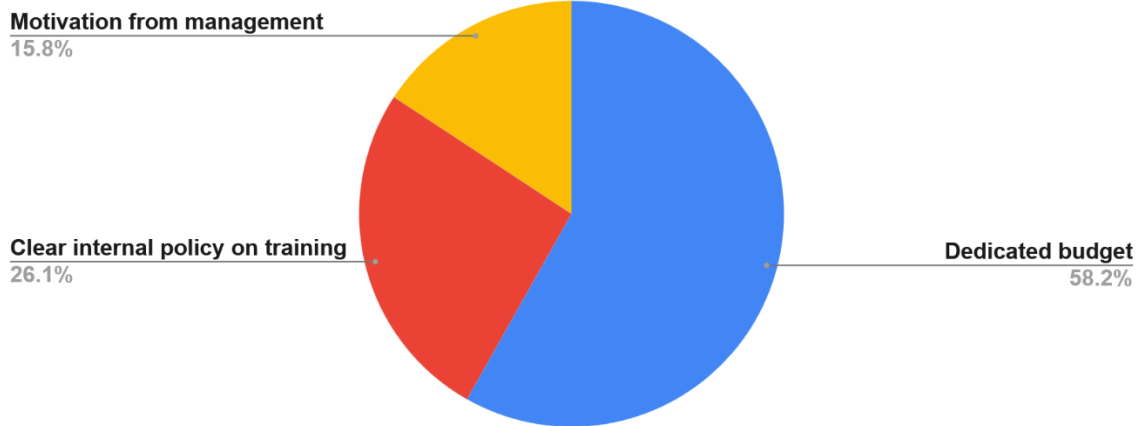
- Planning and coordination
- Performance management
- Project monitoring

### Institutional support for trainings

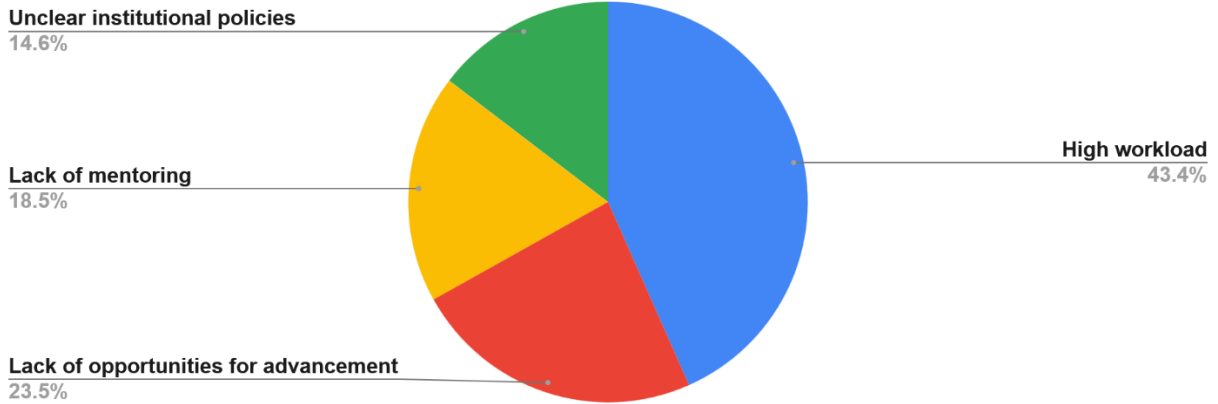


The proposed solutions include the allocation of a dedicated budget and the establishment of clear internal policies. The main barriers to professional development are related to workload pressures, limited opportunities for career advancement and the lack of mentoring.

### If support is limited or none, what would help?



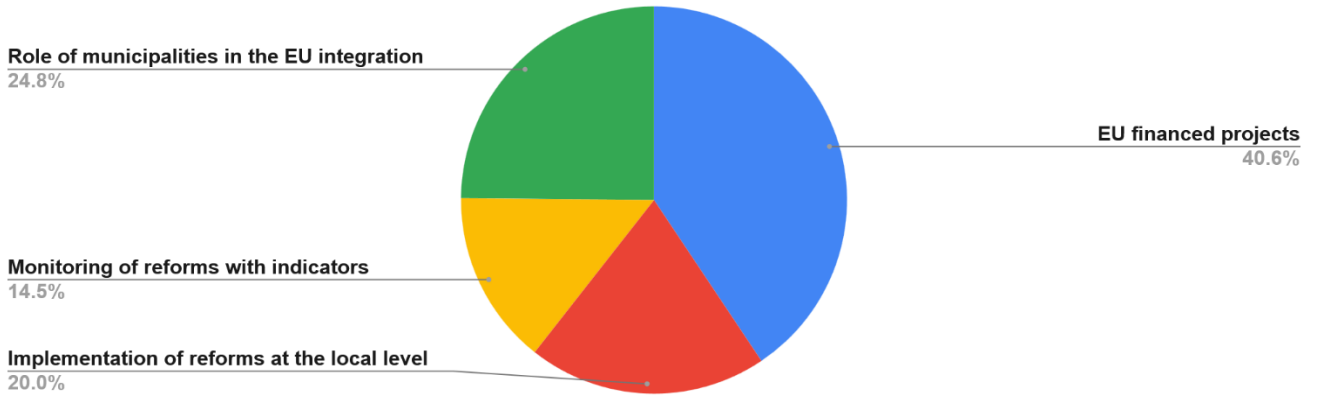
### Barriers for Professional Development



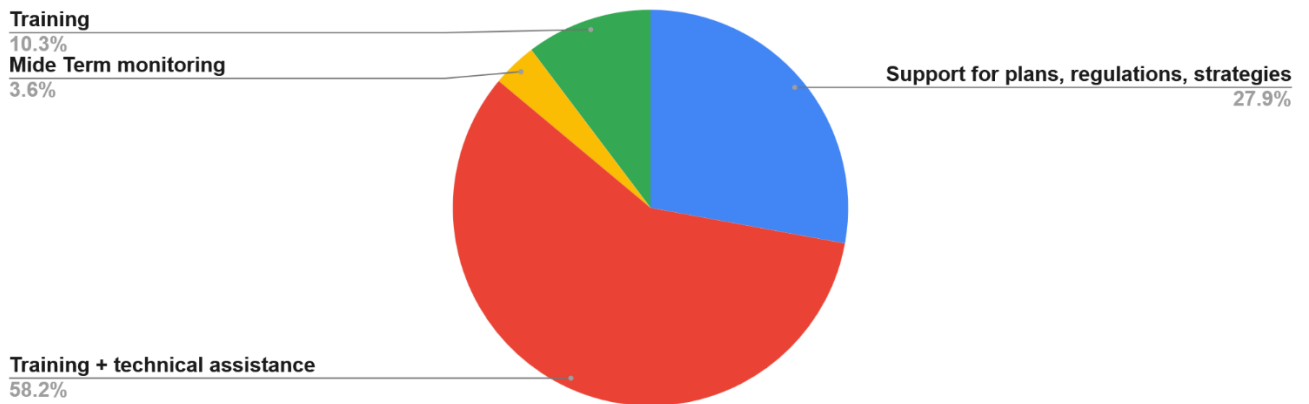
## 7. Thematic Priorities & Types of Support

Training needs include EU-funded projects, the role of municipalities in the EU integration process, the implementation of reforms at the local level, and indicator based monitoring. The most requested type of support is a combined approach of “Training + Technical Assistance,” along with support for the development of plans, regulations and strategic documents.

### Training needs



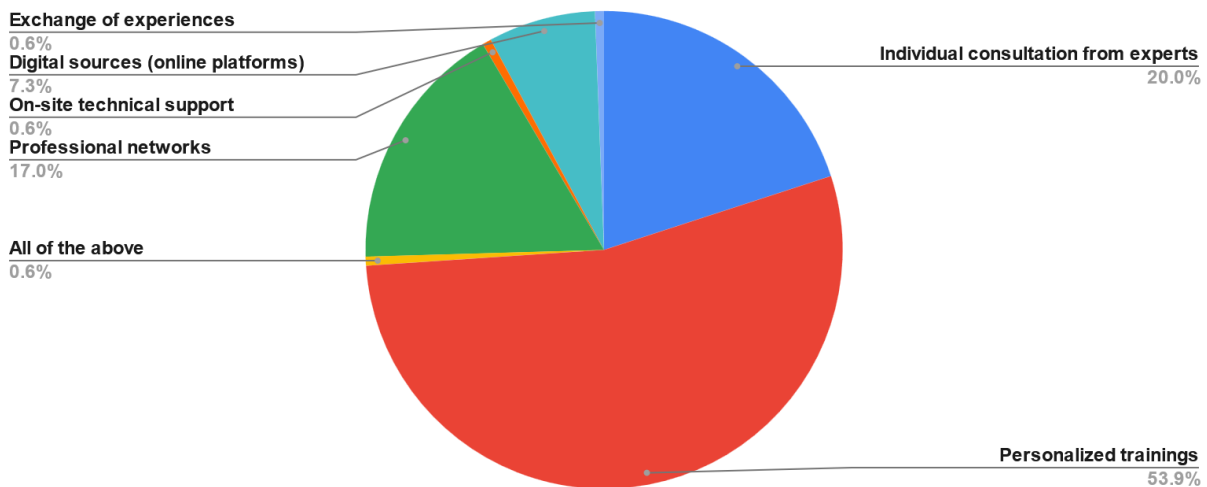
### Form of support



## 8. Personal Skills & Readiness for Engagement

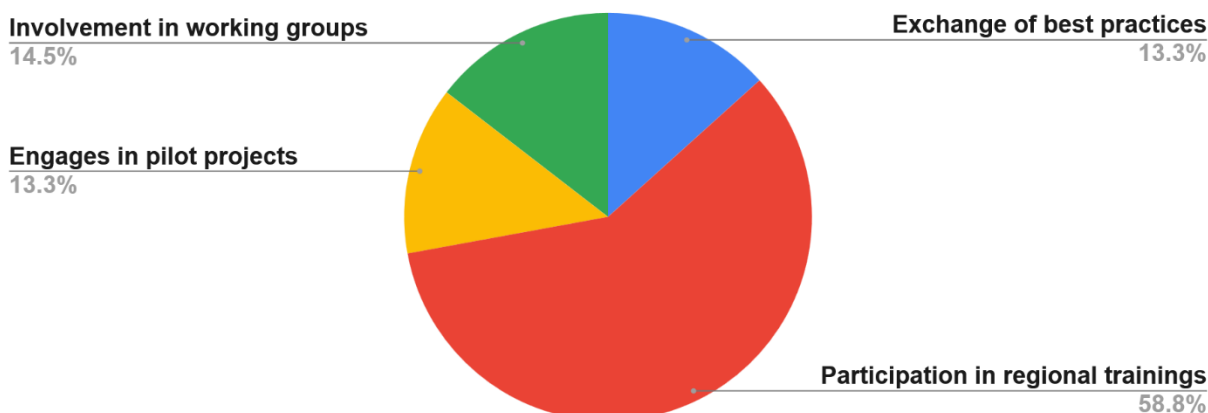
For individual development, the primary focus is on strategic decision-making and problem-solving, communication and presentation skills, as well as time management and priority setting. The majority of municipalities express readiness to receive additional support through personalized training programs, while there is also a strong willingness to engage in individual expert consultations, professional networks, digital resources, and experience-sharing initiatives.

### Types of additional support



Municipalities are willing to participate in regional training programs, engage in working groups, share good practices, and take part in pilot initiatives.

### Municipality's readiness for involvement



## 9. Conclusions

The gender distribution indicates a high level of female participation, accounting for 72% of the survey responses, with a mix of experience levels, where approximately half of the staff with more than seven years of experience have attended advanced training programs. The most common frequency of training participation is 3-5 times per year, while low participation is mainly associated with a lack of information and time constraints. Trainings are generally assessed as useful; however, several challenges are noted, including non-practical training methodologies and the lack of post-training follow-up.

Approximately 52.7% of respondents have benefited from training programs offered by NAMA, while the remaining respondents did not participate mainly due to a lack of information. Municipal capacities are assessed as average (3 out of 5), with more pronounced training needs identified among technical-level specialists and mid-level managers. Municipal capacities were assessed across the following areas: strategic management and leadership; finance and budgeting; technology and e-government; public services such as water supply, transport, and sanitation; urban development and territorial planning; social services and culture; public communication and transparency; and emergency and crisis management.

The skills most frequently identified as lacking are practical skills, technological competencies, and project management skills. In-person and hybrid training formats (combining face-to-face and online delivery) are preferred, with a strong emphasis on practical exercises and case studies. Institutional support is perceived as moderate, with weaknesses noted in planning, performance management, and project monitoring. Barriers to professional development are mainly related to workload pressures, limited opportunities for career advancement and the lack of mentoring.

Training needs include EU-funded projects, European integration processes and the implementation of local reforms. Municipalities seek a combined approach of “training and

technical assistance” and express readiness to participate in regional trainings, working groups, and experience-sharing initiatives.

### **III. Summary of Questionnaires with Focus Groups**

#### **1. Main Findings**

Municipalities confirm that the three most important thematic areas include:

##### 1. Project management with the European Union

- A strong need for capacity building in project design, implementation, and reporting;
- The need for in-depth knowledge of PRAG procurement procedures and EU legislation;
- Municipalities consider EU-funded projects to be a key source of financial resources.

##### 2. Performance Monitoring through Indicators

- Municipalities are increasingly operating based on performance indicators;
- There is a strong need for standardization, data harmonization, and the establishment of a unified reporting system.

##### 3. European Integration and Alignment with EU Practices

- The EU integration process is often perceived as a central-level responsibility rather than a local one;
- There is a need for increased awareness, more practical involvement and a more active role for municipalities in the European integration process.

#### **Human Resource Capacities: Where Are the Largest Gaps?**

Across all municipalities:

- Technical-level specialists represent the group with the largest capacity gaps, mainly because:
  - They bear the primary responsibility for project implementation and are directly engaged in field-level operations;
  - There are significant skill gaps in technical reporting, GIS, data management, planning and the application of EU standards.
- Mid-level managers also demonstrate notable gaps, particularly in:
  - Process management in line with European standards;

- Standardization of procedures;
- Sectoral planning;
- Institutional coordination.

## **Territorial Planning and GIS**

- All municipalities identify a significant lack of capacities in the following areas:
  - Spatial analysis
  - GIS mapping
  - Geospatial data management
  - Interpretation and implementation of relevant legislation
  - Inter-sectoral coordination
- The most frequently reported challenges include:
  - ASIG (State Authority for Geospatial Information) data are not always up to date;
  - Lack of historical data on public investments;
  - A growing tendency of human capacity loss, as qualified staff migrate to the private sector.

## **Standardization of Procedures and Data Management**

- Lack of unified documentation across many processes;
- Need for standardized templates and models for territorial management, public space administration, and reporting;
- Several municipalities highlight the absence of a dedicated and fully functional statistics unit.

## **Capacity Sustainability Mechanisms**

Municipalities call for the following:

- Continuous training programs rather than sporadic or one-off interventions;
- A unified national platform that integrates training opportunities offered by the Albanian School of Public Administration (ASPA), the Training Academy for Local Self-Government (TALGA), donors, and various other organizations.

Successful models for knowledge transfer and capacity sustainability include:

- Training of Trainers (ToT);
- Exchange of best practices among municipalities;
- Municipal twinning arrangements with municipalities in EU member states;
- Professional networks organized by functional profiles;

- Pilot projects implemented at the regional (county) level.

Many municipalities emphasize that short-term projects pose a significant risk of losing accumulated expertise once project funding and implementation come to an end.

## **2. Suggestions**

### **For Central Institutions and Training Providers**

- Establishment of a single national training platform with a shared calendar integrating training activities offered by the Albanian School of Public Administration (ASPA), the Training Academy for Local Self-Government (TALGA), EU-funded initiatives, NGOs, and other providers;
- Development of standardized training modules applicable across all municipalities;
- Creation of a national knowledge management system to ensure continuity, accessibility, and institutional memory.

### **For Municipalities**

- Investment in capacities related to GIS, statistics, monitoring, and reporting;
- Establishment of sustainable internal structures for data management and integration;
- Strengthening of both technical-level staff (specialists) and managerial capacities;
- Avoidance of training duplication through improved centralized coordination.

### **For the European Integration Process**

- Deeper involvement of municipalities in EU accession chapters;
- Clear alignment of chapter-related obligations with concrete municipal-level activities;
- Enhanced communication between EU integration structures and line departments.

### **For EU-Funded Projects**

- Detailed and recurrent training on PRAG procurement procedures, reporting, and financial planning;
- Specialized support mechanisms, including technical assistance delivered through TALGA;
- Practical exchanges with municipalities that have demonstrated successful experience in EU project implementation.

### **For Long-Term Sustainability**

- Incentive schemes to retain expertise within municipalities;
- Mentoring models and the development of internal trainers;
- Pilot projects focused on priority sectors at the regional (county) level.

### 3. Definition of Training Modules (Theme → Module)

Each identified need will be translated into a concrete training module, for example:

EU Project management → Module 1
PRAG & EU Procurement → Module 2
GIS & spatial analysis → Module 3
Indicator Based Monitoring → Module 4
Statistics & data management → Module 5
Territorial planning & legislation interpretation → Module 6
E-government & cyber security → Module 7
Lidership & management → Module 8
Water and sewerage services, circular economy → Module 9

This transformation ensures a direct link between the identified findings and the corresponding training interventions.

#### Definition of Training Methods

The training plan will apply a blended methodology, combining the following approaches:

- **In-person classroom training:**  
Used for topics that require hands-on technical work, such as GIS, PRAG procedures, and indicator-based monitoring.
- **Online and hybrid training:**  
Delivered through platforms such as Zoom, Moodle, and Microsoft Teams, with the aim of reducing costs and increasing training frequency and accessibility.
- **Mentoring:**
  - Targeted at new staff members and mid-level managers;

- Particularly suitable for supporting EU project cycles, from preparation to implementation and reporting.
- **Peer learning and exchange of practices:** Large or more experienced municipalities lead seminars and experience-sharing sessions for municipalities with lower capacities.
- **Case studies and simulations:** Applied to PRAG procurement procedures, budget preparation, and territorial planning, in order to strengthen practical understanding and real-world application.

## **IV. Recommendations**

### **1. Annual Professional Development Program**

An annual professional development program should be established, structured around 2–3 day module trainings, delivered in in-person and/or hybrid formats (a combination of face-to-face and online learning). The program should focus on case studies and practical exercises, with dedicated sessions tailored to different staff levels, ensuring alignment with specific roles and responsibilities.

### **2. Improved Information and Access to Training**

Information flow and access to training opportunities should be strengthened. Municipalities should establish a regular communication system for announcing trainings, including a clear annual training calendar and timely notifications to staff. In addition, the creation of a single national training platform is recommended, featuring a shared calendar integrating trainings offered by ASPA, TALGA, EU-funded initiatives, NGOs and other providers, along with the development of standardized training modules applicable to all municipalities.

### **3. Dedicated Module on EU-Funded Projects**

A dedicated training module on EU-funded projects should be developed, covering the EU project cycle, proposal writing, financial management, reporting, and procurement procedures. This module should also include a structured mentoring component aimed at strengthening institutional capacities at all levels.

### **4. Internal Training Policy and Governance Framework**

Municipalities should develop an internal training policy, supported by a dedicated budget, an annual activity calendar, clear participant selection criteria, certification procedures, and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to measure training impact. Training programs should primarily target technical specialists and mid-level managers, while also including senior management where relevant.

### **5. Mentoring Program and Practice-Based Groups**

A mentoring program and the establishment of practice-based working groups should be introduced, supported by short online learning materials and micro-learning modules, providing flexibility and continuous opportunities for professional development.

## **6. Digital Skills, Cybersecurity and AI Training**

Regular, practice-oriented trainings should be provided to equip local government staff with skills in digital technologies, cybersecurity and the use of artificial intelligence (AI). These trainings should focus on:

- Intelligent infrastructure monitoring
- Modern waste management practices
- Circular economy models
- Use of digital technologies for territorial planning and management

## **7. Combination of Training, Technical Assistance and Peer Learning**

To enhance long-term effectiveness, training activities should be complemented by technical assistance. Moreover, municipalities should promote regional trainings and peer-learning exchanges to facilitate mutual learning and the sharing of practical experience.

## **8. Ensuring Long-Term Sustainability**

To ensure long-term sustainability, the following measures are recommended:

- Incentive schemes to retain expertise within municipalities;
- Mentoring models and the development of internal trainers;
- Pilot projects focused on priority sectors within each county.

## **Annex 1: Questionnaire on the Assessment of Training Needs for the 61 Municipalities – 2026**

Dear Sir/Madam

National Association of Municipalities of Albania (NAMA)

Questionnaire for Municipalities – TNA 2026 & Fundraising Strategy / New Membership Model

The National Association of Municipalities of Albania (NAMA), in fulfillment of its mission to strengthen local governance capacities and drawing on the NAMA Strategic Plan 2026–2030, is conducting a Training Needs Assessment (TNA) for the year 2026, as well as consultations on the Fundraising Strategy and the new Membership Model.

This questionnaire should be completed once for each function by an authorized representative of the municipality. The responses should reflect the institutional assessment of the municipality's needs, rather than solely the personal experience of the individual completing the questionnaire.

The data collected will be used for:

- The development of NAMA’s Annual Training Plan for 2026;
- Adapting training content to the actual needs of municipalities;
- Medium-term planning of capacity development;
- The preparation of the Fundraising Strategy and the new Membership Model.

Please submit your responses by 6 February 2026.  
Thank you for your cooperation!

## Section A: General Information

1. Municipality: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Name/Surname \_\_\_\_\_
3. Department/Unit: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Job position: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Gender: F \_\_\_ M
6. Years of experience at Municipality:
  - Less than 1 year
  - 1–3 years
  - 4–7 years
  - Over 7 years
  - Sub-question: If you have more than 7 years of experience, have you undertaken any advanced training during this period?
    - Yes
    - No
7. How often do you participate in professional training ?
  - Never
  - Rare (1–2 times per year)
  - Average (3–5 times per year)
  - Often (more than 5 times per year)
  - **Subquestion:** If rarely or never what is the primary reason?
    - Lack of time
    - Lack of information
    - Lack of motivation
    - Limited financial resources
    - Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Section B: Previous Experience with Training

8. Have you participated in training sessions organized by the National Association of Municipalities of Albania?

- Yes
- No

Sub-question: *If no, what is the main reason?*

- I was not informed
- I did not have time
- I did not see a connection with my job
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

9. If you have participated in training sessions organized by other institutions, which areas were covered? (Select all that apply)

- Management and Leadership
- Local Finance and Budgeting
- Digital Technology
- Public Services
- Capital Investments
- Local Taxes
- Communication with Citizens
- Legislation and Administrative Procedures
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

10. How useful have these training sessions been for your work?

- Very useful
- Quite useful
- Slightly useful
- Not useful

Sub-question: *If slightly useful or not useful, why?*

- The content was not appropriate
- The methodology was not practical
- The duration was not appropriate
- There was no follow-up after the training

### **Section C: Current Training Needs**

11. How would you assess the current level of staff capacities within the municipality in the following areas? *(Please enter a number in each box from 1 to 8, where 1 represents the lowest level and 8 represents the highest level.)*

- Strategic Management and Leadership
- Finance and Budgeting

- Digital Technology and E-Government
- Public Services (water supply, sanitation, transport)
- Urban Planning and Territorial Development
- Social Services and Culture
- Public Communication and Transparency
- Emergency and Crisis Management

12. Which areas are priority for training in 2026?  
*(Please select a maximum of three priority areas)*

- Irrigation and Drainage
- Forests and Pastures
- Waste Management
- Drinking Water Supply and Sewerage
- Local Taxes and Revenues
- Public Asset Management
- Pre-University Education
- Civil Emergencies
- Environment and Forestry
- Social Services and Protection of Vulnerable Groups
- Gender Equality and Gender-Responsive Budgeting
- Energy, Climate, and Energy Efficiency
- Urban Transport and Mobility
- Culture and Cultural Heritage
- Digitalization of Local Services
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Sub-question: For the selected areas, which specific skills are lacking?

- Theoretical knowledge
- Practical skills
- Use of technology
- All of the above
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

13. At which staff levels do you think there is the greatest need for training?

- Senior management
- Middle management
- Technical specialists
- Support staff

Sub-question: Which specific skills are lacking at this level?

- Leadership
- Communication
- Project management
- Legal knowledge

## Section D: Preferences for Training

14. Which training format do you prefer?

- Online
- In-person (classroom-based)
- Blended (combination of online and in-person)

Sub-question: If online, which platforms do you prefer?

- Zoom
- Microsoft Teams
- Google Meet
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

15. How long should a training session last in order to be effective?

- 1 day
- 2–3 days
- 1 week
- More than 1 week

Sub-question: Do you prefer training delivered in separate modules or as a continuous program?

- Separate modules
- Continuous training

16. Which teaching methods do you prefer?

- Theoretical lectures
- Practical exercises
- Case studies
- Simulations and role-play
- Study visits

## Section E: Challenges and Support

17. In which areas do you think your municipality has institutional weaknesses?

- Planning and coordination
- Performance management and reporting
- Implementation of legislation
- Project monitoring
- Public consultation and transparency
- Inter-municipal cooperation

18. How much institutional support exists for training?

- A great deal of support
- Some support
- Limited support
- No support at all

Sub-question: If limited or no support, what would help?

- A clear internal training policy
- A dedicated budget
- Motivation and support from management

19. What are the main barriers that limit your professional development?

- Lack of opportunities for career advancement
- Lack of mentoring or guidance
- Unclear institutional policies
- Heavy workload leaving little time for development
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Section F: Suggestions**

20. Does your municipality need training on the following topics?

- The role of municipalities in the EU integration process
- Implementation of reforms at the local level
- Monitoring of reforms and the use of indicators
- EU-funded projects

21. What type of support do you need the most?

- Training
- Training plus technical assistance
- Medium-term mentoring
- Support for the development of plans, regulations, and strategies

22. Which personal skills would you like to develop through future training?

- Communication and presentation skills
- Leadership and team management skills
- Problem-solving skills
- Strategic decision-making skills
- Time management and prioritization skills
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Sub-question:** If you had additional support, which form would you prefer?

- Individual consultancy from experts
- Tailored training based on specific needs
- Professional networks
- Digital resources (online platforms)
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Section G: Readiness to cooperate**

23. Is your municipality willing to:

- Participate in regional training sessions
- Share good practices
- Participate in working groups
- Engage in pilot initiatives

24. If you have any additional comments, please write them below:

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## **Annex 2: Questionnaire and responses with focus groups from Municipalities**

### **1. Municipality of MAT**

Interviewer: Evis Gjebrea, expert for Training Needs Assessment

Facililator: Elisa Nikaj, Project Coordinator at National Association of Albanian Municipalities

Interviewee: Mr. Elson Reçi / General Secretary at Mat Municipality

Date: 12 March, 2026

### **A) Questions to Validate Findings (5–10 minutes)**

From the topics identified as priorities (EU funded projects; the role of municipalities in EU integration and the implementation of reforms; monitoring through indicators), which two are currently the most critical for your municipality? Why?

Target groups for capacity building: Do technical specialists and middle management continue to be the groups with the largest skills gaps? In which specific tasks or responsibilities are these gaps most evident?

### **Response**

1. EU-funded projects are currently the top priority because they bring financial resources and have a significant impact. Since this discussion focuses on training needs, I would suggest that trainings be developed in a coordinated and unified manner, so that the trainings offered by the Training Academy for Local Self-Government (TALGA) and the Albanian School of Public Administration (ASPA) do not overlap or duplicate each other. At present, trainings are still being delivered on how to write project proposals, while in reality projects have already been awarded, are being implemented, and municipalities have moved to a more advanced phase.

2. There is no significant skills gap between staff levels, from specialists to directors. Specialists mainly deal with the bureaucratic aspects, while directors identify challenges and address them at a higher level. The needs identified relate primarily to capacity building and specialized expertise for project drafting and project management.

One possible organizational approach would be for the State Agency for Strategic Planning and Aid Coordination (SASPAC) to provide experts specifically for EU-funded projects. The Municipality of Mat has experience in this area, having managed projects with a total value of €3.4 million. The Municipality of Mat has cooperated with SASPAC in this regard and seminars have also been organized by the Albanian School of Public Administration. In addition, the Training Academy for Local Self-Government has been established, with a mandate to provide seminars, including those related to EU-funded projects.

The groups on which capacity-building efforts should continue to focus are all staff levels, from specialists to directors.

### **B) Questions on High-Interest Topics (20–25 minutes)**

1. In which local government administration processes (e.g. planning, reporting, standardization of procedures, data management) do you see the greatest potential for your municipality's concrete contribution to the EU integration process? What additional capacities are needed to meet these requirements in line with European standards and practices?

2. Territorial planning has become an increasingly important issue for municipalities. Which technical and institutional capacities are currently lacking in your municipality to effectively carry out the territorial planning process—including spatial analysis, geospatial data management, interpretation of legislation, and coordination with other stakeholders—and what type of support would be required to strengthen these capacities in practice?

## **Response**

### **1. Contribution to the EU Integration Process and Capacity Needs**

In the Municipality of Mat, an EU integration structure has been established by a Decision of the Council of Ministers, as is the case in all municipalities, composed of three staff members: one coordinator and two specialists. In addition, for approximately one and a half years, an internal structure responsible for data performance monitoring has been set up, with a designated staff member assigned to this role. This structure was created due to the absence of a statistics office and represents an attempt to establish a unified internal data function.

However, this structure is not yet fully consolidated, and there is still a lack of standardized information systems, such as standardized reporting tables applicable across all municipalities. Despite these shortcomings, the establishment of this structure represents a positive step forward.

For example, in the area of territorial management, there is no standardized procedure for cases where property ownership has changed, nor a systematic mechanism for sharing information on whether a property has been developed. Even within the municipality's own departments, information exchange is limited, which creates obstacles for coordinated planning and reporting.

### **2. Territorial Planning and Required Support**

Support from ASIG (State Authority for Geospatial Information) is essential, as it possesses the necessary expertise and technical tools. Progress has been made in this area; for instance, the national address system has facilitated access to information related to spaces, buildings, and infrastructure.

However, the available data remains incomplete, as there is no historical record of previous investments, nor comprehensive information on water supply and sewerage networks, telecommunications networks, and other infrastructure systems. As a result, municipalities are unable to obtain the full set of data required for effective territorial planning.

## **C) Questions on the Sustainability of Municipal Capacity Building (10–15 minutes)**

1. Which mechanisms or development models (e.g. sustainable training programs, internal knowledge management systems, inter-municipal learning networks, or continuous technical assistance) do you think your municipality should develop in the coming years to ensure sustainable capacity growth and to meet modern local governance standards?

2. How willing are you to share good practices or to participate in pilot initiatives or working groups related to the thematic areas where your municipality needs to strengthen its capacities?

### **Response**

The Municipality of Mat has experience with the training-of-trainers approach, whereby trained staff subsequently share their knowledge with colleagues. This model has proven effective in building internal capacities. However, a recurring challenge relates to project-based training initiatives: once a project ends, the expertise developed through external support often leaves, limiting the long-term sustainability of capacity building.

The municipality has also gained experience in sharing practices and lessons learned with other municipalities. For example, in projects funded by foreign donors, if another municipality is at a more advanced implementation stage, the Municipality of Mat has sought guidance on how projects were executed. Overall, training of trainers combined with the exchange of experiences among municipalities is considered one of the most effective capacity-building approaches.

Experience sharing with neighboring municipalities has been institutionalized in certain areas. For instance, formal cooperation agreements have been established with five neighboring municipalities in the field of civil protection, covering areas such as environmental protection, forestry, and fire management. In contrast, cooperation related to foreign-funded projects has so far relied mainly on informal contacts, rather than structured mechanisms.

The Municipality of Mat is willing and committed to strengthening cooperation with other municipalities. Furthermore, within the framework of TALGA, a knowledge management platform is expected to be established, which will further support structured knowledge sharing, institutional learning, and the sustainability of capacity-building efforts.

## **2. Municipality of BERAT**

Interviewer: Evis Gjebrea, expert for Training Needs Assessment

Facilitator: Elisa Nikaj, Project Coordinator at National Association of Albanian Municipalities

Interviewee: Ms. Etleva Dhima / Deputy Mayor of Berat Municipality

Date: 17 March, 2026

### **A) Questions to Validate Findings (5–10 minutes)**

From the topics identified as priorities (EU funded projects; the role of municipalities in EU integration and the implementation of reforms; monitoring through indicators), which two are currently the most critical for your municipality? Why?

Target groups for capacity building: Do technical specialists and middle management continue to be the groups with the largest skills gaps? In which specific tasks or responsibilities are these gaps most evident?

## **Response**

1. Over the past three to four years, municipalities have increasingly understood the role of the European Union and the EU integration process, not only in terms of alignment of legislation and public services, but also by recognizing the significant opportunities offered through EU-funded projects for municipal financing.

Building on more than 15 years of experience in project implementation, municipal capacities have steadily increased, starting from small-scale projects and progressing to large infrastructure investments implemented through various EU assistance programs. These projects have enabled municipalities to address financial gaps that could not be covered by municipal budgets alone.

Under the new legislative framework, municipalities are now eligible to apply for cross-border cooperation programs. In addition, a variety of EU programs exist through which municipalities can access funding for social services, youth-focused initiatives, and projects supporting persons with disabilities, among others.

Another important aspect concerns indicator-based monitoring. Over the past two years, municipalities have increasingly operated using performance indicators. The Strong Municipalities Project, which included the Municipality of Berat, evaluates municipalities based on performance indicators covering a wide range of services, such as civil protection, water supply and sewerage, waste management, education, and public health.

Indicator-based monitoring is particularly important because it enables a systematic internal performance analysis, helping municipalities identify strengths, weaknesses, and priority areas where development programs should focus in the coming years.

At the same time, EU-funded projects remain essential. A strong focus on fund absorption and effective implementation of EU projects would enhance the capacities of all municipal departments, including:

- the projects department, responsible for drafting project proposals;
- the procurement department, responsible for preparing tender documentation;
- the finance department; and
- sectoral departments responsible for project implementation.

2. This process represents a highly effective institutional capacity-building exercise, as it brings municipalities de jure and de facto closer to the European Union. It strengthens alignment not only with EU legislation, but also with EU reporting standards and project implementation practices, enabling municipalities to engage more directly and effectively with EU procedures and requirements.

I would like to extend the focus of capacity-building efforts to also include lower-level staff. While middle and senior-level staff are certainly important and should be included in training and capacity-building initiatives, those who work directly on project implementation are primarily lower-level staff. In practice, both middle- and lower-level staff are involved in project implementation, but the lower level is particularly critical, as these staff members handle the day-to-day operational tasks.

Based on our experience, the main capacity needs relate to:

- Project preparation and proposal writing;
- Reporting;
- Project implementation, especially in the field of procurement.

Procurement is particularly important due to the ongoing alignment of national legislation with EU rules. In the context of EU-funded projects, municipalities are required to apply PRAG (Practical Guide on Contract Procedures), which constitutes a specific and comprehensive legal and procedural framework. Strengthening capacities in this area is essential.

Municipal specialists involved in EU projects need solid knowledge of procurement rules, project drafting, and project implementation, as EU calls for proposals have their own specific requirements and procedures. Enhancing capacities at the operational level is therefore crucial to ensure both compliance and effective implementation of EU-funded projects.

## **B) Questions on High-Interest Topics (20–25 minutes)**

1. In which local government administration processes (e.g. planning, reporting, standardization of procedures, data management) do you see the greatest potential for your municipality's concrete contribution to the EU integration process? What additional capacities are needed to meet these requirements in line with European standards and practices?

2. Territorial planning has become an increasingly important issue for municipalities. Which technical and institutional capacities are currently lacking in your municipality to effectively carry out the territorial planning process—including spatial analysis, geospatial data management, interpretation of legislation, and coordination with other stakeholders—and what type of support would be required to strengthen these capacities in practice?

## **Response**

1. The Municipality of Berat has had positive experience in planning, reporting, and implementation of projects funded by the European Union and other donors, and is therefore in a position to make a meaningful contribution by sharing this experience.

At the same time, additional capacities are still required, particularly in the areas of financial management and legal management of EU-funded projects. Even though the municipality has built solid experience, continuous capacity development remains essential, as EU legislation and application criteria are regularly updated. For this reason, ongoing training and capacity strengthening are necessary to ensure compliance with evolving rules and standards.

2. In the field of urban and territorial planning, the Municipality of Berat faces specific challenges due to the significant level of planned investments and its unique territorial characteristics. Several areas within the municipality fall under UNESCO-protected zones, which means that planning and development must comply not only with national legislation on cultural heritage, but also with UNESCO World Heritage regulations.

In this context, there is a strong need for geospatial data analysis related to territorial planning. This need is further intensified by the fact that several specialists previously working in this field have left the municipality and been absorbed by the private sector, creating gaps in institutional expertise. Under the new legislation on public spaces, the municipality will be required to update and map its entire territory using a GIS system. This GIS-based territorial map will be crucial for: designating public parking areas, planning recreational parks etc.

To address these challenges, technical assistance for urban planning specialists is essential, particularly in: Geospatial planning analysis and GIS-based mapping of public space.

### **C) Questions on the Sustainability of Municipal Capacity Building (10–15 minutes)**

1. Which mechanisms or development models (e.g. sustainable training programs, internal knowledge management systems, inter-municipal learning networks, or continuous technical assistance) do you think your municipality should develop in the coming years to ensure sustainable capacity growth and to meet modern local governance standards?

2. How willing are you to share good practices or to participate in pilot initiatives or working groups related to the thematic areas where your municipality needs to strengthen its capacities?

### **Response**

#### **1. Capacity-Building Mechanisms and Sustainability**

All proposed mechanisms are important. The municipality has not had an internal budgetary program dedicated to staff training, but has benefited from training opportunities provided by third parties, such as the Association of Municipalities and the Strong Municipalities initiative.

The continuity of training programs in specific thematic areas is particularly important, especially in sectors such as urban planning, sustainable transport, sustainable social services, and EU-funded

projects. Continuous and targeted training in these areas is essential to ensure lasting capacity development.

At the same time, interaction and cooperation with other municipalities is highly necessary, particularly with municipalities that face similar challenges or have comparable characteristics, such as population size or territorial management complexity. For example, exchanging experiences and recommendations on issues related to urban transport, traffic management and mobility solutions can be highly beneficial.

Communication and peer learning among municipalities with similar profiles should therefore be strengthened. The municipality also welcomes other forms of training and inter-municipal cooperation, including new or innovative collaboration formats.

## 2. Willingness to Share Good Practices

The municipality is fully willing to share its expertise and experience related to the programs it has implemented, with the aim of knowledge sharing and peer learning among municipalities.

We thank you for the cooperation and remain available for further communication or follow-up discussions if needed.

## **3. Municipality of POGRADEC**

Interviewer: Evis Gjebrea, expert for Training Needs Assessment

Facililator: Elisa Nikaj, Project Coordinator at National Association of Albanian Municipalities

Interviewee: Ms. Entela Gusho / Deputy Mayor of Pogradec Municipality

Date: 18 March, 2026

### **A) Questions to Validate Findings (5–10 minutes)**

From the topics identified as priorities (EU funded projects; the role of municipalities in EU integration and the implementation of reforms; monitoring through indicators), which two are currently the most critical for your municipality? Why?

Target groups for capacity building: Do technical specialists and middle management continue to be the groups with the largest skills gaps? In which specific tasks or responsibilities are these gaps most evident?

### **Response**

All findings are valid and mutually reinforcing and should not be considered separately, as they complement one another.

Technical specialists face the largest skills and capacity gaps, as the bulk of implementation work is carried out by specialists rather than by supervisors or directors. Project implementation, operational challenges, and field-level issues are directly linked to the day-to-day work of specialists.

Under these circumstances, the greatest responsibility and workload rests with technical specialists.

### **B) Questions on High-Interest Topics (20–25 minutes)**

1. In which local government administration processes (e.g. planning, reporting, standardization of procedures, data management) do you see the greatest potential for your municipality's concrete contribution to the EU integration process? What additional capacities are needed to meet these requirements in line with European standards and practices?

2. Territorial planning has become an increasingly important issue for municipalities. Which technical and institutional capacities are currently lacking in your municipality to effectively carry out the territorial planning process—including spatial analysis, geospatial data management, interpretation of legislation, and coordination with other stakeholders—and what type of support would be required to strengthen these capacities in practice?

### **Response**

1. The issues identified cannot be separated, as they are integral components of the same process and are all equally important. Each element complements the others and should therefore be addressed in a comprehensive and integrated manner.

2. In the area of territorial planning, there is a need to address all the aspects mentioned, as territorial changes and the lack or incompleteness of documentation are highly significant challenges. The Municipality of Pogradec faces difficulties related to these issues, and the findings

of the questionnaires are relevant and well-founded, highlighting areas that require further improvement.

The State Authority for Geospatial Information (ASIG) should play a leading role in addressing these challenges, as data is not always up to date.

### **C) Questions on the Sustainability of Municipal Capacity Building (10–15 minutes)**

1. Which mechanisms or development models (e.g. sustainable training programs, internal knowledge management systems, inter-municipal learning networks, or continuous technical assistance) do you think your municipality should develop in the coming years to ensure sustainable capacity growth and to meet modern local governance standards?
2. How willing are you to share good practices or to participate in pilot initiatives or working groups related to the thematic areas where your municipality needs to strengthen its capacities?

#### **Response**

1. I agree with all the points suggested. The municipality has had experience cooperating with neighboring municipalities, such as Cërrik and Divjakë (particularly in the social sector), as well as Struga and Ohrid, and such cooperation has proven to be necessary and beneficial. It is strongly recommended to strengthen cooperation with municipalities within the same county, as they tend to face similar challenges.

Social and educational issues are often comparable across municipalities and for this reason, I would suggest that trainings be organized by specific profiles or thematic areas. It is also important to implement pilot projects at the county level, which can serve as practical learning and replication models.

Training programs should be tailored to specific sectors, such as social services or education. In addition, external training and technical assistance are highly valuable, as they bring additional expertise and perspectives. Capacity-building efforts should therefore be continuous and ongoing, rather than sporadic or one-off interventions.

We thank you for the cooperation and remain available for further communication or follow-up discussions if needed.

#### **4. Municipality of ELBASAN**

Interviewer: Evis Gjebrea, ekspert for Training Needs Assessment

Facililator: Elisa Nikaj, Project Coordinator at National Association of Albanian Municipalities

Interviewee: Mr. Asim Sula / Deputy Mayor of Elbasan Municipality

Date: 18 March, 2026

### **A) Questions to Validate Findings (5–10 minutes)**

From the topics identified as priorities (EU funded projects; the role of municipalities in EU integration and the implementation of reforms; monitoring through indicators), which two are currently the most critical for your municipality? Why?

Target groups for capacity building: Do technical specialists and middle management continue to be the groups with the largest skills gaps? In which specific tasks or responsibilities are these gaps most evident?

#### **Response**

1. The findings are fully aligned with the municipality's priorities. All municipalities require capacity strengthening and training, and the identified findings are accurate and relevant. In particular, there is a strong need for training related to EU project management, including both project proposal writing and project implementation, as EU-funded projects have specific rules and requirements.

While an EU integration office exists within the municipality, which also includes the projects unit, capacity gaps remain in other departments. For example, if the Environment Department prepares project proposals, it may lack the necessary capacities and experience. Accessing EU funding represents a significant benefit for the local community; however, capacity limitations often create challenges in fully leveraging these opportunities.

2. Capacity-building efforts should also extend to the director level. For instance, when addressing the digitalization of municipal services, it is important to include directors in capacity-building initiatives, even though these are positions subject to change.

### **B) Questions on High-Interest Topics (20–25 minutes)**

1. In which local government administration processes (e.g. planning, reporting, standardization of procedures, data management) do you see the greatest potential for your municipality's concrete contribution to the EU integration process? What additional capacities are needed to meet these requirements in line with European standards and practices?

2. Territorial planning has become an increasingly important issue for municipalities. Which technical and institutional capacities are currently lacking in your municipality to effectively carry out the territorial planning process—including spatial analysis, geospatial data management, interpretation of legislation, and coordination with other stakeholders—and what type of support would be required to strengthen these capacities in practice?

#### **Response**

1. All aspects identified are important; however, the greatest challenges are related to management, where more issues and capacity gaps are observed.

2. All aspects are important. The municipality cooperates with ASIG, and it is essential to also develop internal capacities in this area.

### **C) Questions on the Sustainability of Municipal Capacity Building (10–15 minutes)**

1. Which mechanisms or development models (e.g. sustainable training programs, internal knowledge management systems, inter-municipal learning networks, or continuous technical assistance) do you think your municipality should develop in the coming years to ensure sustainable capacity growth and to meet modern local governance standards?

2. How willing are you to share good practices or to participate in pilot initiatives or working groups related to the thematic areas where your municipality needs to strengthen its capacities?

#### **Response**

1. There is some knowledge transfer between employees as well as cooperation among municipalities; however, these practices are not sustainable in the long term. For this reason, sustainable and continuous training programs are necessary, as it often happens that staff members receive training and later are no longer employed by the municipality.

It is also important to take into account the financial feasibility of proposed initiatives, ensuring that expectations are realistic and achievable, and that staff turnover is addressed by promoting greater employment stability.

Another key element is the importance of twinning partnerships with municipalities in EU Member States. While the exchange of experiences among municipalities is essential, on its own it cannot be considered a sustainable mechanism. In order to reach EU governance standards and operational practices, it is crucial to establish municipal twinning arrangements with EU counterparts, particularly in the area of implementation of local government legislation. Such partnerships provide a shared approach to alignment with EU standards and represent, in our view.

2. The municipality is fully willing to engage, as described under point 1.

### **5. Municipality of VLORE**

Interviewer: Evis Gjebrea, expert for Training Needs Assessment

Facililator: Elisa Nikaj, Project Coordinator at National Association of Albanian Municipalities

Interviewee: Ms. Vilma Toshkallari / Deputy Mayor of Vlora Municipality

Date: 18 March, 2026

### **A) Questions to Validate Findings (5–10 minutes)**

From the topics identified as priorities (EU funded projects; the role of municipalities in EU integration and the implementation of reforms; monitoring through indicators), which two are currently the most critical for your municipality? Why?

Target groups for capacity building: Do technical specialists and middle management continue to be the groups with the largest skills gaps? In which specific tasks or responsibilities are these gaps most evident?

### **Response**

1. EU-funded projects are important, and in this regard, EU-related themes are currently addressed within the negotiation chapters being worked on by ministries. However, at the municipal level, this process is felt to a much lesser extent, and municipalities are often perceived as having a secondary role.

This perception needs to change. Municipal staff often believe that EU integration issues belong primarily to central government, whereas in reality the calendar of EU negotiation chapters should become an integral part of municipal activities as well. Under these circumstances, EU integration should not be viewed by municipalities as a distant or abstract process, but rather as one in which they are direct and active participants.

For example, if an urban planner is asked about EU integration, they are likely to associate it only with EU-funded projects, rather than with the principles and standards that should be incorporated into their daily work.

2. When discussing EU integration, it should be understood as a holistic process that involves all staff levels, starting from specialists, continuing through unit heads, and including directors. While institutional sustainability is more strongly anchored at the level of specialists and unit heads—who tend to remain longer within the institution—directors and heads of institutions should not be excluded from this process.

### **B) Questions on High-Interest Topics (20–25 minutes)**

1. In which local government administration processes (e.g. planning, reporting, standardization of procedures, data management) do you see the greatest potential for your municipality's concrete contribution to the EU integration process? What additional capacities are needed to meet these requirements in line with European standards and practices?

2. Territorial planning has become an increasingly important issue for municipalities. Which technical and institutional capacities are currently lacking in your municipality to effectively carry out the territorial planning process—including spatial analysis, geospatial data management,

interpretation of legislation, and coordination with other stakeholders—and what type of support would be required to strengthen these capacities in practice?

### **Response**

1. All elements are important. Through the role of NAMA, a stronger influence of municipalities on draft acts of central government—such as Decisions of the Council of Ministers (DCMs)—has become more evident, particularly through consultations within the Consultative Council. An important next step would be not only to discuss draft legal acts within the Consultative Council, but also to include other decisions, strategies and policies related to EU integration.

This could extend to the EU negotiation chapter clusters, where periodic achievements should be jointly discussed. At times, progress is achieved within these chapter clusters, but it is not communicated or discussed with municipalities.

2. This is a highly sensitive issue. A meeting of the Consultative Commission on the Regulation for the Management of Public Spaces has taken place, aiming at achieving unification of rules to support coordinated and effective management. This represents a positive step forward, as there will no longer be individual public space management plans approved separately by Municipal Councils, but instead a single unified document applicable to all municipalities.

However, municipalities face significant challenges in this process, particularly in recruiting qualified experts, such as engineers and architects. Due to low salary levels in the public sector, many qualified professionals opt for employment in the private market.

### **C) Questions on the Sustainability of Municipal Capacity Building (10–15 minutes)**

1. Which mechanisms or development models (e.g. sustainable training programs, internal knowledge management systems, inter-municipal learning networks, or continuous technical assistance) do you think your municipality should develop in the coming years to ensure sustainable capacity growth and to meet modern local governance standards?

2. How willing are you to share good practices or to participate in pilot initiatives or working groups related to the thematic areas where your municipality needs to strengthen its capacities?

### **Response**

1. The Municipality of Vlorë has been part of the Strong Municipalities Project. Within the framework of establishing the Training Academy for Local Self-Government, the municipality has allocated a dedicated budget to support training activities.

One of the key needs identified is the establishment of a shared national system, specifically a centralized platform, where information and announcements related to training opportunities could be published. This platform could include training offers from institutions such as ASPA, NAMA,

the European Union, and various other organizations. Such a platform would improve coordination, visibility, and access to training opportunities for municipalities.

Internal training within municipalities is also considered necessary; however, it is more challenging for large municipalities, which have complex work dynamics and a high workload. For example, it can be difficult for engineers and other specialized staff to train colleagues due to time constraints and operational demands.

2. Municipalities actively share practices with other municipalities that have similar characteristics. For example, when draft decisions concern coastal municipalities such as Durrës, Saranda, and Lezha, experiences have been exchanged and lessons learned on issues such as management of public beaches, initiatives like Vlora Invest, and salary schemes for the municipal police. These topics have been discussed during joint meetings organized by the Association of Municipalities, and this has proven to be extremely valuable.

Such cooperation demonstrates that networking, professional relationships, and regular contact with peers are essential elements of effective municipal governance and capacity building.

In conclusion, I believe and hope that in the future the role of municipalities in the EU integration process will be significantly strengthened and will no longer be confined to a single structure, such as the EU coordination office. Instead, EU standards should be translated into concrete actions, and the negotiation chapters should be operationalized through direct activities at the local level.

For example, if there is a negotiation chapter related to agriculture, relevant stakeholders should be brought together to define and distribute concrete tasks and responsibilities.

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