



Executive summary

Mid-term Review

European Union Trust Fund (EUTF) Support Programme
for Refugee Settlements in Northern Uganda (SPRS-NU):
Livelihood and Labor Market Relevant Skills Development
for Refugees and Host Communities

Uganda

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1 Presentation of the evaluation

While around 800,000 young people in Uganda reach working age every year, only 70,000-100,000 paid jobs are created annually. In addition to the fact that most businesses are small and informal, there is a gap between the skills of graduates of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and the needs of employers for skilled employees in all main economic sectors. Many young people – especially refugees and women – face supply and demand side barriers in access to TVET and entrepreneurship.

Against this backdrop, Enabel implements the Support Programme for Refugee Settlements in Northern Uganda (SPRS-NU) since 2016 with funding from the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa. The programme component led by Enabel seeks to improve livelihoods, food security and nutrition of refugee and host communities (general objective) by enhancing their livelihood and labour market relevant skills (specific objective) through formal vocational training and entrepreneurship support. The object of this review is the most recent addendum to the grant agreement, under which Enabel implements the programme in five districts of Northern Uganda and one district in Western Uganda, which altogether host a significant number of South Sudanese refugees.

The purpose of the review is to support accountability, learning, and steering. The review covers the period from December 2021 to September 2023 and is based on available documents and existing M&E data, as well as primary data collected by the review team in five of the six programme districts. The team interviewed 51 key informants, conducted focus groups with a total of 36 beneficiaries, and observed training locations and facilities.

2 Results and conclusions

2.1 Performance criteria

The OECD-DAC evaluation criteria were scored on a scale of A (very good), B (good), C (problems), or D (serious deficiencies).

Evaluation criterion	A	B	C	D
Relevance		•		
Coherence		•		
Efficiency			•	
Effectiveness	•			
Impact		•		
Sustainability		•		

Relevance: The objectives of SPRS-NU match the needs and priorities of beneficiaries, and the programme design addresses the main skilling constraints faced by beneficiaries. This is especially true for provision of TVET and entrepreneurship support in rural areas while some challenges remain regarding accommodation and transport costs for students, outdated training curricula, and limited opportunities for work-based learning. The set of trades supported by SPRS-NU was identified through a labour market scan but has not been sufficiently adaptive to fully align with the preferences of refugees. There is clear evidence that beneficiary selection has adhered to the targeting criteria and focuses on those most in need of skills development and income generation. The intervention is fully aligned with the government priorities for TVET and refugee response articulated in

national policies and plans. SPRS-NU is also consistent with the country strategy of the donor and, at a general level, with the relevant Belgian development cooperation policies.

Coherence: SPRS-NU is compatible with other Enabel interventions in the TVET and education sectors in Uganda. The recently initiated Enabel Country Programme for 2023-2027 is likely to further strengthen internal coherence and enhance the currently still limited direct synergies. The upcoming intervention ‘Sustainable Business for Uganda’ (SB4U) can directly build on SPRS-NU in West Nile region. Synergies with Belgian NGOs in Uganda are limited. Ensuring coherence with other (non-Belgian) actors within programme areas is also challenging for Enabel given the fragmented landscape of skills development and livelihood actors, although coordination mechanisms exist.

Efficiency: The performance of the intervention against planned outputs has been very good so far, both in terms of time and quality, despite the challenging operational context. Outputs to direct beneficiaries are delivered through grantees and their co-applicants. Although this modality has been more efficient than direct implementation would have been, the efficiency gains have been outweighed by Enabel’s large overhead structure for the programme, which has negatively affected the input-output ratio. The implementation period for grantees and co-applicants was designed to be disproportionately short.

Effectiveness: The programme outputs have been effectively used by Enabel, its partners, and the beneficiaries to enhance access of refugee and host communities to quality skills development (Result 1 of SPRS-NU). This result applies primarily to the (so far) 984 direct beneficiaries in TVET, which include a large proportion of refugees and women. SPRS-NU has also improved stakeholder coordination for skills development (Result 2).

Impact: The impacts on direct beneficiaries cannot be accurately determined yet. However, there is evidence of emerging impacts. The excellent level of formal skills development is evidenced by the high rate of institution-based learners who have sat for and passed the official assessments. In terms of livelihood impacts, instant training has triggered clear income gains after only a few months, and current trainees in work-based learning have started selling their first products and services. A 2023 re-tracer study of previous graduates found high levels of self- or wage-employment and substantial income gains after and due to the training received.

Sustainability: While the financial resources of the national and local governments for skills development are very limited, Enabel has secured EU funding for the new SB4U programme, which is still in formulation phase but envisages further support to skills development and decent work also in West Nile region. Grantees and co-applicants, and the training centres operated by them, have strengthened their technical capacities with support of Enabel. However, without continued funding, this does not significantly reduce the risk that the absorption capacity for refugees of these organisations/centres drops back to their baseline levels after the end of SPRS-NU. The capacities of the private sector as provider of work-based learning have improved. Local ownership (especially by refugee communities) is relatively strong.

Transversal themes (gender, and environment and climate change): All grantee/co-applicant consortia have addressed gender-specific needs and access constraints to skills development although they differ in systematic planning and scale. The corresponding activities and outputs have visibly enhanced access of female youth to institution-based learning, and there is evidence of strong economic empowerment of women participating in instant training. However, the programme budgets and work plans do not sufficiently acknowledge the extra level of effort and resources needed for gender-

specific support, especially to support mothers. Environment and climate change aspects have not been systematically streamlined in SPRS-NU, except for training in agriculture/agribusiness.

3 Recommendations

R1: *Take actions to increase the budget and time available to grantees and co-applicants.* In future phases of SPRS-NU or similar interventions, Enabel should produce a rapid (rather than an in-depth) labour market assessment and be flexible to adjust the set of trades supported later. This would give implementing partners time to serve two sequential cohorts of beneficiaries and ensure a better match of the selected trades with the preferences of refugees. Enabel should also attempt to speed up the selection of grantees and reconsider the current tracer study (relying on those done for previous cohorts).

R2: *Invest (or de-invest) in system-level actions in function of the timeframe of the intervention and the likely contribution of these actions to enhancing sustainability.* In similar interventions, Enabel should work on reducing local actors' dependency on external financing so that system-level actions become more effective. Specifically, Enabel should support vocational training institutes in identifying ways to generate internal revenues, and it should explore the possibility of setting up revolving funds for institution-based learners (rather than subsidizing 100% of the tuition fees). The fund should be initially supervised by Enabel but eventually by local governments and/or Refugee Welfare Councils.

R3: *Further optimise the targeting and tailoring of the intervention to specific sub-groups.* Consider targeting a host community share of 50% in total beneficiaries, provided it can be justified on the grounds of vulnerability. Support grantees and co-applicants in systematically planning and implementing support to mothers of young children from the beginning, including a programme-wide support strategy for this group. Further reduce access constraints (and increase the share in total beneficiaries) of members of target communities who live further away from training centres or work-based learning hubs.

R4: *Adopt realistic approaches for engaging the private sector in work-based learning in West Nile region.* In interventions with short timelines (including the current phase of SPRS-NU), Enabel should accept working with only a limited number of 'first mover' businesses. In interventions with longer timeframes, it can consider a broader engagement strategy for the private sector, which should focus on promoting the tangible economic benefits that providers of traineeships may obtain.

4 Lessons learned

L1: *Understanding constraints in access to quality skills development*

The preparatory analysis and implementation of the programme has shown that the access constraints to quality skills development faced by refugee and host communities are complex and need to be addressed simultaneously. This typically involves working with a wide array of stakeholders, such as private sector providers of work-based learning, local government, local media, refugee communities including community-based organisations and women's groups, health centres, etc.

L2: *Matching strategic ambitions with resources and timeline*

While the complexity of the previous access constraints supports the rationale of system-wide approaches, the experience of SPRS-NU shows that there is only so much a skills

development intervention can achieve with limited resources and timeframe. Acknowledging these limitations, solutions for reducing access constraints can be prioritised regarding their expected (cost) effectiveness within the given programme period. Establishing such rankings can provide clarity about what an intervention can realistically achieve and help programme staff to strategically orient it.

L3: Involvement of the private sector

The private sector plays multiple roles in SPRS-NU and similar interventions. Its active strategic and operational participation in skills development is thus crucial. This is what the programme has attempted, with varying level of success depending on the specific role in which the private sector has been engaged. Linking graduates of institution-based learning to businesses offering traineeships has so far created the biggest skilling and livelihood impacts observed in the intervention. It is also essential to engage the private sector in other roles to eventually reduce donor dependency of the TVET system (especially for refugees), but this requires a long-term approach.