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ITÄ-20 and Embassy of Finland (Kyiv, Ukraine)

6.11.2020

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**Final Report
Mid-Term Review
Learning Together Project
Ukraine**

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

COVID-19	Coronavirus disease
CTs	Cluster Task Teams
CTA	Chief Technical Advisor
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EU	European Union
EUDEL	The EU Delegation to Ukraine
FCG	Finnish Consulting Group
HRBA	Human Rights-Based Approach
ICT	Information and communications technology
ITTI	In-Service Teacher Training Institutes
L2	Second Language
LC	Language Component
MFA	Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine
MTR	Mid-Term Review
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPD	National Project Director
NUS	The New Ukrainian School
OECD DAC	The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PB	Project Board
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PM	Project Management
PMT	Project Management Team
SC	Steering Committee
SL	State language
STA	Short-term assistance
STEM	Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

1. Executive Summary

The aim of the Mid-Term Review (MTR) is to produce evidence-based knowledge on the successes and key challenges of the first half of the implementation period of the Learning Together project in Ukraine. The Project “Learning Together” (from here on referred to as the “Project”) supports the Ukrainian School Reform with the assistance of Finland. The mid-term review aims to enhance joint learning of the Project Team and the key stakeholders to steer the implementation of the Project towards the set results in the final implementation period and to enable better strategic decision-making and programming in Ukraine with the Finnish support.

The Mid-term review concludes that the Project has progressed well and achieved some tangible outputs despite the challenges encountered, especially the COVID-19. The mid-term review allows the Project to review its operations and activities reflecting the findings, conclusions, and recommendation in the final part of the project. **It is recommended that the Project will be continued and finalised within its current scope with a possible no-cost extension. It is not recommended to add any new components to the Project.**

The Introduction presents the scope of the mid-term review; the team, the methodologies applied, the time period and the deliverables. The field study, which was implemented at a distance, included in-depth online interviews and a survey. **A total of 41 participants were involved in the mid-term review.** Altogether 25 persons with the Ukrainian language as mother tongue, 9 Finnish and 7 persons with other languages (Hungarian, Romanian, Russian and Polish) participated in the review.

The review presents the context of the Project with reference to the recent legislative and strategic reforms realised in NUS reform in Ukraine. The Learning Together Project evaluated in the review and its progress up to mid-term is described based on the project documentation. The Key Findings are presented according to the key criteria of relevance, effectiveness, project-management/decision-making structures, efficiency, risk mitigation and sustainability. Each of the key findings is presented and analysed drawing findings from three sources of data: the desk research, the interviews, and the survey.

In the review, the key findings are categorised and filtered from the collected data into conclusions. **In the conclusions, the evaluation experts of the review provide their interpretation on the Project’s successes and challenges in the mid-term based on the key findings.** The recommendations are drawn from the conclusions and are more practically oriented in terms of what should be improved, by whom, when and how. The aim of the recommendations is, whilst acknowledging the good performance of the Project, to support in achieving the results with long-term sustainability and impact. The lessons learnt are rather insights gathered and aim to support in continuing the Finnish-Ukrainian cooperation in education. The Annexes provide supporting evidence to the key findings and include the list of participants of interviews and surveys (without names), interview and survey questions (in English and Ukraine), a list of documentation reviewed, the survey results in power point presentation and interview results listed as a collection of statements.

The executive summary presents the outcomes of the mid-term review in the following matrix, including the logical progression from key findings to conclusions and

recommendations. The key findings, conclusions and recommendations are described and analysed in more detail later in the Final Report.

KEY FINDINGS	CONCLUSIONS	RECOMMENDATIONS
<i>Relevance</i>		
<p>1. The Project is supporting the NUS reform (laws, strategy), aligning with MoES' and beneficiaries' reform need.</p>	<p>1. The Project addresses well the NUS reform, MoES' and final beneficiaries' needs.</p>	<p>1. To continue supporting the NUS reform and highlight the Project's support and outcomes of the reform in all communication and visibility measures.</p>
<p>2.1 The Project is supporting the Finnish HRBA policy in its activities. HRBA is integrated into project activities and outputs.</p> <p>2.2 Higher level of engagement needed of target groups addressing the inclusion of disadvantaged teachers, staff or students from vulnerable groups, minority members.</p>	<p>2.1 The Project is aligned with the Finnish HRBA policy. The activities support the objectives.</p> <p>2.2 The Project needs clear evidence on the progress on the integration of disadvantaged target groups and minority members into the Project's activities.</p>	<p>2.1 To continue supporting the HRBA policy and highlight it in all communication and visibility measures.</p> <p>2.2 To provide evidence on including the diversity of participants, incl. disadvantaged persons and students from vulnerable groups into the activities. To evidence progress from sensitive to progressive and transformative measures in HRBA.</p>
<p>3.1 MoES is involved in the development of the Project's outputs. MoES is expecting project support in the reform progress towards the 5th-6th grade and reaping the benefits from the developed outputs so far.</p> <p>3.2 The ITTI role is changing in the teacher training provision.</p>	<p>3.1 MoES' ownership of the Project and the results is on a high level. MoES needs the Project's support to progress the reform to the teaching and learning in 5th-6th grades.</p> <p>3.2 There are institutional changes in teacher training provision in Ukraine due to the Law (2017). There is a need for widening teacher training provision, incl. digital training, in addition to ITTI.</p>	<p>3.1 To agree with MoES on supporting the progress of the reform to the next level of education during the final part of the Project; e.g. build on the existing outputs and training materials adapted for the 5th and 6th grade; delivery in digital format etc.</p> <p>3.2 To include new teacher training institutions, providers and representatives in the teacher training activities organised by the Project.</p>
<p>4. MoES has a Reform Support Team (supported by EBRD) and needs stronger donor cooperation to support the reform in future programming.</p>	<p>4. The Project has an opportunity to build stronger cooperation with other donor projects addressing the needs of the Reform Support Team in the future programming.</p>	<p>4. To create cooperation opportunities with other donor projects supporting the Reform Support Team with the view of the next programming in Ukraine. To follow closely the education reform progress and cooperation opportunities, as needed by MoES.</p>

<i>Effectiveness</i>		
1. The beneficiaries perceive the Project's activities successful, e.g. teacher training and language component.	1. The Project's activities are implemented effectively , e.g. teacher training and language component	1. To continue addressing effectively the needs of the beneficiaries. To build on successes and share information across the Clusters and LC to gain synergy. To build on the successful activities and highlight them in communication to ensure sustainability.
2. Development of e-learning portal delayed.	2. Development of e-learning portal is significantly delayed due to the fact there was not full clarity and vision on the needs and requirements regarding the e-platform format and content, from the beginning of the project.	2. To continue developing e-learning solutions with different, alternative approaches (e.g. open-source) to ensure sustainability and wider outreach of the developed outputs (e.g. from teacher training, education standards, education environment, the language component etc.) To assess the feasibility of supporting the e-learning portal within the Project's time span and the available resources.
<i>Project Management/ Decision-making structures</i>		
1. Project Management Team remained largely the same; changes in the representatives of MFA and MoES; the role of the Steering Committee has been revised to improve the efficiency in the management.	1. The Project has a clear management structure. The external changes (changes in staffing, COVID-19) force Project Management to find new ways of working.	1. To revise the Project document and prepare an action plan for the final part of the Project. To organise a strategic meeting internally with PMT, Clusters and LC to prioritise the activities; find synergies across the clusters in order to reach the Project's common objectives.
2.1 The Project's experts are working at a distance after COVID-19 pandemic. Digital communication and development at a distance are perceived as becoming a new normal as COVID-19 pandemic continues. 2.2. Transition of project activities to an online environment. The production of digital outputs for wider outreach is asked by MoES.	2.1 The mode of working in the project's activities have changed due to COVID-19. Working at a distance has resulted in difficulties in communication and coordination. The Project needs to address the digitalisation holistically across the activities of Clusters and LC. 2.2 Transition to online digital approach and delivering the outputs digitally is highly needed by MoES.	2.1 To develop a holistic plan for digitalisation. To prepare a strategic plan on the transformation of the project into the distance and digital mode , involving all Clusters and the Language Component; To develop a joint action plan to transfer the activities and outputs into a digital mode within the project. 2.2 To make a strategic plan on how to transfer the activities online, produce digital outputs, ensure broad access

		and outreach, support the users with digital skills and guidance to e-resources etc. To transfer the project activities to online environment and produce digital outputs according to the Project's action plan and as needed by MoES. To re-allocate the human resources to digitalisation , e.g. a full-time expert in digitalisation of education and also having pedagogical skills.
<p>3. There is a need to improve communication internally concerning all levels in the Project.</p> <p>3.2 The decision-making is perceived too slow and should be more flexible, f.ex. transfer from onsite trainings to online mode; approval of ToRs, recruitments etc.</p>	<p>3.1 The Project has a problem regarding communication across the Clusters/LC, Ukrainian and Finnish experts, Project Management and MoES.</p> <p>3.2 The Project has a problem in the current decision-making structure. There is a need to improve the efficiency of decision-making; faster transfer of operations according to the need.</p>	<p>3.1 To improve the internal communication of the Project. To discuss the gaps and make a plan for the improvement. To include all Clusters and LC in the PMT. To prepare a communication action plan covering the PMT, the Clusters and the LC.</p> <p>3.2 To revise the decision-making structures involving all Clusters and LC and make an action plan for improvement internally in the Project.</p>
<p>4. The communication on NUS reform is spread widely through different media channels; the project increased awareness and positive attitudes regarding the NUS reform (teacher trainers, wider public etc.)</p> <p>4.2 Communication to reach specific groups (e.g. university teaching staff and parents) could be enhanced.</p>	<p>4.1. The communication activities are efficiently supporting MoES in the implementation of reform.</p> <p>4.2. The project needs to develop targeted communication measures to increase awareness and engagement to the NUS reform (those target groups and key stakeholders that until now had a lower level of engagement).</p>	<p>4.1 To prepare an external communication and dissemination plan for sustainability. To continue developing the external communication activities to support the NUS reform based on the positive progress and outputs achieved in the Project.</p> <p>4.2 To revisit and revise the external communication plan and add targeted communication towards key stakeholder groups, e.g. parents, university teaching staff, marginalised groups etc. To incorporate evidence on media presence with indicators to demonstrate the impact.</p>
Efficiency		
1. There is strong capacity building perceived through the training activities of the Project.	1. The capacities built in the Project are strong and indicate the potential for sustainability	1. To benefit from capacities built in the project in the strategic planning during the

There are good outputs, f.ex. teacher training materials with good potential for wider reach. The Project was perceived successful in the Language Component, as the activities were limited to regions.	of the activities and outputs. The capacities built in the Project will ensure the impact of the outputs.	final part , e.g. implementation, dissemination and communication. To plan collaboratively with local capacities on how to proceed and ensure impact and sustainability of the outputs.
2. Human resources are perceived as insufficient regarding all activities of the Project. Some Cluster advisors are not engaged as full-time experts. The expert resources (person-months) are spent on administrative issues rather than on the development of activities.	2. The Project needs to assess the needed human resources and expertise to support the activities towards the final part; the expert resources need to be allocated effectively.	2. To re-allocate financial resources to add the expertise needed in the Project according to the revised Project's action plan.
3. The Project has the right approach to collect feedback from the beneficiaries. There is a lack of Monitoring and Evaluation system in the Project to measure the progress and performance of all activities.	3. The Project has an appropriate feedback collection system, but the entire M&E system of the Project, providing solid evidence on how the project was successful and to what extent the envisaged impact was achieved is lacking.	3. To develop a Monitoring and Evaluation system for the Project in line with the revised Project Document and Action Plan. To continue collecting feedback and measuring progress and impact on key performance indicators.
Risk mitigation		
1. There are political changes and instability perceived in Ukraine.	1. There is political instability in the context of the Project, but at the same time, there are the legislative framework and strategies to back up the continuation of the reform.	1. To have an agreement with MoES on the action plan for the key priorities of the reform for the rest of the project time to mitigate policy changes. To follow the legislative framework and strategies of the reform to mitigate political instability.
2. There is a need for prompt adjustments for the final part of the Project, which are possible due to flexibility of MFA. There is a need for agility to respond to external changes as needed	2. The Project has a possibility to make adjustments to the reform support in the mid-term, as agreed by MFA/MoES.	2. To use the remaining time and budget effectively to avoid the risk of not delivering by continuing with successful and needed activities. To have a continuous update of external changes and make agile responses in implementation.
Sustainability		
1. There is a community of active developers and supporters of NUS in the reform supported by the Project.	1. The community of active developers and supporters of NUS will take the reform forward after the Project ends.	1. To plan collaboratively and benefit from the active, committed people locally to find ways how to take the reform forward from the Project's outputs. To prepare a sustainability plan together with MoES, key stakeholders

		and beneficiaries as part of the exit strategy. To engage people to become examples and advocates for sustainability.
2. There are good practices developed in the project.	2. The Project has good potential of disseminating and sustaining outputs and examples of good practices from the Project.	2. To disseminate good practices from the project, stories of people involved, examples of reform to ensure impact and sustainability.
3. Digital approach across all clusters and LC is requested to further support wider outreach of the outputs.	3. The Project needs to develop an overall digital approach across all Clusters and LC to support wider outreach and sustainability of the outcomes for the future.	3. To utilise digitalisation to support wider access, outreach for impact and sustainability. To prepare a digital strategy and actions for all Clusters and LC to ensure wider outreach and sustainability for the future. To provide indicators to demonstrate the impact. It is recommended to use MFA's development indicators when applicable.

2. Introduction

The main purpose of the Mid-Term Review (MTR) of Learning Together project in Ukraine is to produce evidence-based knowledge on successes and key challenges of the first half of the project implementation period to enhance joint learning of the project team and the key stakeholders, and to enable steering for better strategic decision-making, programming and implementation towards the set results. The scope of the Mid-Term Review (MTR) covers the project time from the beginning of the Project in July 2018 up to August 2020.

The project document identifies three indicators to assess the overall impact of the project after its finalisation:

- i. Public perception of education
- ii. Increased teacher job satisfaction
- iii. Improved level of competencies among students.

The MTR is planned in the Project Document to be conducted as an external and independent study during the second year of the project's implementation. The purpose of the MTR is to support the steering of the project activities and the management based on findings, lessons learned and recommendations of the review. The review will provide evidence to support MFA and the project in strategic decision-making with forward-looking and improvement-oriented recommendations. The review will thus support to make necessary adjustments for the remaining implementation period, especially considering the COVID-19 situation and the recent Government change in Ukraine.

The Terms of Reference outline the research questions for the mid-term review. The three main review questions are:

1. To what extent has the project promoted Finnish and Ukrainian policy objectives? (Relevance)
2. To what extent has the project delivered the planned results during the first half of the project implementation period? (Effectiveness)
3. To what extent has the project management and decision-making structures been supportive of and facilitated smooth project implementation, and what are the key issues to be addressed in the future? (Project Management)

The review is framed according to the ToR and Evaluation Criteria (e.g. OECD DAC): Relevance, Effectiveness, Project management/Decision-making structures, Efficiency, Sustainability and Risk Mitigation. The review sub-questions under each criterion were formulated as detailed in the ToR.

The primary users of the review results are:

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Finland
- MoES in Ukraine
- Project Management Team
- Steering Committee
- Project Board

The MTR has been conducted home-based between the time period of 3.9.2020 – 6.11.2020.

Main milestones and reports

- Contract signed – signed 3.8.2020
- Inception report – approved 29.9.2020
- Data collection of surveys and interviews – 6.10. – 22.10.2020
- Presentation of the field findings (at the end of the field phase) – 26.10.2020
- Draft Final report – 2.11.2020
- Final report – 6.11.2020
- Presentation of the MTR findings and recommendations –to be confirmed

The overall objective of the MTR is to assess **to what extent the Project has progressed towards its objectives**. The aim of the review to assess the **successes and challenges** in the implementation of the project. With the findings, lessons learned and recommendations, the review aims **to support and facilitate better strategic decision-making, programming and implementation for the project towards its final part**. The conclusions aim to support the development and steering of the project activities as well as its management and cooperation partners for 2021 and beyond.

The mid-term review was implemented according to the plan of the Inception. The review was conducted at a distance with online communication and digital tools due to the continued pandemic situation and travel restrictions both in Ukraine and Finland.

The MTR Team includes two senior evaluation experts, Dr Eila Heikkilä and Dr Marija Pavkov. In addition, the team has a Junior Expert, Iris Hiltunen, and a local assistant Mr Oleh Lytvynov in Ukraine to assist in the review. The support of MFA and the Project Management Team facilitated to conduct the review effectively in a short time period.

Inception

- Kick-off meeting on 11.9.2020 with the MFA, Embassy of Finland and the PMT in English.
- Another meeting for the PMT with Ukrainian partners was held on 1.10.2020.
- After the kick-off meeting, the Project supported the MTR team in compiling the project documentation, as outlined in the ToR.
- The desk research involved reviewing the project documentation to achieve initial findings on the project.
- The desk review was included in the Inception Report.
- The interviews and survey questionnaires were outlined based on the key criteria and research questions of the ToR and finalised according to the findings from the desk review

Field study

The field study consisted of in-depth interviews and surveys in Kyiv and Transcarpathian region in Ukraine. The fieldwork aimed to collect primary assessment data from the organisations and people, who have been actively involved in the project. Two main methods of data collection were used, namely, in-depth interviews (online) and a survey questionnaire (online). After the approval of the Inception, the team translated both the questionnaires from English into the Ukrainian language.

The list of participants was completed with names, contact information and language preference. The Project supported the review team in completing the list with the interviewees and survey participants. The in-depth interviews lasting about an hour targeted the members of the Project Board, Steering Committee and Project Management Team. The survey participants were the end-beneficiaries of the Project in the activities of the three Clusters of the project. The invitations to participate in the mid-term review were sent through e-mail. The e-mail of the survey had two links to the questionnaire, one in English and one in the Ukrainian language. A letter of recommendation was provided by MFA to support the participants in engaging in the field study.

Interviews (on-line in Microsoft Teams or Zoom)

The MTR interviews were arranged during the time period of 6.10. – 22.10.2020. The two senior experts, supported by the local assistant, conducted interviews in English or Ukrainian language as requested by the interviewee. The interpretation was consecutive. During the interviews, it was possible to prompt further questions regarding issues of interest for the review. The interviews were noted down and/or recorded for the later reference and data analysis. The data collection included 21 interviews involving Project Board, Steering Committee and Project Management members in the assessment. A compilation of the statements from the interviews are included in Annex V. The insights of the interviewees and the compiled statements provide the key data for the review and analysis of the Project in the mid-term.

Survey (Google Drive questionnaire)

The MTR team conducted the survey with a standard questionnaire. The persons targeted (25 in total) were participants of the activities in the different clusters of the Project. The questionnaire was sent through e-mails to the participants, in English and Ukrainian language. Three reminders, one from the Project, were sent to encourage participants to reply to the questions. 20 persons replied to the survey. Their insights provided key findings complementing the desk review and interview findings. The open space questions were translated from Ukrainian to the English language. The data from the survey were processed into graphs and statements and finalised for the purpose of the analysis and final reporting. The field study involved a total of 41 persons and participants into the mid-term review. 27 women and 14 men were involved, thus respecting gender representativeness in the sample of people involved in the field research. 25 persons with the Ukrainian language as mother tongue participated in the review, complemented by 9 Finnish and 7 other languages (Hungarian, Romanian, Russian and Polish). The Survey results are included in Annex IV.

Data Analysis

The data analysis reviews the material, which was collected through a combination of three data collection methods (desk review, surveys, and interviews). The approach of triangulation in the data collection allows for the **review of the data from viewpoints of different groups of people** to report on key messages and lessons learnt on the Project in the mid-term phase. The **qualitative approach in the review** is a **content analysis** of the vast amount of information collected during the field study. The review identifies and analyses the main themes, citations, and keywords from the qualitative data to answer the research questions under the key criteria.

The content analysis follows a **systematic interpretation of the aggregated information**, including findings from the desk-research, interview, and survey. The process includes identifying the emergent themes and key messages regarding the specific criteria and research questions across the data collected. The analysis and findings of the qualitative data are complemented and supported with evidence from the **quantitative analyses of the survey**. The interviewees' insights from the strategic and operational level and the beneficiaries' experiences and perceptions from the survey aim to build up a holistic and authentic picture of state of the art and the steps forward in the mid-term of the Project.

The analysis process draws the **conclusions and recommendations, answering research questions and sub-questions** regarding all evaluation criteria. The final report is to provide an overview of the review, highlighting the **main findings, conclusions, recommendations, and lessons learnt**. The findings are presented in a summary table including main findings, conclusions and recommendations and their logical links. The MTR findings are commented by the MFA and the PMT to make necessary amendments.

The limitations of the used methodology and the findings of the mid-term review need to be acknowledged. The review was implemented at a distance without a possibility of the senior evaluation experts to travel to Ukraine. The findings are based solely on the Project's documentation and the data collected from the people, who participated in the review. In this situation, it was not possible to learn informally about the Project, to learn to know the staff, to make observations about the different activities, the locations etc. The online interviews and discussions with the key stakeholders lasted around an hour and were more formal than normally in an interview meeting onsite, where discussions are held more informally in a relaxed office environment. The review team could not track the respondents of the survey,

as they were anonymous. A major part of survey respondents are, for example, teaching staff, which may have a slight emphasis on teacher training in the key findings.

3. Description of the context of the Project

The Learning Together Project is set in the context of supporting the education reform in Ukraine. The Law “On Education” (2017)¹ sets up the basic principles of the new education system. The law **highlights teaching the key competences**, as they are necessary for each modern individual to function successfully in society. The New Ukrainian School (NUS) “**Conceptual Principles for the Secondary School Reform (2016)**” **describes the conceptual approach and the changes that will occur in the Ukrainian education system upon the introduction of the Law “On Education” (2017) and the Secondary School Reform**. The new school reform consists of nine elements, out of which the Project is addressing with the principles of **new educational content based** on enabling the competencies necessary for successful self-fulfilment in society; **motivated teaching staff** who enjoy the freedom of creativity and professional development; **a contemporary educational environment** that will provide necessary conditions, means, and **technology for the education** of pupils, teachers, and parents, not only in the premises of the educational establishment (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2016)². In this regard, the **Project aims to support the NUS reform by developing inter alia new teacher training programmes** (Cluster 1 activities), **the e-platform to provide opportunities for the teachers to upgrade their skills through online courses** and experience exchange/internship (Cluster 3 activities), and **new textbooks and teaching materials (Language Component activities)**.

The Law “On Education, Article 59 (2017)” defines **the professional development and advanced training of educational and academic workers**. Professional development of educational and academic workers envisages permanent self-education, participation in advanced training programmes and any other types and forms of the professional growth. The **NUS concept acknowledges and announces substantial changes in teacher training content, followed by the development of incentives for personal and professional development**. It also foresees **a variety of teacher training models**, such as courses at Institutes for Teacher Professional Development, workshops, webinars, online courses, conferences, and self-education (certificates recognition) (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2016)³. The Project’s Cluster 1 activities aim, for example, at “teacher preparation aiming at an increased professional capacity of primary school teachers”. In cooperation with MoES, the Project has developed teacher professional standards and professional standards for principals to support the reform.

One of the key competences of the New Ukrainian School (NUS) is defined as the **communication in the national language (and mother tongue, if different)** (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2016)⁴. These key competences and skills in communication are supported by the Language Component of the Project, in particular regarding the key competences linked to the fluency in state language, civic and social

¹ Law On Education (2017), Article 12, pg. 14; Article 39, pg. 31

² Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (2016) The New Ukrainian School – Conceptual Principles of Secondary School Reform, pg.7

³ Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (2016) The New Ukrainian School – Conceptual Principles of Secondary School Reform ,pg.16 - 17

⁴ Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (2016) The New Ukrainian School – Conceptual Principles of Secondary School Reform, pg.11

competences. In terms of the aim of the reform to **develop contemporary educational environment**, the new concept envisages, amongst other activities, development of an infrastructure that will support various forms of teaching (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2016). **This aspect of the reform is supported by the Project by developing a national e-platform for e-resources and textbooks.** To conclude, the aim of the **NUS reform** is to transform profoundly the ways of teaching and learning in primary education in Ukraine, which the Learning Together aims to support.

Ukraine has experienced acute political, security, and economic challenges during the past six years. There have been Presidential elections on April 21, 2019. The parliamentary elections were held on July 21, 2019. The resulting government took office in August 2019, and the new government, re-appointed in March 2020, have both committed to an ambitious and wide-ranging reform agenda (World Bank)⁵.

4. Description of the Project evaluated

The four-year, bilateral, nation-wide technical assistance project Learning Together started in July 2018. The total budget of the Project is 8 million euros, with the Finnish contribution of 6 million and the EU of 2 million. The EU support is tailored to improve the instruction of the Ukrainian language as a second language among the national minorities in Chernivtsi and Transcarpathian regions, whereas the overall Project has nation-wide coverage.

The Project targets the primary school grades 1-4. The implementation is organised in three Clusters and a Language Component:

- 1) Cluster 1: Teacher preparation aiming at an increased professional capacity of Primary School Teachers;
- 2) Cluster 2: Education promotion aiming at increased awareness on and positive attitudes towards the education reform among the general public via communication activities;
- 3) Cluster 3: Education environment aiming at the development of learning materials accessible to all under the new educational standards;
- 4) Language component: Instruction of Ukrainian language as the language 2 (L2) among national minorities, focusing on the Hungarian and Romanian linguistic minorities in Chernivtsi and Transcarpathian regions.

The competent authorities of the Project are the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (MoES), the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (MFA), and the EU Delegation to Ukraine (EUDEL). Representatives of these authorities are engaged in the Project Board and Steering Committee to steer the project and its decision-making and to support in the monitoring of the Project (Revised Project Document 2019)⁶.

FCG International Ltd. – in co-operation with the Faculty of Educational Sciences of the University of Helsinki, and the University of Helsinki Centre for Continuing Education HY+ – has been contracted as **the Implementing Agency** through an open tender procedure by the MFA. The implementing agency was required to have strong connections with Finnish education institutions, in particular, with institutions engaged in competence-based

⁵ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ukraine/overview>

⁶ Revised Project Document 2019, pg. 42

curriculum development, teacher training and professional development, educational material production (including ICT) and supporting curriculum implementation at the school level. Similarly, the requirement was that the agency has a broad network of short-term experts and experience in arranging experience exchange between educational institutions at different levels in Finland. As the Implementing Agency, FCG International provides technical assistance and home office support for the implementation of the Project.

The implementing agency's **international technical assistance team** comprises the Chief Technical Advisor (CTA) and three experts. Serving as short-term assistance (STA), they are the responsible consultants for the three Clusters, thus supporting the implementation of the Project with travel to Ukraine as per the requests. The expertise required for these positions was teacher preparation, learning assessment/PISA analysis, and learning materials production. This arrangement does not exclude the recruitment of other STA whenever the need arises. Regarding staffing, the Project has the CTA, a National Project Director (NPD) as well as secretarial and interpretation services. A pool of Short-Term Experts (international and local) are also engaged in Project implementation. The Language Component has a separate Language Advisor, as well as office and regional staff, which have been later added to the team. The Home Office (Home Coordinator) ensures that the needed Technical Expertise is available. The Home Office organises the study visits and other international experience exchange in accordance with the Project Document and Annual Work Plans.

The **key cooperating partner is MoES** together with other authorities and organisations in Ukraine. The project management structure consists of a Project Board, Steering Committee, a Project Management Team, and three Cluster Task Teams.

The activities started with a comprehensive study of the context and conditions for education development in Ukraine. The Project has comprehensively described the recent reforms and progress in the education sector, thus, providing a solid basis for the support. The objectives of the Project, the Clusters and the Language Component are clearly explained with detailed arrangements for the implementation activities, resources, budget, monitoring and reporting. The Project Document was modified and extended during the Inception period, based on input from the Project's collaboration partners in 2019 (Project Document, March 2019).

The implementation of the activities started in early 2019. The Project started successfully by mobilising and recruiting the human resources, setting up the project management, planning and monitoring systems, finalising the project approach. In the early start, the project documentation was updated and the Work Plan for 2019-2022, and Annual Plan for 2019 with the budget were developed. In addition, the Project also prepared a draft Project Document for the Language Component funded by the EU, as a later addition (Inception Report, 18.1.2019).

The Project organized a kick-off event on 15 March 2019 under the title Finnish Education Day. The event was a result of a collaboration between the Project, the Embassy of Finland (Education Finland), and the MoES. There were 460 participants at this event. Apart from introducing the Project and organizing workshops around the contents of the Project, Finnish education firms were exhibiting their products.

It can be observed that **the Project had some challenges and delays early on.** In 2019, the Project activities in Cluster 1 Teacher Preparation started as planned but had some delay in the approval processes. In Cluster 2 Education Promotion, the activities also started as planned, but were delayed due to problems in decision-making processes. In Cluster 3, training activities were organised as planned, but the e-platform component did not succeed due to irregularities in procurement. The Language Component had administrative constraints due to different rules, as it is a separate component with EU funding (Annual Report 2019, 19.2.2020).

In 2020, the Project continued the activities started in 2019 successfully according to the plan. However, in March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic struck also Ukraine and the Project had to start working at a distance. The Project activities continued but had to be adjusted to the new situation. While the Project made a plan for the adjustments, some of the activities were delayed or even halted due to the situation.

By the mid-term in August 2020, the Project started a new approach of working at a distance through online to continue the activities and trainings. However, the smooth transition to implement the activities through online communication has proven challenging according to the Project's reporting. In addition, there have been changes in the staffing of MFA, MoES and also the Project. There have been institutional changes in the Project's cooperation counterparts. A new structure of Centres of Pedagogical Development has been introduced on the side of In-service Teacher Training Institutes (ITTI), which is a key cooperation counterpart in Cluster 1 (Semi-Annual Report, 2020).

The Project has held five Steering Committee meetings in 2018, seven meetings in 2019, and 5 meetings in 2020 (one on 6th October). In addition, one Project Board meeting was held on 14.03.2019. The SC and the PB monitor and steer the strategic decisions of the project (Project's MoMs), while the Project's Management Team makes the operational decisions.

5. Key findings

The key findings on all criteria are drawn from the key messages emerging in the interviews with policymakers, project management team and the survey feedback received from the end-beneficiaries involved in the project activities in the three clusters and the language component, as well as the desk review analysis of project documentation. The evaluation questions and sub-questions for each of the five evaluation criteria are specified in the ToR and listed in Annex VI. The following sections on key findings are structured as to provide answers to the evaluation questions in a comprehensive and systematic way under key evaluation aspects presented as section headlines.

5.1. Relevance

Key findings:

Promotion of Finnish development policy and Ukrainian education policy objectives

Finland supports structural reform and reconstruction in Ukraine as the conflict poses a security threat to Europe and Ukraine needs assistance for its structural reforms and reconstruction efforts. Development policy is an integral part of Finland's human rights-based and value-based foreign and security policy. International cooperation and Finland's actions are grounded in the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In particular, Finland is committed to enhancing achievement of the global sustainable development goals of the Agenda 2030, among them the Goal 4 on Quality Education. Education is also among the priorities of the Finnish development policy. The priority number 3 highlights quality education as a means for building democratic and effective societies⁷. Finland's primary goal is to eradicate poverty, increase the inclusiveness of education and reduce inequalities. All actions take into account the cross-cutting objectives, which are gender equality, non-discrimination, the position of people with disabilities, climate resilience and low emission development. How the Project incorporated these aspects is analysed further below.

Finland applies **Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA)** in its development policy. Human rights are used as a basis for setting objectives for the development policy and cooperation. In addition, it means that the processes of development cooperation are guided by human rights principles. This implies that human rights principles are considered and applied in the programming, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. The minimum level is that all Finnish development interventions are human rights sensitive. The aim, however, is that all interventions will be human rights progressive or transformative⁸.

While education is one of the fundamental rights, the starting point of Finland's support to the Ukrainian education sector is that education is for all and every child has a right to education – making it human rights sensitive. The desk-research analysis reveals that HRBA is implemented in new Ukrainian policy documentation and other regulations that were passed prior to the Project beginning or during the first half of the Project.

The survey results support the desk-research findings regarding the integration of the human-rights based approach and further provide details on the integration of other **Finnish policy objectives** and the concepts of **inclusive education, gender equality, non-discrimination and climate/environmental sustainability** (figure 13, Annex IV). In more detail, the majority of respondents strongly agree or agree that the project has successfully integrated human rights approach (85%); inclusive education (85%); gender equality (75%); non-discrimination (75%), but only 35% of respondents believed that the project had addressed aspects of climate/environmental sustainability.

However, this is not surprising because the project is not focused on addressing the aspects of climate change and environmental sustainability. These themes could demonstrate to be important once the Project starts developing textbooks for STEM subjects. The Project is demonstrating strong MoES participation and steering of the Project activities in terms of their alignment with the New Ukrainian School concept. There is a clear logic in Project planning of individual activities aligned with the Implementation Plan (Phase I, Phase II,

⁷ Terms of Reference

⁸ https://um.fi/documents/35732/48132/human_rights_based_approach_in_finlands_development_cooperation_-_guidance_note_2015_pdf_32_sivua_118_mt.pdf/b757f2f3-6103-7a43-1508-ba1bbbe3908d?t=1560452713123

Phase III) of the New Ukrainian School concept (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2016)⁹.

The Human Rights-Based Approach and gender mainstreaming have been clearly applied in the planning of the Project, as presented in Annex 6 of the Revised Project Document (2019). The Project embeds Human Rights principals into the outputs and related activities of the Language Component. Based on the desk-research, all Cluster 1 related activities of the Language Component have aimed at Promotion of the methodology of teaching Ukrainian as a second language for national minorities, comprising aspects such as: (i) inclusive teaching strategies; (ii) work in a multicultural environment; (iii) gender equality.

Target groups of the Project are teachers, teacher trainers, students, employees/staff of different educational institutions and training centres, etc. However, while the Project is human rights sensitive, and thus complies with the minimum requirement, it does not sufficiently evidence being progressive or transformative regarding the HRBA. In this regard, the Project insufficiently provides further descriptive details on the profile of the target groups in general terms, for example: inclusion of disadvantaged teachers, staff, or students; inclusion of minority members; inclusion of students from vulnerable groups, etc. and the ways that the Project has supported human rights with progressive and transformative measures.

These findings of the desk-research analysis of basic Project documents is supported by the recommendations of the HRBA study which states that the Project should implement steps towards increasing the diversity of the Project participants (including gender balance, representatives of ethnic minorities, internally displaced persons) (Hrabovska O, 2019).

Contribution and alignment with the New Ukrainian School (NUS)

The desk review demonstrates that there is a clear logical framework between the planning on the Ukrainian policy level, relevant documentation that follows and supports the vision, and the Project as the means through which the goals of the Ukrainian education policy are put on the operational level and are being achieved as a step-wise process.

The document “New Ukrainian School concept book” (2016) outlines the implementation plan of the reform through the three phases of the education system development¹⁰ based on the objectives of the reform (Revised Project Document, 2019)¹¹ and the four building blocks (new educational content based on competencies, new professional teacher, contemporary school management and a new structure for schools, and modern educational environment). The desk-research findings demonstrate that **Project activities are fully aligned with the implementation phases of the concept document**. In addition, and following the implementation phases described above, the Project is fully aligned with the activities of the New Vision Action Plan as presented in the Revised Project Document (2019)¹². This demonstrates a **high level of alignment of project activities with the national plans, laws and other relevant documents** as referred to above. The Project is being implemented within the context of the Action Plan for 2017-2029 to implement the State Policy Concept of General Secondary Education “the New Ukrainian School”. In

⁹ Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (2016) The New Ukrainian School – Conceptual Principles of Secondary School Reform, pg. 31-33

¹⁰ Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (2016) The New Ukrainian School – Conceptual Principles of Secondary School Reform, pg. 30-33

¹¹ Revised Project Document (2019), pg. 9-10

¹² Revised Project Document, 2019, pg. 32-34.

addition, the Project is aligned with the implementation of the Road Map developed as a result of communication between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine and the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe on Article 7 of the new Education Law¹³.

The interviews provided further evidence that the project is **aligned with the MoES needs, which are based on the national laws and regulations**, developed before the Project start and during the implementation timeline. Project demonstrated flexibility in answering the new MoES needs that proceeded from the newly developed and approved regulations. For example (desk-research finding): support the **participatory development process** of teacher professional standards (basic and primary education teacher) through two three-day workshops and an online survey to collect feedback from teachers (activity C1.3).

The interviews revealed that the **Project addresses well the MoES need regarding the NUS reform** and that activities are strongly linked to what MoES does strategically in terms of the NUS reform. This is also supported by survey findings that the Project fully contributes to the Ukrainian School reform (figure 6, Annex IV). Since the **reform is progressing to the next level towards the 5th-9th grade**, the MoES expectation is that the Project will further support these reform plans by, for example, developing further the training of teacher trainers cascade model (e.g. topics in general pedagogy and digital skills). The interviews also clearly described the interaction between the project and MoES as the **co-creation process**, which is a positive aspect and should be continuously guided by the Project.

The survey results analysis provides additional supporting evidence that the project fully succeeded in meeting the needs of the participants (figure 5, Annex IV) as all respondents confirmed that the Project succeeded in meeting their needs. Additionally, the respondents provided more detail on how they succeeded to use and benefit from the new knowledge and skills, for example by applying some of the methods learned when providing in-service training for teachers; by using interesting motivational tasks for children; by applying new knowledge when training the teachers, developing methodology and teaching/learning materials.

However, the survey respondents (figure 7, Annex IV) provided the following answers when assessing the extent to which the Project has improved their knowledge and competences in their work:

- a) Teacher trainers: 21% extremely well; 50% very much; 21% moderately; 8% do not know
- b) Primary teachers (grade 1-4): 25% extremely well; 25% very much; 37.5% moderately; 12.5% do not know
- c) Teachers training Ukrainian language: 28% extremely well; 28% very much; 28% moderately; 16% do not know
- d) Subject matter teachers: 25 % very much; 25 % moderately; 50 % do not know
- e) University teaching staff: 20% extremely well; 20% moderately; 60 % do not know

It is interesting to note that only 50% of primary teachers stated that the Project has improved their knowledge and competences in work extremely well and very much since many of the Project activities in Cluster 1, Cluster 3, Language component, aimed at increasing teachers' competences. It could be argued that **primary teachers gained a general feeling that the Project answered their needs after they participated in trainings, but once they started implementing the new tools and methods in the schools and with other teachers, they encountered challenges**. This could be a message for the **Project to conduct a new teachers' needs analysis and to assess what skills and competences are currently perceived as highly needed**, in particular, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift towards digital and online modes of learning. The second message could be **to organise and**

¹³ Work Plan 2019, pg. 5

provide additional support to teachers and teacher trainers, as they might not feel competent enough in implementing the new knowledge, tools, and methods. The support service should be organised in a structured and frequent way.

Synergies with other projects

The interviews revealed that **MoES is cooperating with the Reform Support Team that was set up in 2019** and whose operational functioning is supported by EBRD. **The Reform Support Team was set up to close the human capacity gap in MoES and to address the tasks that MoES urgently needs, focusing on NUS reform.** Since both, the Project and the Reform Support Team are providing expertise to the implementation process of the NUS reform, the Project itself should further strengthen cooperation opportunities with the Reform Support Team. In that way, there is a potential that Project's activities could be coordinated together with the Reform Support Team and also, by bringing the national-level expertise of the Reform Support Team into the Project's activities, the sustainability and ownership of Project's outputs and results could be strengthened.

The Annual Report 2019¹⁴ mentions that the Project would get involved in a new multi-donor initiative on Inclusion and Soft Skills managed by UNFPA, but further details are not provided. The formation of the new World Bank development program which addresses the rationalisation of the school network in Ukraine is also mentioned¹⁵, but further details are not given. The Semi-Annual Report 2020 states on a general level that “networking, collaboration and building of synergy with other parallel initiatives, which work with the same target groups will continue”¹⁶. However, further information about the potential synergies and initiatives are not given. One of the interviewees mentioned that unofficial and occasional meetings at events organised by third parties do happen, but **any structured and in advance prepared cooperation is lacking. This is a shortcoming of a project** since there are undoubtedly many potential cooperation opportunities with other ongoing initiatives in Ukraine, financed by other donors or organisations. Such meetings could contribute to external actors understanding better the supportive role of the Project and the potential for the usability of Project results.

Institutional changes within the education sector and changing role of the In-service Teacher Training Institutes (ITTI)

The interviewees responsible for strategic decision-making in the MoES mentioned that the role of ITTI is changing because it became possible to organise and conduct teacher trainings with the support and provision of other actors. The ITTI will not play anymore the major and the most significant role in teacher trainings as the demonopolisation of the sector took place, and consequently, ITTI should be modernised and more practice-oriented. **The message for the Project from the MoES perspective is that in the near future, new cooperation structures with teacher training providers will need to be created** in order to build a sustainable system of teacher training provision, even after the Project has ended. This could be a challenge for the Project because it will bring new actors/beneficiaries on board and therefore, new communication and cooperation channels will need to be developed and maintained until the end of the Project.

¹⁴ Annual Report 2019, pg. 5

¹⁵ Annual Report 2019, pg. 10

¹⁶ Semi-Annual Report 2020, pg. 34

It was also mentioned in several interviews that Centres for professional development have been established as a new structure as of September 2020. They represent former methodological groups of teachers and are not operated under the ITTIs but are separate organisations. They will support teachers with a more practical side of knowledge and therefore, the **Project should strongly cooperate with the new Centres**, in particular regarding the provision of teacher training and development of teacher training materials. This could also be a challenge because the Project will need to bring new actors into the implementation process and therefore excellent management and coordination are needed in order to use time and resources for building new cooperation arrangements efficiently and consequently to efficiently implement project activities.

MoES's ownership of the project

The available documentation suggests that Project's outputs are aligned with the MoES' and the education system needs identified in the document on the New Ukrainian School – Conceptual Principles of Secondary School Reform. Hence, the level of ownership proportionally increases when the project results are aligned to the actual Project needs to a greater extent.

The majority of interviewees expressed their satisfaction regarding the quality of outputs delivered so far and are convinced that the **MoES ownership is high** and supported by the fact that the project is responding to the actual MoES needs and that MoES staff is also involved in the development and delivery of project outputs. This is supported by survey findings (figure 14, Annex IV) in which all respondents replied and confirmed that the **project fully succeeded in developing educational materials in accordance with the new educational standards** and also succeeded in meeting the needs of the survey participants (figure 15, Annex IV).

The educational system will integrate project outputs on the operational level, but for the time being **there is no systematic collection of feedback to what extent the developed outputs were implemented in everyday teaching practice**. The evidence so far is occasional and accidental, for example, through social media, when teachers post information themselves about their new practices or when information is transferred on a personal level through acquaintances.

5.2. Effectiveness

Key findings:

Delivery of planned results during the first half of the project implementation period

In Annex 1 to the Annual Report 2019, the status of the Results Output Matrix by 31.12.2019 versus planning matrix for annual targets 2019 is clearly presented. The Matrix demonstrates that **the majority of the activities were implemented to achieve the planned results for 2019 compared to the targets defined for 2019**. However, some results were not achieved

fully¹⁷, for example: Output C1-3 Teacher professional standards improved and in use, Output C1-6 Pilot teacher education institutions prepared to introduce new competency-based approaches and good practices, Output C2-3 Implementation of the education promotion, Output C3-2 Capacities in the development and use of e-platform.

The delays in development of the e-platform and related activities were transferred into 2020 (Semi-Annual Report 2020)¹⁸ because the e-platform plan was rejected and consequently a new plan had to be developed which finally resulted in a pilot e-platform that has been put in operation in the first half of 2020. On the other side, **there were also activities in which the Project exceeded initial targets for 2019**, for example: Output C1-1 Teacher trainers in ITTIs prepared to deliver preparatory projects for new standards; Output C2.2.2. Support to the Learning Together Project (for further details and elaborations on the level of achievement of individual activities, please refer to the Inception Report, Section on the Effectiveness evaluation criteria). In the Annual Report 2019, new activity in relation to PISA assistance has been delivered. The Project organised three workshops, and two lectures were given in launching national PISA results events.

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly influenced the implementation of the work programme in the first half of 2020. However, the Project managed to adjust according to the external conditions, as discussed in the Project Management section. Only two activities related to the Language component in Cluster 2 activities were cancelled, namely, the activity to organise six Spring Camps in preparation for the Ukrainian External evaluation of the Ukrainian language and literature; and the activity of organising Summer Camps in Transcarpathian and Chernivtsi regions for students from Hungarian and Romanian national communities with poor skills of the Ukrainian language. It has been noted that the concept of summer camps is continued to be developed to have a wider coverage of pupils, e.g. as after school activities. **The interviewees strongly agreed in their views that the teacher training and language component have been successful in the project.** It can be argued that teacher trainings were successful because the Ukrainian education system has a long tradition of organising and delivering teacher trainings. In addition, the existing institutional structure (ITTIs cover the whole country) enabled very good contact with and outreach to the teachers and teacher trainers to be involved in the project's activities.

In the Semi-Annual Report 2020, several new activities in Cluster 1 were implemented: support in the participatory development process of teacher professional standards (basic and primary education teachers; support in the participatory development process of the strategy for teacher professional development; support to teachers in the quarantine period. This demonstrates the **openness and flexibility of the Project to address the current needs of the MoES** by providing expert support in the development of strategic documentation which is vital for the successful implementation of the education reform. It is also evident that the Project addressed the needs of teachers involved as beneficiaries in the Language component, during the COVID-19 pandemic and provided them with the necessary tools and knowledge on how to teach during pandemic times.

Activities with pilot schools were also perceived as successful and new schools are already expressing their interest for further inclusion in the project's activities. The activities related to the development of the e-learning portal (Cluster 3) were perceived as lagging behind and not delivering expected outputs. Conducting interviews with different participants as regards their position and the role in the project resulted in a deeper understanding of the situation with **the e-platform development**, which was not fully

¹⁷ Annual Report 2019, Annex 5 Result Matrix vs Annual Targets 2019

¹⁸ Semi-Annual Report 2020, pg. 22

reflected in annual reports and therefore the MTR team was not able to understand different dimensions of the problem after conducting the desk-research analysis. It is understood from the interview findings that several aspects are relevant for bringing forward the e-platform development.

- a) Full clarity on MoES needs since there was a lack of vision concerning the content and the structure of the e-platform and therefore the MoES was not fully able to share the demands with the project, as from the project start
- b) Decision, whether the e-platform will be developed from scratch or existing software tools will be used (open source), which could lead to saving time, financial resources and human resources invested in the platform development.

Even though the interviewees did not mention the “All-Ukrainian online school” project¹⁹, it would be interesting for the Project to explore cooperation opportunities with the new project that started in April 2020 as an answer to COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, the aspect of lessons learned and challenges encountered would be worth exchanging and exploring since the new project received much criticism even though it delivered an entirely new approach to teaching via a TV channel, distance education, etc.

Regarding the Cluster 2 activities, the interviewees reflected that the project was flexible to support MoES in the organisation of communication/dissemination events. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the communication events are planned to be transferred to an online format and will be delivered to the extent possible. It was stressed from the MoES staff that the project should contribute and follow the Communication plan of the MoES since the plan is focused on the communication about the reform rather than on communication about the Project. Some interviews reflected very clearly that the reform was communicated to the wider public through social media, TV, newspapers, and other printed and digital media, followed by a series of events. Since the Project supported the public presence of the reform in media, it would be very interesting for any reader studying the Project annual reports to find supportive materials from the media and other communication means that provide evidence on the efficiency of awareness-raising about the reform and its processes. Therefore, **the Project is strongly suggested to collect any evidence on public appearance of the reform and to include it in annual reports** in a separate Annex in future reporting.

The survey results on the extent to which the project increased awareness on and positive attitudes towards the NUS reform (figure 8, Annex IV) revealed the following for the participating beneficiaries: the highest levels of achievements (extremely well and very well) are reported for teacher trainers (75%), teachers training Ukrainian language (66%), school principals (64.4%), civil society (61.5%), wider public (50.1%), ethnic minorities (50%); whereas the lowest levels are reported for parents (35.7%) and university teaching staff (23.1%). This demonstrates that the Project is communicating well the reform to teachers and all other target groups closely linked to the education system, which is somehow expected due to the nature of the reform focused on those organising and delivering educational activities. However, the communication towards the parents and university teaching staff seems to be directed to a lesser extent and that the message about the reform did not reach them sufficiently, that even more because the “Thank you teacher campaign” was targeting parents. Therefore, **the Project is encouraged to additionally tailor-made communication activities towards parents and university teaching staff** by delivering the message about their roles in the reform process, and consequently, the benefits.

¹⁹ <https://112.international/society/what-viewers-dont-know-backstage-of-all-ukrainian-school-online-project-50566.html>

Key results of the project to date and key hindrances that may continue to compromise the project's ability to achieve the set objectives

The **key results are strongly linked to teacher training, development of training materials, development of Teacher professional standard of primary school teachers and development of Teacher professional standard of general secondary education teachers; voluntary teacher certification; materials concerning teaching Ukrainian L2 developed; ITTI teacher trainers trained; “Thank you, teacher” campaign; 2019 summer camps; Grade 1-3 textbooks prepared.** In relation to Cluster 2 activities and the MoES Communication Plan, it is reported²⁰ that recent changes in the Ministry position also resulted in changes to the Communication Plan, but details are not known yet. Depending on the scope and range of changes, the Project will need to adjust its planning in Cluster 2 activities, and hopefully, there will be no significant hindrances.

COVID-19 pandemic is also influencing the Project's effectiveness. Based on the evidence on how the Project has mitigated this external circumstance (analysed under Project Management criteria), there is a good potential that the Project will wisely adjust its activities to online presence, where possible. This could also mean implementing activities that are planned for 2021 and 2022 in advance and leaving the time at the later stages of the Project for activities that require beneficiaries' presence, such as camps and study visits. In case the COVID-19 pandemic situation prolongs into the whole of 2021, the Project might need to redirect its resources towards new activities that could be created/programmed based on the MoES needs. Besides the very present COVID-19 pandemic, the interviewees mentioned changes on the political level that could influence project's ability to achieve the set objectives, for example: changes in the Government; political structures insufficiently supportive of the reform.

Nation-wide project strategy versus regional approach

The Project is implemented nation-wide with the exception of the activities related to the Language Component that are focused on Chernivtsi and Transcarpathian regions with the aim of enhancing the instruction of the Ukrainian language as a second language among the national minorities. Due to the nature of the activity, target groups of cluster activities and the Language Component are different given that the focus is either national or regional.

As clearly described in the Annual Report 2019²¹, in Cluster 1, the original Finnish project targets **teacher trainers** which means that the Project is working **on a regional level** and is training trainers for classroom teaching with a cascade model. **In the Language Component**, on the other hand, the Project is working on the **school level** with individual teachers of Ukrainian SL/L2 for subject teaching in a very precise domain. In Cluster 2, the target audience is the general public, while the Language Component targets geographically and linguistically clearly defined sub-audiences. Meanwhile, in Cluster 3, the original cluster activities circle around supporting learning material and learning environment production on the systemic level by training developers for different subject areas.

The **nation-wide approach** is consistent with the supportive role of the Project to the MoES in implementing education reform on the national level. **Development of the results such**

²⁰ Semi-Annual Report 2020, Annex 1, pg. 10

²¹ Annual Report 2019, pg. 11

as: teacher professional standards, standards for principals, Strategy for teacher professional development, and Standard of basic secondary education will contribute to the implementation of the reform on the national level because the nature of the documents per se is relevance on the national level.

5.3. Project management/decision-making structures

Key findings:

Strengths and weaknesses of the project management

As described above, the project management structure includes the Project Management Team (PMT), three Cluster Task Teams (CTs). The project management is supported by the FCG Home Office. The Steering Committee (SC) has the representation of members from MoES, MFA, EUDEL and PMT. The role of the SC is to monitor and steer the project and its activities. The Project Board (PB) is small and composed of MFA representatives and has a monitoring role in the project.

The main asset of the Project is that **the main key experts have remained the same**. It is a benefit for the Project that the same persons have continued the activities and have become trustful partners in the co-development of the Project. However, there have been **several changes in MoES staffing**, who have been key persons steering the project and its activities.

The desk-research reveals that there were changes in decision-making processes between the Steering Committee and the Project Management Team. The project management (PM) faced **delays with the decision-making processes**, which resulted in delays. The Project appropriately revised the decision-making process so that the PMT rather than the SC approve documents that are parts of implementation activities. In the new PM model, the work of the SC concentrates on monitoring and policy steering of the Project rather than dealing with decisions on technical implementation of the project (Annual Report 2019). The interviewees noted that the **decision-making processes should be more flexible** regarding, e.g. approval of Terms of Reference, recruitments etc.

According to the desk review²², the Project Management Team has been reorganized. The members of the PMT are the National Program Director, the Chief Technical Advisor, the Language Expert of the Language Component, and the Assistant of the National Program Director, but it is worth noting that **cluster experts are not members of the PMT**. The PMT meets weekly. Cluster experts may attend PMT meetings when present in Kyiv, however due to the fact that since spring 2020 online PMT meetings are organised, the presence of cluster experts should be mandatory, in particular, because the cluster experts are displaced and are currently not present in Kyiv. According to the project, the reorganization is motivated by the ineffectiveness of the larger PMT suggested in the original structure. It is argued that a smaller PMT is more flexible in decision-making. However, the **presence of cluster experts in PMT is regarded as crucial** since interviews revealed that there is an insufficient level of information exchange between the individual clusters and the current PMT.

The interviews and survey findings reveal that there are **challenges in the coordination and communication** of the project. The interviews note the need for enforced communication internally and externally, and it concerns all levels. The interviews further revealed that there

²² Project Implementation Manual (2019)

is a need for improved **communication between the individual Clusters and also Clusters with the PMT**. The reason for that could be found in the fact that cluster advisors are not involved in PMT, and this results in the lack of communication between the main roles in the Project. The clusters are perceived ‘projects within the project’, with not sufficient coordination and communication for support and finding synergies. The interviews also note the need for improved communication between the Ukrainian and Finnish experts. It is argued that national experts need to be listened more carefully to ensure sustainable Project results in the long term. There is also a need for improved communication between the PMT and MoES to coordinate the policy support for the reform. The communication should be planned, structured and systematic rather than on ad hoc basis as a result of addressing new MoES needs that need to be communicated.

The survey inquired the views of beneficiaries on PM with the question “How were the project activities in which you were involved in organised and implemented?” The survey results show that **100%** of the respondents agree or strongly agree that **the project activities were organised and implemented effectively**. Also, 100% of the respondents agree or strongly agree that the project activities were organised and implemented without delays and with clearly defined roles. However, there was some deviation in the opinions regarding **the statement of excellent coordination: 10%** of the respondents were **undecided** regarding the statement. The same applied to the statement of clear communication, where 5% were undecided. The most substantial deviation was regarding the statement of appropriate adaptation of COVID-19, where 20% of the respondents were undecided (figure 15, Annex IV). Some of the statements from the beneficiaries suggest that the Project should be more flexible in terms of decision-making. It is also hoped that the Project will continue communication and engage a wider circle of educators to various project activities. The beneficiaries hope that the Project will ensure better coordination of activities within the Project, responsibility areas, act faster and more efficiently.

Adaptation to COVID-19 pandemic and digitalisation

In the Semi-Annual Report 2020,²³ it is acknowledged that the Project has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic since March 2020, which resulted in project staff working at a distance. **The interviews raised the issue of Finnish experts working from Finland and consequently their lower level of availability to the local staff and MoES staff involved in the Project.** It became apparent from the interviews that the **Project decided to engage additional local experts as counter-experts to Finnish experts as to address the identified need for rapid provision of expertise to the MoES based on the new needs/requests.** The new local experts will cooperate closely with Finnish experts through virtual means of communication and should thus support the operational implementation of activities in Ukraine by coordinating other actors/stakeholders involved, in particular new institutions and organisations established within the education sector as elaborated under Relevance criterion.

Overall, the interviews suggested that the Project responded adequately to the COVID-19 situation by developing some additional outputs based on the MoES requests and by continuing activities where possible in the online mode. However, **the Project is described to be still functioning from the mindset of postponing activities rather than finding ways on how to convert the planned activities into the digital format.** It was interesting to find out from the interviewees who were involved in the Project from its beginning that the

²³ Semi-Annual Report 2020 (2020), pg. 12-13

digitalisation of project outputs was discussed even before the COVID-19 outbreak. This would suggest that the awareness and the need for digital outputs and transformation of some activities to an online format (e.g. teacher trainings) were expressed in the first half of the project. In that sense, it can be concluded that, despite the awareness and the need, the project insufficiently reacted to that need, even before the outbreak. **This response to digital transformation is still pending** in terms of flexibility, additional efforts in digital transformation/digitalisation, etc.

The desk review reveals that the PMT has taken measures to overcome COVID-19 restrictions since March 2020. The project staff was teleworking since March 2020. During the teleworking mode, the PMT had regular staff meetings once or twice a week. The respective Cluster Experts have continued their work through teleworking (Semi-Annual Report, 2020). Project reporting has a COVID-19 response in an excel table with a clear visual presentation on activities (according to the plan, modified, postponed, cancelled). Some parts of the activities have been modified and postponed, and two activities have been cancelled (more details are provided under the Effectiveness section). However, the interviews reveal that **transitions process to the new normal of distance/digital approach is perceived slow**, e.g. the transfer from onsite trainings to online mode during the pandemic took a too long time.

Overall, the main mitigation measures proposed and implemented by the Project as the answer to the pandemic are appropriately developed, including:

- a) The transition of planned on-site trainings into online educational activities
- b) Promotional campaigns adjusted to more intensive online presence through different social media and other communication channels
- c) Successful cooperation with MoES continued, and important national-level documentation developed.

The desk research reveals that total annual budget in 2019, was 2,154,780.00 euros, and the actual expenditure during the reporting period has been 1,605,570.80 EUR which is 74.51 % of the annual budget. The total annual budget for 2020 was 2,678,780 EUR and the actual costs for the period January - June 2020 has been 500,916.46 EUR²⁴ which is only 19 % of the annual budget suggesting a significant underspending in 2020. This could be explained by the slow adjustment of the project to react to the COVID-19 circumstances and lower expenses of online events vis-à-vis face-to-face events. Transforming the events to the online mode will continue and is likely to require different kind of expertise than initially planned for the Project, which could be financed by the surplus budget.

The need for digitalisation of the developed outputs has emerged in the field study both in the interviews and the survey. The need is to provide wider access to the developed outputs, e.g. teacher training to a wider community of teachers and learners. As noted in the interviews, the need the change to digital activities in the Project is a significant change and requires fundamental planning and analysis of the situation across the clusters. Also, the Project was encouraged by the donors to plan a response to tackle the demand for developing the pedagogy of distance teaching in Ukraine. After consulting the MoES, the Project drafted a concept note regarding a suggested training package of distance teaching. The draft was shared with the MoES. The possible training package of distance teaching would be financed through additional funding.

²⁴ Semi-Annual Report 2020, pg. 26

5.4. Efficiency

Key findings:

Use of project resources compared to outputs delivered

The Projects' efficiency is not possible to analyse fully at this point, as several activities are still in progress and incomplete. In 2020, some activities have been delayed or postponed because of the unprecedented and unique situation caused by the pandemic. The interviews show that a number of outputs have been developed in the project, especially in Cluster 1 of teacher training and the language component.

The interviews note that human resources have been limited in the Project from the start with regard to the objectives. It was shared that there is a need for more resources and full-time experts. For example, cluster advisors are not engaged as full-time experts, and high amount of their resources (person-months) is spent on administrative issues rather than on the development of activities. This limits their capacity to answer the needs of the Project. This need is more relevant due to the change in the working more to teleworking as the expert support is not available promptly, but rather is delayed. As noted earlier, some of the MoES staff involved in the project from the beginning have left MoES and the knowledge about the project, which in turn influences the stability and continuity of the Project. The desk review notes that **one of the bottlenecks is recruitment**. Especially, this is true with finding suitable contractors for different Terms of References. The Project might need to find out alternative ways to recruitment.

The interviews reveal that there has been **good knowledge transfer** from Finnish experts to local project management team/MoES staff and local experts. The experience of the Finnish experts has been perceived supportive in the reform. The capacities built in the project are seen to ensure the sustainability of the project. It is noted that the local counterpart experts with their capacities can support more in the project activities.

Quality of Project indicators

The desk-research analysis of the Project Document, Annual Plans 2019 and 2020, Annual Report 2019 and Semi-annual Report 2020, with supporting Annexes and Results Matrix, concluded **that it is not easy to follow the presentation of initial project plans, annual plans and reported results**. Even though a general level of understanding and a general overview of project achievements can be grasped, the inter-relations between the documents and results reporting structures are insufficiently straightforward. It is also evident that **at the initial planning phase, the project was not assigned a sufficient level of indicators, which would allow continuous monitoring of the project's achievements**. Namely, **the indicators are not provided on annual bases and even semi-annual bases**; thus, it is sometimes difficult to follow and understand the approach to setting the targets and indicators presented in Results Matrixes.

The interviews revealed on the strategic level that there is a **lack of clarity regarding the selection, measurement, and presentation of the indicators**.

The project has developed a **very good approach to beneficiaries' feedback collection on the quality and relevance of activities implemented**, and this practice should be continued during the second half of the project. The survey results (figure 10, figure 11, Annex IV)

confirm that because 19 out of 20 respondents answered positively that the Project collects regular feedback about the quality and relevance of Project activities and that it collects enough information regarding the quality of project outputs (e.g. training materials, promotional materials, language learning materials, etc.). The feedback was mostly collected (figure 12, Annex IV) via questionnaires (60%), interviews (18%), focus groups (11%) and other means, such as informal meetings with project representatives; email communication; personal meetings and phone calls (11%). The approach to use the questionnaires is self-explanatory since the project is targeting higher numbers of participants; thus the distribution and analysis of questionnaires is the most appropriate method for collecting feedback from a higher number of participants. However, the possibilities of focus groups and interviews could be further explored by the project in particular because they allow less structured communication, can trigger higher levels of openness towards the beneficiaries and can allow new ideas generation, including suggestions and recommendations. This is of utmost importance since the project is primarily focused on delivering outputs aligned with MoES and beneficiaries' needs.

It should also be noted, that the approach to feedback collection and evaluation of project activities should also be revised in the next planning period due to the COVID-19 pandemic and highly expected transition of the activities from face-to-face to online and digital format. The project is strongly encouraged to develop a section devoted to evaluation and feedback collection in the revised version of the Project Document.

The desk review notes that **monitoring indicators must be more specified**. It is important to **collect indicators regarding the targets for impact**. The evaluative data with clear indicators will support the monitoring and strategic decision-making for the project. In addition to quantitative data, also qualitative assessments are suggested. For example, the capacity-building activities of the teachers were given good feedback, and, in the reports, numerical objectives are reached, but how prepared and motivated do the teachers feel to start using these materials in schools? How were teachers' capacities built on a practical level? How do teachers perceive the Language Component's implementation's effectiveness? How do teachers perceive the quality of trainings and materials? How do teachers perceive the usefulness of different materials and platforms?

Integration of the EU-funded language component

The Language Component was a later add-on to the project. The interviews reveal that **integrating a new component with different EU-administrative rules have been time-consuming**. It is suggested that the component should have been integrated from the start with parallel planning with the clusters. In the Language Component, the Project is developing textbooks focused on languages of ethnic groups: Hungarian and Romanian, thus limiting its focus to Chernivtsi and Transcarpathian regions. The regional focus of the Language Component proved to be a successful approach for the particular need of the two regions. The focused territorial approach allowed the activities to be managed more successfully because the outreach was limited. The interviews note that **communities of developers have emerged in the project regarding the minority languages**. It is also perceived that the expertise of Canadian experts has supported well the capacities in the language component. After this Project, there is enrichment in the knowledge of how Ukrainian citizens regardless of the native language can have access to quality national language education and can thus fulfil their constitutional rights in Ukraine.

Regarding the planned activities and results achieved according to each cluster, **the Annual**

Report 2019²⁵ states that the majority of Cluster 1 and Cluster 2 Language Component related activities were implemented completely as planned. The programs of the Camps (Cluster 2) were developed using interactive activities. However, these programs were concentrating more on activities than on the pedagogical content. The number of participants of the spring and summer Camps exceeded the initial plan. However, the Camps were not able to include the more vulnerable group of children who do not speak Ukrainian at all with any motivation to visit the Camp. It was concluded, that during the summer Camps, the Project reached less than 2 % of the target population. In some Camps, the groups of participants did not match the target groups identified by the Project.

Additionally, the lack of visibility of the Project in the Camps was seen significant, due to different logistical conditions and specificities of the regions, as well as different responses of the communities and administrative delays. The Language Component team grasped on this issue and developed new materials for contracts implemented and financed under the Project in order to address these kinds of issues in the future. However, it was noticed that the financing of such activities in the future might get compromised and more sustainable funding modalities should be considered.

The Language Component was embedded to the Project in a later stage than the initial project planning but was nevertheless **very successfully integrated into all three project clusters**, which was confirmed by the majority of interviewees. The Language Component activities demand strong interaction with trainers as to build a community of teachers/practitioners, which could prove to be more challenging to set up and maintain in the online environment and therefore the project should develop a strategy on how to keep the teachers engaged and motivated continuously. That even more, because the interviewees shared that in practical terms, the project noticed that it is vital to contact teachers after face-to-face trainings to keep them engaged and motivated. Thus, the project implemented the approaches of sending some additional teaching and training materials and also some teachers shared online on how they implemented new skills acquired.

5.5. Risk mitigation

Key findings:

The desk research reveals that two major factors have affected the Project's smooth progress; **the challenges encountered in the administrative environment and decision-making systems**, and the unexpected situation of **COVID-19 pandemic**. The interviews reveal that there are **political changes in Ukraine** due to the change of the Government. There is now the third Minister of Education in place leading the MoES, which has also affected the Project's operational environment. It is noted, however, that the legislative framework and the strategic objectives steer the continuation of the reform. The interviews reveal that the project participants have a **strong commitment to the project**, which is a strong asset to continue the project with the support of the reform.

The survey findings prove the concerns of the beneficiaries regarding the risks. 50% of the respondents see that there are potential future risks that might significantly hinder the implementation of future project activities (figure 18, Annex IV). **The survey respondents believe that there is political instability in central and regional education authorities.** They also note that there is the **new leadership of MoES that lack of political will to**

²⁵ Annual Report 2019, pg. 5

implement certain objectives of the project. The quarantine measures due to COVID-19 are also mentioned as a risk for the project.

At the project level, the basic assumption has remained that MoES endorses the continuation of the reform process despite all changes in the administration.

The Project has appropriately taken active measures to mitigate the risks. Nevertheless, the annual planning for the remaining period of time needs to take into consideration the risks and update the mitigation measures according to the changing operational environment.

5.6. Sustainability

Key findings:

Ensuring sustainability should become a key principle for the remaining period of the project. The project needs to ensure that the developed outputs are disseminated and exploited to become a sustained part of the education policy, system, and practices.

The desk study reveals that sustainability has been strongly supported in the reform from the perspective of the legislative framework and compliance with the regulated education system and standards in Ukraine. The interview findings support the conception that the Project has developed a community of active developers and supporters of NUS in teaching and learning in education in Ukraine. The survey results confirm the support for the sustainability of the project results. 95,5% of respondents of the survey see that the Project ensures long-term use of the developed results with a long-term perspective, e.g. new practice in teacher training, new teaching material of online courses and textbooks in use, new language learning methods in use etc. (figure 16, Annex IV). The respondents answered the question of what activities and outputs were implemented sustainably. It was noted that **innovative software** that was developed as part of the project will be transferred to the Ministry and its institutions and will be maintained and operated in the long term. The **online courses** being developed were perceived as sustainable. Also, the **teaching and learning materials** received at the trainings within the project were seen supporting sustainability. Also, **standards** developed; trainings; materials developed; awareness-raising and promotion were perceived to be sustained in the long term. It was also seen that the prepared **course materials would be used by regional ITTI staff** when training the trainers for teacher professional development centres. In the Language Component, **a system of teaching L2 through play within NUS** and others were seen sustainable. Also, the **methodology of teaching the Ukrainian language** as SL/L2, as well as **methodology guidelines for teachers to assess and select textbooks.**” (Annex IV).

The dissemination and communication need to have a stronger focus towards the end of the project. The **focus should be on the communication and visibility of the reform.** It is crucial to disseminate good examples of practices and making people with new capacities to become examples and advocates for the sustainability of the Project’s outcomes.

6. Conclusions

The conclusions herein are drawn from the key findings of the three sources analysed in the report (desk review, interviews, and survey). The aim of the mid-term review is to assess the extent to which the Project has promoted Finnish and Ukrainian policy objectives.

Responding to the reform policy objectives

It can be concluded that the Project addresses well the **Ukrainian policy objectives** – in fact, exceptionally well compared with some donor-driven projects that may be observed in development cooperation. The need to **support the NUS reform** has come from MoES in Ukraine, and the Project has been well aligned supporting the reform. However, there were some delays in the start of the Project, which have impacted the alignment. Especially, the inception period of six months was too long. Nevertheless, the Project can be assessed to support well the different areas of the NUS reform, and the Project has well responded to the needs of MoES and the beneficiaries regarding the different aspects of the reform.

The Project is also well aligned with the Finnish **HRBA policy objectives**, and there is evidence that HRBA policy has been adopted in the implementation of the activities. For example, the majority of survey respondents strongly agree or agree that the project has successfully integrated the human rights approach, inclusive education, gender equality and non-discrimination in the activities. A minority of respondents believed that the project had addressed aspects of climate/environmental sustainability, but this is not surprising because the project is not focused on addressing the aspects of climate change and environmental sustainability. The Project's activities have aimed at promoting the methodology of teaching Ukrainian as a second language for national minorities, comprising aspects such as **inclusive teaching strategies, work in a multicultural environment and gender equality**. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that the Project should continue highlighting HRBA and engaging target groups, such as disadvantaged teachers, staff or students, minority members and students from vulnerable groups etc. in the activities. **Clear evidence and indicators of the integration of disadvantaged target groups and minority members, progress achieved, and implemented transformation measures are needed.**

Due to the relevance of the Project to the reform of primary school education, **the ownership of MoES can be assessed high**, and also local cooperation partners and experts have been involved in the development of outputs, especially during the early part of the Project. In this regard, the Project needs to continue the close cooperation in supporting the MoES needs and **the progress of the reform** to the teaching and learning in 5th-6th grades.

Relevant cooperation partners and delivery of teacher trainings

There are institutional changes in teacher training provision in Ukraine due to the Law “On Education” (2017). There is a need for engaging more teacher training institutions and teachers in the project's activities to ensure wider teacher training provision (regional, digital), in addition to ITTI's ToTs.

As digital delivery of teacher trainings is becoming a new normal in education, supporting the teachers with digital skills and the related guidance systems in professional development are emerging as key issues.

Challenges in communication and coordination

It can be concluded that the Project has established its management structure to continue its work towards the final phase. However, the Project has faced challenges in management and decision-making. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced Project Management to find new

ways of distance and online working approaches. The Project has also faced external changes in the staffing of MoES and MFA.

Based on the review, it can be concluded that the Project also has **challenges in communication and coordination** at all levels of the Project and across the Clusters/LC, the Ukrainian and Finnish experts, Project Management and MoES. These challenges can be due to the current decision-making structure, which **does not sufficiently involve all Clusters in the management of the activities**. The **Cluster experts working at a distance** due to the pandemic and the changes in MoES staffing may have further contributed to the issue. The Project needs to improve communication and coordination across the Clusters and the LC to drive the activities towards to common targets in synergy. The different components of the Project need to have access to and exchange on information on developments to support the common objective and synergise the activities. Also, the communication and **reform policy dialogue with the MoES** needs to be strengthened and widened, in particular, due to the changes in MoES staffing. In addition to formal meetings, all possibilities to exchanges need to be sought to support the Project in delivering the reform development. A continuous dialogue with MoES is needed to update of changes and make agile responses in implementation to ensure impact and sustainability.

Enhancing efficiency and effectiveness

Overall, the Project's activities are implemented effectively, e.g. teacher training and language component. Development of e-learning portal is significantly delayed due to the fact there was not full clarity and vision on the needs and requirements regarding the e-platform format and content, from the beginning of the project. It can be concluded that the Project has progressed well despite the challenges encountered in the early part of 2020.

However, there is a need to improve the efficiency of decision-making in the Project to ensure the achievement of the objectives. The decision-making processes are perceived too slow in the review and should be **faster and more flexible**, f.ex. transfer from onsite trainings to online mode; approval of ToRs, recruitments etc. **A prompt decision-making approach will** improve the efficiency of the implementation of activities. Faster decision-making is also requested to transfer the Project's operations according to need by MoES. In this regard, the review also suggests that there needs to be improved accountability in terms of who is accountable, for what and by when. This would also help the monitoring of activities by all parties towards the common goals. The Project needs to assess if the expert resources are allocated effectively and if there is a need for additional human resources and expertise to support the activities towards the final part of the Project.

Digitalisation for wider outreach and access

The transition to online digital approach in the Project's activities and delivering the outputs digitally is highly needed by the Project's cooperation partners. The implementation of the Project's activities online at a distance has already started. However, the new ways of online working need to be addressed holistically across the activities of Clusters and LC with a common approach, not each on their own. **The transition from traditional workshops onsite to online webinars requires new ways of organisation and different kind of expertise**. From the beneficiaries, e.g. teacher's perspective, new skills are required to learn through online training methods, to use the technology for learning and to know where to access to digital online training. The same applies to transferring traditional training materials

to online provision. The teachers need to know in what way and to what extent the digital online training add to their professional development in the teaching profession. One aspect of digitalisation is the teaching and learning environment. It concerns not only the infrastructure but also the relevant software and digital materials supporting the teaching and learning. It can be concluded that there is a need to re-assess the needs of the Project in the new situation and seek new human resources with expertise to support the transition to digital mode.

The Project has faced **challenges in the development of the e-learning portal**. This is partly because there was not full clarity and vision on the needs and requirements regarding the e-platform format and content from the beginning of the project. It is concluded that whilst setting up and maintaining an e-learning infrastructure and management system in education is challenging in any country, it is especially challenging in a country, which is introducing the system. Setting up an e-learning portal could a project in itself, and it could be unlikely that the Project can finalise the e-learning portal and system. Nevertheless, it is essential that the Project will ensure the sustainability of the developed outputs through digital alternative ways, e.g. open-source. Finnish expertise has a good opportunity to support Ukraine in this development with one of the most advanced online/digital/e-learning teaching and learning systems.

Revisiting the Project's plan

In the mid-term, the Project needs to revisit its Project Document's original plan and objectives. The Project can already benefit from successes and share them across the Clusters and the LC to develop the activities further.

When revisiting and revising the Project's initial plans, there is a need to plan and specify objectives and targets with clear indicators for the rest of the time period. Those results and outputs that can continue enriching future NUS policy and practice need to be continued. Those results and outputs, which are not feasible within the Project's life cycle, need to be left aside.

In the later part of the project, dissemination and communication will become a focal activity. The media presence needs to be tracked by the Project to demonstrate the efficiency of the communication activities regarding the different target audiences (incl. parents and university teaching staff), supported with a monitoring and evaluation system to evidence impact.

The revision process allows the Project to re-think the quality of the Monitoring and Evaluation. Regarding measuring progress and impact, the Project needs a new M&E plan due to the revised Project document and the new action plan.

Ensuring impact and sustainability

Planning the impact and sustainability will become driving principles in the later part of the Project. The dissemination and exploitation measures need to ensure that the activities from all Clusters and LC will have wider outreach and sustainability in the future. A key question is what the Project will be remembered for in Ukraine after three to five years; what are the elements that will become sustainable part of the education system in Ukraine. The review concludes that the capacities built in the Project are strong and indicate the potential for sustainability of the activities and outputs. The community of active developers and

supporters of NUS will take the reform in Ukraine forward after the Project ends. The good practices and outputs developed in the Project have the potential to become sustained practices in the Ukrainian education system. The communication activities are efficiently supporting MoES in the implementation of reform. The project needs to further develop targeted communication measures to increase awareness and engagement to the NUS reform (those target groups and key stakeholders that until now had a lower level of engagement). The overall digital approach across all Clusters and LC will support the outreach and sustainability of the outcomes forward.

Donor cooperation for future opportunities

The Project is well established in Ukraine. In this regard, it has an opportunity to build stronger cooperation with other donor projects addressing the needs of the MoES Reform Support Team (EBRD project) regarding the future programming and Finnish cooperation with Ukraine. The MoES needs and challenges are many in the NUS reform. In this regard, there is a need for the Project to build strong cooperation opportunities with other donor projects and in particular with the MoES Reform Support Team.

7. Key recommendations

The Mid-Term Review has evaluated the Learning Together Project up to the half-way of the Project's implementation. The Project has progressed well and achieved some tangible outputs despite the challenges encountered, especially the COVID-19. The review findings allow the Project to reflect and re-assess its operations and activities in the light of the feedback received. Overall, it is recommended that the Project is continued and finalised within its current scope and with a possible no-cost extension. It is not recommended to add any new components to the Project.

The key recommendations for the Project are provided here below and a more detailed list of recommendations is presented in the Executive Summary of this final report. The recommendations are drawn from the review conclusions and are presented in the order of priority.

1. To revise the Project document and prepare an action plan

The review recommends the Project to revisit and **revise the Project Document and prepare an action plan** in the light of challenges encountered, and feedback received. A strategic planning meeting (as many days as needed) to be organised to take stock of the results achieved and what is feasible to deliver in the last phase of the Project. The new plan needs to set priority targets that are realistic to achieve and which are most needed by MoES and the reform. **The Clusters and LC need to find synergies and a joint approach to the overall objectives.** A detailed work plan needs to be developed with a Monitoring and Evaluation system, indicators, time plan with nominated persons who are responsible for the results.

The thematic areas and working groups are, e.g. how to widen teacher training institutions' and teachers' involvement and include them in future teacher trainings, how to progress with the reform to the next grades, how to proceed with digitalisation etc. The revised Project Document and action plan need to be **discussed and agreed with MoES and MFA in a Steering Committee Meeting.**

Who: Mixed teams consisting of Project Management Team members, Cluster Experts, Local Experts, MoES staff. **The planning days are recommended to be organised and facilitated/moderated by an external expert/consultant.**

When: Prior to the Annual Plan 2021. After the approval of the Final Report of the MTR by MFA.

How: Effective teams representing the Clusters and LC, Finnish and Ukrainian experts, other interested key stakeholders, and participants. Plan further those outcomes that have the most need and have proven successful.

2. To improve internal communication

The recommendation for the Project is to **strengthen internal communication towards the end of the Project**. Communication meetings need to be arranged within the Project and with key stakeholders and beneficiaries to assess the need for improvement. It is important to discuss in PMT and with MoES and beneficiaries where the gaps are and revise the communication plan accordingly. **Clear principles and code of conduct are needed to ensure the quality of communication in the Project.**

Who: Project management team, Cluster experts, local experts, MoES staff

When: Upon revision of the Project Document. Within 1 month latest.

How: The working group of experts will describe the need for the new mode of formal communication and develop a revised Communication Plan in the Project Document by defining the frequency of the online/offline meetings, responsibility for initiating and organising the meetings, and **taking minutes of meetings**; defining responsibility for decision-making on a Cluster level and how the decisions will be transferred to the project management team, etc. Prepare a communication action plan (who does, what and by when).

3. To develop a holistic plan for digitalisation

The Project is recommended **to develop a holistic strategic plan for digitalisation**. The different aspects to be developed are **how to digitalise**:

- the projects activities and workshops, e.g. webinars in a coordinated way
- to digitalise the different materials developed in the project for wider reach and ensure their sustainability and ownership in MoES
- to ensure the outputs are accessible to the target audiences
- to support the digital skills of teachers and learners
- to support the skills and professional development with guidance and materials
- to assess the online learning environments and software according to the digitalisation
- to continue developing an e-learning platform and/or other e-learning solutions.

Who: Project Management Team, Cluster Experts, Local Experts, MoES staff. Additional resources for digitalisation, a full-time expert (with also pedagogical skills and who understands the needs of teachers and learners) is needed to support and mainstream digitalisation.

When: Upon revision of the Project Document. Within 1 month latest.

How: Working in teams, align the digitalisation approach according to the new strategic plan, the needs of Clusters and LC and the needs of MoES. Collaborative planning to deliver the

outputs for impact through digitalisation. Exploring alternative ways of platforms (open source). Regarding the e-learning platform, it is of utmost importance for the MoES to deliver to the project requirements and needs in a single document so that both, the MoES and the project are very clear on what needs to be developed and to what extent it is possible to address the MoES' needs within the time and budget still available. **A shared understanding of the e-platform functionalities should be reached and specified in writing.**

4. To prepare a Monitoring and Evaluation system

The revised Project action plan defined for **the second half of the project needs to include an M&E system and quantitative indicators in 6-month periods** to enable efficient project monitoring and timely revision of activities in cases when indicators are not being achieved. The Project is recommended to develop an M&E system (indicators – what monitoring/follow-up data is collected, how and by whom, how the data is processed/used etc.) This is part of the Results Based Management of MFA, which helps to make informed decisions within the project or produce quality project reports.

The Project should think about digital tools, which could be used for effective feedback collection (e.g. online questionnaires/surveys, Padlet, etc.). **The Project Management Team, Steering Committee and the Project Board will benefit from the revised Project plan and M&E system to monitor the progress, outputs, and outcomes.**

5. To prepare external communication and dissemination for sustainability

The Project needs to develop as part of the action plan, **a communication and dissemination plan that would include how the project's results will be communicated to reach a wider audience and simultaneously communicate the objectives of the NUS reform** needs to be prepared collaboratively in the Project. The enhanced communication measures will ensure the dissemination and exploitation of the developed outputs more widely in Ukrainian primary and secondary education. The Project's communication and dissemination plan needs to be discussed with the Steering Committee and MoES to agree on how to communicate and disseminate the Project's outputs and how to ensure the sustainability of the reform outputs.

Who: Project management team, Cluster experts, Local experts, MoES staff, beneficiaries

When: Upon revision of the Project Document. Within 1 month.

How: The working group needs to prepare a communication and dissemination plan. In the plan, it is important to build on results achieved to continue enriching NUS policy and practice, f.ex. outputs from Clusters to new and wider target groups. Linked to communication, develop comprehensive communication and visibility measures on the reform to sustain the progress. Support sustainability with targeted guidance and visibility measures addressing specific target audiences, incl. marginalised groups Disseminate good practices from the project, stories of people involved, examples and advocacy of reform to ensure impact and sustainability. Linked to digital strategy and actions for delivery for all clusters and LC, ensure wider outreach and sustainability through digital means for the future. Support sustainability by setting indicators to evidence impact.

Benefit from the capacity and commitment of people involved in the project to ensure sustainability (MoES, ToTs, etc.). The people, who have been actively involved in the project and who have made a commitment and contribution and the best resource to sustain the

results and take the reform forward after the Project has been finalised. Use the remaining time and budget effectively to continue with successful and needed activities for sustainability. The Project needs to evidence on NUS reform being communicated through different media channels and additionally tailor-made communication activities towards targeted groups with indicators. The project reporting needs to present detailed description and overview of target groups/beneficiaries' profiles, per categories such as: gender, minority members; vulnerable groups; disadvantaged groups, etc. This concerns, for example, teachers, teacher trainers, students involved in summer camps, textbook developers, etc.

8. Lessons learnt

The interviews and surveys demonstrate some very interesting insights that can be attributed to lessons learnt, and they are gathered here.

Co-creation

Co-creation in communities of practice, in pilots within limited scope has proven successful. Such communities proved to be, e.g. professional groups of teachers at the same level of teaching, in specific fields, such as language learning, regions etc. Communities of practice have a shared interest in development and have the motivation to take the reform further. Motivation and addressing the need is a driving force both for teachers and students in development.

Piloting

Piloting concepts and tools in a smaller scale, not nation-wide. Pilot schools were perceived as very successful; new schools were very motivated to join the project. The concept of summer camps was introduced and will be made available wider by MoES.

Building on capacities

Benefiting from **capacities built to take the reform further.** Benefit from knowledge and experience about the project developments of individuals who have left the project. This experience should not be forgotten, and if the future activities allow, those who have participated previously might be involved again, depending on the circumstances and willingness.

Communication

Constant feedback/communication line with the organisers and participants of the project is needed. Communication helps the project to be more agile and respond to what is currently needed in the changing environment (rather than stick to what was planned at the beginning). Communication enhances clarity on expectations from all partners involved. It is not always

clear what the expectations are; expectations should be communicated because people and conditions are changing. Continuous evaluation and feedback (e.g. online) in order to find out to what extent the project outputs are implemented in schools. A survey needs to be done, and it should be planned in cooperation with MoES.

Human Resources

Need to optimise cooperation arrangements among different roles in the project. In cases when CTA or other Key Experts are, for example on holidays, it is good to have a replacement role and assign it to, e.g. another expert who will be the contact point of reference to ensure efficient progress of activities.

Digitalisation for wider outreach and impact

External risks, such as COVID-19, may significantly change the ways of working in the project. **There is a need to react fast and in a coordinated approach to transfer activities and outputs through digitalisation for improved efficiency and wider outreach and impact.** Overall, it seems that the project has developed outputs (e.g. teacher training materials with videos) that could be adapted to online format and mode of delivery, thus adjusting rapidly to the new circumstances. Moreover, the project could use the Erasmus+ project results platform²⁶ as a source of existing outputs that could be implemented in the current project as well (e.g. teacher training materials on digital skills).

ANNEXES

- I. List of participants of interviews and surveys
- II. Interview and Survey Questions in EN and UKR
- III. List of documentation reviewed
- IV. Survey results
- V. Interview results
- VI. ToR Research questions

²⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects_en