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# Strengthening Ukraine's democracy through education during the war

## Second mid-term evaluation of the European Wergeland Centre's Schools for Democracy Programme

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| Abstract: | The mid-term evaluation shows that the Schools for Democracy programme has been able to achieve its objectives, despite the dramatic change in working conditions following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The programme has demonstrated its relevance and effectiveness through flexible decision-making, remaining closely linked to Ukraine's reform policies. Despite the full-scale invasion, most planned activities were implemented. Key recommendations include clarifying the geographical component in the programme's objectives; contextualizing the results with general statistical data; maintaining the research component in the programme's goals and objectives; expanding the program for out-of-school education, vocational training, and work with students at pedagogical universities in Ukraine; and placing a stronger focus on strengthening learning communities and educators. |

# Preface

This report has been written by a team consisting of Oleksandra Deineko (project leader) and Jørn Holm-Hansen.

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The report was commissioned by the European Wergeland Centre.

We are very grateful to all our interviewees both in Norway and Ukraine who have shared their time, experiences and insights with the evaluators.

Oslo, June 2024

Kristian Tronstad
Research Director

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# Summary

Schools for Democracy: Supporting education reforms in Ukraine programme (SfD) aims to facilitate systemic democratic reforms in education and strengthen European cooperation by promoting democratic culture and democratic citizenship in policy and practice in Ukraine.

The programme is implemented by the European Wergeland Centre (EWC) in close cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (MoES). It is funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (ref. UKR-21/002) with partial own contribution by the EWC.

This report presents findings and recommendations from the mid-term evaluation of the current programme period (2021-mid-2023). The evaluation is based on SfD's reporting of results as well as findings from the interviews and general programme documents. It focuses on assessing the programme's relevance, effectiveness and results achieved so far.

### The programme

The Schools for Democracy programme is carried out in 2021-2024 with the aim to continue supporting education reforms in Ukraine through facilitating systemic democratic reforms in education and strengthening European cooperation by promoting democratic culture and democratic citizenship in policy and practice.

The components serve to support changes at two levels of education: school and pre-school education. The programme:

- supports further development and piloting of new educational policies aimed at promoting the culture of democracy in pre-school and school education;
- contributes to evidence-based communication of democratic changes in pre-school and school education;
- supports and strengthen the capacity to implement the education reform among local and national networks, partnerships, and learning communities of educators.

### The new context

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has significantly impacted the education process in Ukraine at all levels, thus affecting the implementation of SfD's objectives. Among *the key challenges*, resulting from Russian military aggression, have been:

- constant air alarms, power outages, security risks for all participants of the educational process;
- the scattering of teachers, parents, and pupils becoming internally displaced persons or leaving the country;
- the shortage of personnel among teachers and educators due to relocation abroad;
- various operating modes of education – from fully online in frontline regions to fully offline in western regions of Ukraine;
- new inequalities emerging in the unequal access to education for specific groups of children (those with special needs);
- psychological tension, and the lack of close contact and quality communication in the school environment;

- the emotional strain and psychological exhaustion in the educational environment;
- financial and technical challenges;
- sluggishness in making management decisions by the MoES;
- the quality of education for Ukrainian children abroad, as well as the risk of them not returning to Ukraine in the future.

Despite ongoing massive attacks on various regions of Ukraine, SfD managed to launch and implement most of the activities planned for the reporting period. As an answer to these and other challenges, SfD team ensured:

- the programme's flexibility;
- the transition of most activities to an online format facilitated the implementation of planned activities;
- the integration of psychological support as part of facilitated courses and mobile trainer groups (as unplanned components);
- conducting research activities to learn about current challenges;
- the preservation of the trainer network by transitioning to maximum online work mode and maintaining dense communication among all members;
- continuation and expansion of programmes' activities in the frontline regions of Ukraine.

Despite the challenges the Ukraine's education system has shown resilience and flexibility during this extremely tough period. All stakeholders in the education sector, under the leadership of the MoES, were able to make management decisions that ensured the stability and continuity of the education process in Ukraine during times of war. SfD participants showed a high level of interest and strong engagement in their work under martial law.

### Relevance

- **Contextual relevance**

In many ways, the war has elevated the promotion of democracy on Ukraine's agenda. It shapes various levels: the international agenda concerning Ukraine's future in the EU; national resilience against the aggressor through democratic practices of participation and volunteering; and the decentralisation outcomes that have transformed educational institutions into community hubs. In the future, schools will play a crucial role in rebuilding Ukraine and strengthening social cohesion at the local level, with younger generations becoming the most active participants in these processes.

The evaluation has shown that the SfD programme is closely linked to Ukraine's reform policies helping to put into practice the democratizing elements of education reform and contributes to decentralisation reform in Ukraine. This ranges from contributing to policy development, training teachers and facilitating teacher networks to the work with Ukrainian children and youth.

- **Structural relevance**

The war has also slowed down policy-making and legislation in the civilian sector of society, while the programme has contributed to the development of legislation and the implementation of policies.

- **Relevance of the form and format**

The programme has demonstrated its relevance through flexible decision-making and adaptation of activity formats. By prioritizing online activities and communication, the programme has maintained sustainable implementation despite numerous challenges such as displacement, power cuts and air raid alerts.

- **Relevance for the future needs**

Another sensitive issue relates to the grey areas of future cooperation with the occupiers in the occupied territories. These issues need to be resolved peacefully, democratically and in a principled and dialogue-based manner in order to avoid harmful social divisions. The attitudes and skills developed through the programme can be helpful in this regard.

## Effectiveness

Despite the full-scale invasion, SfD was able to implement its programme activities. Some changes were made, and additional activities (psychological support and mobile trainer groups) were carried out because of the invasion, but everything was done within the budget. The programme has created and maintained networks between participants and a commitment to continue working together. Many teachers who have taken courses come back to help with new courses. Tracking of activities after participation in the programme shows examples of participants engaging in social entrepreneurship or initiating participatory budgeting projects. The programme is reported to have been a catalyst for this.

## Results

The programme is characterized by a wide variety of activity types. Despite the war, these activities have been carried out in large numbers. SfD has managed to maintain its chain of activities, from participation in MoES working groups, to training of educators and provision of learning resources, to support for educator networks. The fact that the online courses were run with such a high level of participation during an ongoing war must be considered a success. Participants from areas under constant bombardment also took part. This means that the programme is well embedded in the Ukrainian education sector.

The 2021-2024 programme is a combination of continuity and renewal. Many of the trainers were retained from the previous phase. The implementing partners from 2017-2021 have been retained, but an additional partner has been added. The fact that the trainers have been working together for a number of years and have got to know each other are factors that are conducive to building competence and trust, which was particularly important due to the war, when the professional network also functioned as a support network. The programme filled a previously almost empty niche with its component on democratisation in pre-schools.

*Outcomes* occur when approaches and skills acquired through the programme activities are applied 'in real life'. Results are achieved to the extent that participants in the programme's many activities return to their schools and apply new and more democratic approaches and methods - and also manage to convince reluctant colleagues. One obvious obstacle to this, as the interviews revealed, is the fact that many schools are still quite hierarchical.

**Recommendations**

- **To develop "the geographical dimension" of the programme**

During the reporting period, the programme significantly expanded its audience. From the outset, the programme has been designed to cover all of Ukraine, while the strategy for geographical expansion in the implementation of the programme is not clearly defined or articulated in the programme documents. This is partly due to the predominantly online nature of the activities, which do not depend on the geographical location of the participants. On the other hand, it is most difficult to discuss democracy in areas where human rights are seriously violated. The programme has succeeded in working in this direction through close cooperation with a new partner - SavED. Meanwhile, the emergence of "new types" of territories in Ukraine during the period of martial law (de-occupied territories, active combat zones, frontline areas), together with the constantly shifting front line, highlights the need to develop and refine the "geographical dimension" of the programme in the future. This would include a strategy to include new participants from these regions and a balance between urban and rural areas involved in the implementation of the programme.

**Recommendation:** to clarify the geographical component in the objectives of the programme, based on the essential needs to support democracy in Ukraine.

- **Building linkages between the programme results and statistical data**

The results of the programme show that it is expanding in scope and that its intellectual "products" (courses, modules, materials) are becoming more diverse and more numerous. The programme continues to attract new participants. As the programme approaches its final phase in 2024, it would be beneficial to contextualise its outputs with general statistical data (such as the number of schools and kindergartens in Ukraine and those participating in the programme, as well as the total number of teachers and those involved in the projects). This will help to assess the quantitative scale of the programme's implementation, highlight the need to continue this work and estimate its ongoing quantitative impact.

**Recommendation:** to contextualise the results of the programme with the general statistical data (number of schools and kindergartens in Ukraine and those participating in the programme; number of teachers in general and those involved in the projects, etc.).

- **Stronger focus on strengthening learning communities and educators**

A comparison of the programme outputs for the reporting period with the planned targets for 2024 has shown that some targets have already been achieved, while others need further work by the end of 2024.

**Recommendation:** to focus on outcome 3 "Learning communities of educators strengthened" and enhance the project team's efforts regarding outputs 3.2 and 3.3 by the end of the programme period in 2024 (the number of educational and teacher training institutions, including NGOs, involved in training programs on strategic planning and development, as well as the number of participants in networking and community-building events).

- **Research component as a part of the programme**

During the reporting period, the programme included two research projects, which contributed both to a better understanding of the challenges and needs of the target groups during the war, and to ensuring the quality of the programme's activities and approaches to pre-school education. Research as a method of data collection and evaluation of activities proved its strengths in the interviews with both the project team and the beneficiaries of the programme.

**Recommendation:** to maintain the research component in programme's goals and objectives with the focus on wartime needs and challenges experienced by target groups.

- **Towards democratic changes at all levels of education**

In order to follow the holistic approach in the development of democracy through all levels of education in Ukraine, it seems useful to extend the programme to cover out-of-school education, vocational training and work with students at pedagogical universities in Ukraine. This will help to promote democratic changes at all levels of education and make the results of the programme more sustainable over time.

**Recommendation:** to expand the programme of out-of-school education, vocational training and work with students at pedagogical universities in Ukraine.

- **To clarify new (old) target groups**

Unlike the programme prior to 2021 the current phase does not target parents. Since schools (including pre-schools) are the responsibility of the municipalities, targeted programme work with local politicians and local administration should be considered.

**Recommendation:** for a possible next phase of the programme consider reintroducing parents as a target group and the representatives of amalgamated territorial communities. Both measures increase the chances of achieving results.

- **To maintain sustainability over time**

Due to the war, sustainability of the programme's outcomes is challenged.

**Recommendation:** Measures to increase sustainability:

1) to expand the programme of out-of-school education, vocational training and work with students at pedagogical universities in Ukraine to cover all levels in the educational circle;

2) Include municipal decision makers (councillors and people from the local administration) as target groups to enhance the cooperation between educational institutions and local authorities in local development;

3) if the programme continues in a new phase after 2024, make sure most of the current activities are continued;

This helps making the "critical mass" of "agents of change". Continuing with more or less the same programme activities as before, of course, may be perceived as lacking in innovation, but continuity of (the most successful) activities strengthens sustainability over time.

# List of abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| **CoE** | Council of Europe |
| **CMO** | Context-Mechanism-Outcome |
| **EWC** | European Wergeland Centre |
| **MFA** | Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Norway) |
| **MoES** | Ministry of Education and Science |
| **MOOC** | Massive Open Online Courses |
| **SfD** | Schools for Democracy programme |
| **ToC** | Theory of Change |

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Aim of the evaluation

In line with the Terms-of-Reference, the mid-term evaluation's empirical and analytical focus is on the programme's relevance, effectiveness and results achieved by mid-2023.

**Evaluation questions:**

1) Relevance: Is the programme relevant in the implementing context, including for the recipient country's reform agenda, donor priorities, as well as the situation of war?

2) Effectiveness: To what extent has implementation process been complete and appropriate to date?

3) Results: To which degree is the programme achieving the expected objectives and results so far? How many people and what parts of the country have been impacted to date?

## 1.2 Analytical and methodological approach

This mid-term evaluation uses the same analytical and methodological framework as the previous mid-term evaluation (Holm-Hansen and Rabinovych 2021). The two analytical frameworks applied - ToC and CMO - help to answer the question: do the immediate project activities (outputs) strike a chord in the local context to the extent that they lead target groups to more democratic practices?

### 1.2.1 Theory of change

The evaluation is grounded in an analytical and methodological framework based on the Theory of Change (ToC). ToC has been instrumental in structuring the evaluation's interview guides, analysis and final report.

The stages in a stylized ToC are as follows:

> **input** (the «intervention», the initial activities) → **output** (the immediate results, «deliveries») → **outcome** (what the deliveries lead to, make project participants and target groups do as a result of the activities) →**impact** (on society).

This somewhat simplistic scheme has proved to be a practical tool to help bring forth the assumed relations between the interventions (inputs) and their outputs and outcomes, and the relations between the outcomes and the solution of the problems that the intervention seeks to reduce or solve. Making actively use of ToC as a structuring and analytical tool is useful because it helps avoid concentration on output practicalities and engenders good discussions about what works and what does not work.

## 1.2.2　Context-Mechanism-Outcome

In addition to ToC, we have applied the Context-Mechanism-Outcome (CMO) approach. This, "trio of explanatory components" helps combining a focus on the programme as such with a focus on the pre-existing context in which the programme intervenes with its activities. This helps identify how the programme activates structural, agential and relational mechanisms to produce the planned outcomes. Put differently, this is about helping outputs lead to outcomes by identifying contextual obstacles.

## 1.2.3　Data and methods

The evaluation is based on two main categories of data. The first category of sources is plans, reports and other documents of relevance that have been provided by EWC. The analysed list of documents includes:

- Detailed project proposal summitted to the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in spring 2021.
- Annual report 2022 (covering the project period November 2021 – December 2022) consisting of (1) narrative report, (2) hierarchy of goals, (3) implementation plan.
- Progress report 2023 (covering the project period January – July 2023) consisting of (1) narrative report, (2) hierarchy of goals, (3) implementation plan.
- Summary of the research project *Ukraine's fight for democracy – The role of schools in times of war* carried out in spring 2022.
- Analytical summary of the research project *Democratising preschool education in Ukraine* carried out in spring 2023.
- Full report on the research project *Democratising preschool education in Ukraine* carried out in spring 2023.
- Impact study from Cedos from 2021.

The second category of data is 10 individual and group interviews that were conducted during April-June 2023 with totally 39 participants that represent the core project team in Oslo, the core team in Ukraine, policy makers, partners, teacher trainers and beneficiaries (see more details in table 1). The interviews lasted between 50 and 90 minutes. Recruitment was conducted by the researchers with the informational assistance of the EWC team, ensuring geographical representation in the selection of both teacher trainers and beneficiaries. 9 interviews with participants from Ukraine were conducted digitally in Ukrainian, 1 interview with the core project team in Oslo was conducted face-to-face.

Table 1:   Participants of the interviews

| Interview type | Category of participants | Number of participants |
|---|---|---|
| Group interview | the core project team in Oslo | 5 |
| Group interview | the core project team in Ukraine | 8 |
| Group interview | teacher trainers (school education professionals) | 9 |
| Group interview | teacher trainers (preschool education professionals) | 3 |
| Group interview | teacher trainers (youth work with IDPs, school and preschool) | 3 |
| Group interview | partners of the programme in Ukraine | 2 |
| Group interview | beneficiaries 1 (representatives of Centres for Professional Development of Teachers, CPDs) | 3 |
| Group interview | beneficiaries 2 (trained teachers, school education professionals) | 2 |
| Group interview | beneficiaries 3 (trained teachers, preschool education professionals) | 3 |
| Individual interview | interview with the Ukrainian authorities (a representative from the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine) | 1 |

### 1.2.4   Ethical considerations

The research project underwent evaluation and approval by the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (SIKT). All interviewees were provided with information regarding the project and their rights as research participants. They were informed that participation was voluntary and that the information they provided would be processed anonymously and in aggregated form, ensuring individual identities remained confidential. All interviews were taped so that the researchers could listen to them again to make more accurate notes, if needed. All the interviews were transcribed with Autotekst (a digital tool for transcribing text from audio files).

In this report, we have anonymised any information that might make it possible for individuals to be identified. That is why we do not distinguish between interviewees considering their role and attachment to the project.

## 1.3   Briefly on the state of democracy in Ukraine

In addition to being a value in itself, democracy is important for Ukraine. Breaking with the "oligarchy" and strengthening rule of law has been recurrent themes in the country's political life throughout the last decades. A series of political reforms aimed at enhancing democracy, including decentralisation, digitalization, and anti-corruption measures, was implemented following the Revolution of Dignity in 2014.

Today, democracy serves as a rallying point by being "what Putin's Russia is not" and by being a prerequisite for Ukraine's future membership in the EU.

The quality of the Ukrainian democracy is under pressure due to the war and occupation. Measures to reduce certain civil liberties have been deemed necessary as part of the country state of war. This has had an impact on Ukraine's rank on various democracy indexes.

The Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute publishes an annual report on the state of democracy in 179 countries. This report is generally considered the most authoritative index on democracy world-wide.

In 2023 Ukraine ranked 105 out of 179 countries on V-Dem's liberal democracy index (V-Dem Institute 2024). In its report on 2021, however, V-dem optimistically characterised Ukraine as "a recent democratizer" (V-Dem 2022, p. 24) although the country still ranked 99 out of 179 countries regarding liberal democracy.

V-Dem's approach to conceptualizing and measuring democracy, however, does not only focus on "liberal democracy". The institute distinguishes between five high-level principles of democracy: electoral, liberal, participatory, deliberative, and egalitarian, and collects data to measure these principles.

Interestingly, both in 2021 and 2023, i.e. immediately before and after the invasion, Ukraine has much better scores on the indexes for egalitarianism, participation and deliberation than on liberal democracy.

The *egalitarian* principle of democracy measures to what extent all social groups enjoy equal capabilities to participate in the political arena. The *deliberative* principle of democracy is about the process by which decisions are reached in a polity. A deliberative process is one in which public reasoning, focused on the common good, motivates political decisions – as contrasted with emotional appeals, solidary attachments, parochial interests or coercion. The *participatory* principle of democracy emphasizes active participation by citizens in all political processes, electoral and non-electoral. The definitions in this paragraph are drawn from V-Dem 2024.

The egalitarian, participatory and deliberative principles are precisely the aspects of democracy that the SfD programme seeks to strengthen. The table below shows Ukraine's ranking in terms of the strength of these three principles, as well as the country's ranking in terms of the state of its liberal democracy.

Table 2:   Ukraine's ranking on V-Dem's Democracy Index (rank out of 179 countries)

| Year/principle | Egalitarian | Deliberative | Participatory | Liberal democracy |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2021 | 73 | 48 | 70 | 99 |
| 2023 | 77 | 63 | 60 | 109 |

Sources: V-Dem 2022; V-Dem 2024

## 1.4   Background on Ukraine's educational reforms

The SfD programme is linked to and supports reforms in the Ukrainian education system. The reforms started in 2016 with the adoption of a new law on education

and the introduction of a strategic vision for education. This vision - 'The New Ukrainian School' - is in line with approaches and practices common in EU countries and with the European Council's recommendations to member states.

The reform was also in line with OECD recommendations. The 2017 OECD Review of Integrity in Education report for Ukraine served as a reference point for the reforms (OECD 2017). The OECD identified a wide range of shortcomings in Ukraine's education system. Corruption, nepotism and widespread and unregulated private tutoring by teachers for a fee made access to education unequal. The OECD also identified the need to balance professional autonomy and accountability, and to increase opportunities for monitoring and challenging decisions.

The reform introduced a competence-based approach to learning, pupil/student-centred pedagogy, greater autonomy (including financial autonomy) for individual schools and more academic freedom for teachers. The aim of the reform was for schools to be "organised according to the model of respect for human rights, democracy and support for good ideas".

Ukraine was officially granted candidate status for EU membership on 23 June 2022. Within the EU, education is primarily the responsibility of member state governments, and the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement simply states that Ukraine and the EU are "examining the possibilities of development and cooperation" in school education. Nevertheless, the reform forms part of the de facto rapprochement of Ukraine to the European mainstreams by bringing Ukraine's educational system closer to the systems in most EU countries.

The reform of the education system in Ukraine is an ongoing process and in 2019 new quality guidelines for schools were adopted to promote democratic culture and inclusion in schools, as well as the democratisation of teaching and assessment practices.

In 2020, a reform of early childhood education and care was launched. The reform aimed at building pre-school *education* rather than childcare. This means that nurseries should be perceived as educational institutions. The reform also aimed at increasing the accessibility of preschool education (including rural areas). Furthermore, the reform included renewal of the pre-school curriculum, focusing on children's participation, free play and the development of democratic competences. The aim is to develop a quality pre-school system with a more child-centred approach and better inclusion.

### 1.4.1 The SfD programme's main contributions to the reform

— Piloting and implementing the New Ukrainian School reform (training teachers on child-centered pedagogy, competence-based teaching, making use of academic freedom and democratic school governance to make of the school autonomy)
— Shaping and drafting the new Quality Standards for Schools in 2020
— Drafting the new Curriculum for Pre-School Education in 2020 (coordinating the work of and training curriculum developers)

## 1.5   Effect of the 2022 full-scale invasion on education

The 2022 full-scale invasion has not put an end to the educational reforms. The context in which the reforms are carried out, however, have changed dramatically and as long as the war continues, many of the reform objectives are more difficult to achieve.

As of June 2024, UNHCR reports that 6.5 million refugees from Ukraine are registered globally and more than 3.5 million are internally displaced (UNHCR 2024).

By June 2023, no less than 3 290 educational facilities had been bombed. Ten percent of Ukraine's educational infrastructure had been shelled (information cited in OECD 2023, p. 20). To cope with the situation three educational models are being applied at the same time, depending on the degree of exposure to the war in the region in which the individual school is located. The three models are fully remote, mixed remote and in-person and solely in-person. The different models provide different learning environments. Children who only receive digital teaching are disadvantaged.

As part of the educational reform, funds were made available through the state budget for new equipment and improvement of the educational space in schools. This made it possible for municipalities to purchase furniture and other equipment that facilitated more active and flexible learning in line with the reform objectives. At the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic these subsidies were withdrawn. However, state subsidies to promote and implement the New Ukrainian School were renewed in 2023 and continue in 2024.

Promoting and practicing democracy, openness and tolerance has proven to be difficult even in countries that have experienced peace for decades. In a country, like Ukraine, that is victim of a brutal invasion the challenge is even bigger. A country that is being invaded may have to set some democratic procedures aside temporarily. Moreover, widespread fear, loss and anger may foster attitudes in the population that go contrary to the objectives of democracy and openness. In schools, therefore, the potentially difficult trade-off between the pedagogy of patriotism (during war) and the pedagogy of democracy is of particular importance.

There are challenges ahead for Ukraine's democratic achievements from before the full-scale invasion to be preserved and also applied under the current situation: inclusion of IDPs in schools and local communities; sustaining decentralised governance of schools and education; securing equal access to quality education across the country.


## 1.6   Continuation of reforms after 2022

The 2022 invasion did not put an end to the New Ukrainian School reform, but during the first year of the war, priority had to be given to providing access to education and psychological support for educational staff.

The SfD programme has helped the government with the extensive teacher training in participatory online pedagogy to deal with the challenges of war. This contribution has been specifically mentioned in the recent Report to the Storting (White Paper) for the Nansen Programme in Norway (St.Melding 8, 2023-2024).

SfD also contributed to the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) efforts by including modules on psychological support in all teacher training courses. The modules were developed in collaboration with the Norwegian Centre for Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies (NKVTS).

MoES has launched its *Vision of the Future of Education and Science* for the period 2024-2029. According to the Vision, educational reforms will extend to upper secondary and pre-school education, with the aim of promoting civic responsibility, inclusion and active participation. Differentiated learning according to students' chosen learning pathways is envisaged to bring the education system in line with EU standards. Increased cooperation with local NGOs working in the field of education will be encouraged as a means of improving the quality of education and strengthening the democratic resilience of local communities.

# 2 The School for Democracy programme

## 2.1 The European Wergeland Centre

The Oslo-based EWC is a European resource centre on education for human rights, democratic citizenship and intercultural understanding. The centre operates on the basis on the CoE Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture that covers all sectors of education.

The EWC was established in 2008 by Norway and the Council of Europe (CoE). The centre serves all member states of the CoE. Its mandate is to support democracy through education and schools.

The EWC runs projects in a number of CoE member states. In Ukraine, the EWC's Schools for Democracy: Supporting Education Reforms programme aims to strengthen systemic democratic transformations in the country by supporting democratic reforms in school and pre-school education through the promotion of democratic culture and democratic citizenship in policy and practice. In particular, the programme supports the further implementation of the New Ukrainian School reform in Ukraine by contributing to policy-making, providing a range of capacity-building activities for educators, supporting professional learning communities, and helping to raise public awareness of the value of the reforms. The programme also develops innovative teaching and learning and provides resources to facilitate implementation of innovative methods.

## 2.2 The programme 2017-2021

In the programme's first phase (2017-2021) was divided into four programme components: policy support, school democratization and decentralisation, development of online teaching and learning resources, and experience exchange and regional cooperation.

## 2.3 Programme objectives 2021-2024

The Schools for Democracy programme is carried out in 2021-2024 with the aim to continue supporting education reforms in Ukraine through facilitating systemic democratic reforms in education and strengthening European cooperation by promoting democratic culture and democratic citizenship in policy and practice.

The components will serve to support changes at two levels of education: school and pre-school education. The programme:

- supports further development and piloting of new educational policies aimed at promoting the culture of democracy in pre-school and school education;
- contributes to evidence-based communication of democratic changes in pre-school and school education;
- supports and strengthen the capacity to implement the education reform among local and national networks, partnerships, and learning communities of educators.

In line with the recommendations given in the mid-term evaluation of Schools for Democracy 2017-2021 (Holm-Hansen and Rabinovich 2021), the ongoing

programme includes two key components: policy support and evidence-based communication of democratic changes and strengthening learning communities of educators.

**Target groups**

**Target Audience:** local communities of education professionals (including local Centers of Professional Development (CPDs), local providers of teacher training services, regional Teacher Training Institutes, administration of schools and preschool institutions, teachers, policy makers and experts). Unlike the programme prior to 2021 the current phase does not target parents.

## 2.4 Funding

The programme is funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (ref. UKR-21/002) with partial own contribution by the EWC. During the reporting period (01.11.2021-31.07.2023), the grant amount utilized was 11,380,297 NOK.

## 2.5 Involved institutions

The Programme is implemented by the EWC in close cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. It is funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (ref. UKR-21/002) with partial own contribution by the EWC.

The Programme is implemented by the EWC in close cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine.

The project has three implementing partners in Ukraine:

- The Step-by-Step Foundation (Kyiv) for pre-school project activities
- Centre for Educational Initiatives (Lviv), for activities in schools
- The international charitable organisation SavED, on access to education in communities that has suffered from the Russian war against Ukraine

Other partners are UIRO (the Ukrainian Institute for the development of education). Prometheus, the Lviv regional institute for post-diploma pedagogical education, Smart Osvita, Sociologist and the International Step-by-Step Association.

## 2.6 The Programme's theory of change

The overall aim of the programme is to contribute to strengthening democracy and human rights in Ukraine by enabling activities in schools and pre-schools that fosters such values. This is the project's desired impact. One could say the project strives for two – closely interlinked – impacts. The immediate impact is on the educational system's capacities to foster democracy which in turn leads to the ultimate impact, that of a stronger democracy and respect for human rights in the Ukrainian society.

To reach the desired impact, the programme operates with a set of outcomes. In SfD's Result Framework the outcomes are stated as:

- Outcome 1, New education policies foster democratic citizenship and human rights (to be achieved by these outputs: support for development of new policies, support for piloting new policies).
- Outcome 2, Awareness of democratic changes in education is raised
- (to be achieved by these outputs: presenting democratic changes in schools, disseminating resources and good practices).
- Outcome 3, Learning communities of educators are strengthened
- (to be achieved by these outputs: capacity building of education professionals, institutions and networking of educators).

The concrete programme activities (outputs) that are meant to lead to the above-mentioned outcomes are numerous, and they are meticulously registered by the programme officers as soon as the activities have been completed.

Table 3: The programme outputs for 2022-2023

| Programme outputs | Reporting period (01.11.2021-31.12.2022) | Reporting period (01.01.2023-31.07.2023) |
|---|---|---|
| Policy support | • 5 policy documents adopted with the participation of the programme experts<br>• Team involved in 5 policy working groups and 2 communities of practice | • 3 policy documents adopted with the participation of the programme experts<br>• Team involved in 4 policy working groups and 4 communities of practice |
| Learning resources developed | • 10 webinars reaching out to 17 000 viewers<br>• 9 videos reaching out to 10 750 viewers through the EWC Youtube channel<br>• 4 videos on Outdoor education (under development)<br>• 3 manuals for Centers for Professional Development of educators<br>• repository of materials for mobile group work<br>• 1 digital resource on student self-government piloted in 2022(under development) | • 5 webinars gathering 954 participants<br>• 4 inspirational videos for preschool educators sharing Norwegian experience<br>• 4 videos on Outdoor education gathering 1561 views<br>• 1 digital resource on student self-government<br>• 36 new activities for Toolbox<br>• 1 activity book on outdoor education that has been downloaded 1031 times from the website library<br>• 10 activity cards and 1 brochure for mentorship support (under development) |
| Online learning opportunities provided | • 6 MOOCs available on the Prometheus platform<br>• 1 new MOOC *"School Life Online"* launched in May 2022. 99% of the course participants say they would suggest the course to their peers<br>• Over 100 000 course participants registered for | • 5 MOOCs currently available on the Prometheus platform<br>• 1 new MOOC for the Teaching Staff Professional Development Centres is under development<br>• 113 815 course participants registered |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | our MOOCs since spring 2021<br>• 40 940 participants enrolled in our courses in 2022<br>• 34 265 participants enrolled after 24 February 2022, 16 131of them obtained certificates<br>• 5 blended learning courses offered at the EWC online learning platform<br>• 1 new blended course developed in 2022.100% of the participants say they would recommend our courses to their colleagues<br>• 1842 teachers (school and preschool) took part in the blended learning courses, 849 of them were awarded with certificates | for our MOOCs since spring 2021<br>• 18 140 new participants enrolled in our MOOCs in 2023<br>• 6 blended learning courses offered at the EWC online learning platform<br>• 3 new blended courses developed in 2023<br>• 3184 educators (school and preschool) took part in the blended learning courses<br>• |
| Integration activities for IDPs | • 7 575 participants (4 423 of school and 3 152 of preschool age) took part in the mobile youth work trainings<br>• Totally 541 trainings organised (225 at schools and 316 in kindergartens) | • Not relevant |
| Communication | • 34 900 unique visitors to the programme website (including 19 000 Toolbox views)<br>• Over 86 000 readers reached through 14 publications produced and disseminated on various educational resources<br>• 10750 viewers on the EWC Youtube channel<br>• 5300+ followers on the programme Facebook page<br>• 2500+ subscribers to the programme Newsletter | • 26 086 unique visitors to the programme website<br>• 20 152 unique users accessing the Toolbox<br>• 2202 unique users visiting the library<br>• 105 811 readers reached through 11 publications produced and disseminated on various online educational resources<br>• 5800+ followers on the programme Facebook page<br>• 565 course alumni actively participating in a closed Facebook group Democratic Kindergarten Network |
| Youth-led school-community projects | • Not relevant | • 202 high school students, 10 mentors and 20 teachers participating in especially tailored civic education program |

A comparison of the programme outputs for the reporting period (goal hierarchy with preliminary results from 01.11.2021-31.12.2022 and 01.01.2023-31.07.2023) with the planned targets for 2024 (Project Proposal 2021-2024) shows that some targets have already been achieved, while others need further work by the end of 2024.

For Outcome 1, "New education policies foster democratic citizenship and respect for human rights," 8 policy documents were adopted with the participation of programme experts, meeting the planned target of 8.

For Outcome 2, "Awareness of democratic changes in education raised," the programme's dissemination efforts and involvement of new participants and followers have been successful. Over 134,412 readers were reached through publications on various online educational resources, exceeding the planned target of 100,000 viewers. The programme also demonstrated successful promotion on social media, attracting many new followers and users. However, the number of publications on democratic changes in school and preschool education, based on monitoring conducted by the programme, is 25 out of the 30 planned for 2024.

For Outcome 3, "Learning communities of educators strengthened," the target for the number of produced learning resources was exceeded. However, the number of educational and teacher training institutions, including NGOs, involved in training programs on strategic planning and development, as well as the number of participants in networking and community-building events, is lower than the target numbers for 2024. It is recommended to enhance the project team's efforts regarding outputs 3.2 and 3.3 by the end of the programme period in 2024.

# 3 Findings and discussion

## 3.1 Context analysis: main challenges facing the education system during times of war

The conditions of wartime have significantly impacted the organization and operation of the education process in Ukraine at all levels, thus affecting the achievement of the programme's objectives. One of the key challenges, resulting from Russian military aggression, has been the scattering of education process participants, with many teachers, parents, and students becoming internally displaced persons or leaving the country. Teachers who participated in the research interviews expressed concerns about the quality of education for Ukrainian children abroad, as well as the risk of them not returning to Ukraine in the future. Another challenge during wartime has been the shortage of personnel among teachers and educators due to Ukrainians relocating abroad. Under such circumstances, it became urgently important for the programme team to ensure the preservation of the trainer network by transitioning to maximum online work mode and maintaining dense communication among all members. As noted by one interviewee, the programme's greatest achievement during wartime has been "*preserving the professional trainer network.*"

Military aggression in the east and south of Ukraine, as well as constant Russian attacks on other regions, led educational institutions to adopt various operating modes in different parts of Ukraine – from fully online in frontline regions to fully offline in western regions of Ukraine. According to teachers participating in the programme, these different operating modes lead to "*educational losses,*" where the quality of education among children living in different regions of Ukraine varies significantly, with the online education format significantly lagging behind. Factors contributing to this include constant air alarms, power outages, security risks, psychological tension, and the lack of close contact and quality communication in the school environment. Thus, new social inequalities arise and are entrenched in Ukrainian society during wartime, including unequal access to quality education. This highlights the importance of the programme's work in the frontline regions of Ukraine, where the educational process is forced to take place online due to security risks. Furthermore, there are new inequalities emerging in the unequal access to education for specific groups of children. Some participants pointed out that children with special educational needs due to health conditions, when relocated to other regions of Ukraine, do not always can continue inclusive education because of infrastructural challenges.

Interview participants from western regions of Ukraine also highlighted an increase in workload for teachers who, due to the mass internal displacement of Ukrainians from the front-line regions, are working in two shifts per day. This intense work schedule, combined with constant volunteering and support for the military, results in psychological exhaustion, physical fatigue, and professional burnout. The conditions of war have also affected the psychological atmosphere in work environments and student classrooms. As one interviewee pointed out, "*it's challenging to continue showing kindness to children when our loved ones are dying on the front lines.*" The emotional strain and psychological exhaustion experienced by participants in the education process during wartime underscored the need for an

unplanned component of the programme – the integration of psychological support as part of facilitated courses.

It's quite expected that funding issues for educational institutions in times of war have become a significant challenge for the functioning of the education process in Ukraine. Interview participants have repeatedly pointed out that implementing the New Ukrainian School requires adequate material and technical support, while budgetary funding has been significantly limited due to the priority of other budget expenditures. Underfunding issues were also emphasized by kindergarten teachers funded by local budgets. The problem of low salaries for teachers and educators has been identified as a key factor leading to the outflow of personnel to other employment sectors. These material and technical challenges do not contribute to strengthening the work motivation of participants in the education process, who are currently focused on addressing the survival needs of their own families.

Among the structural challenges, interview participants also highlighted the sluggishness in making management decisions by the MoES during wartime, along with deteriorated communication, which hampers all participants in the education process from responding promptly to current challenges. In summary, one of the interview participants expressed, "*Compared to 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019, the ministry communicates quite weakly and reacts rather slowly to challenges. There are many more challenges now, and they are much more drastic... School administrators feel it, educators feel it, that they are in a certain vacuum. And this is a big threat, I think.*"

The solidarity of various international actors with Ukraine has led to an increase in the number of projects aimed at supporting the functioning of the education system. Interviewees explained that this poses a challenge for MoES staff in structuring and organising all the efforts coming from abroad. As a result, there is a proliferation of projects, sometimes with similar agendas, and the lack of necessary management and coordination leads to somewhat chaotic processes in project implementation.

Despite the challenges mentioned earlier, such as security risks and other difficulties posed by the current wartime situation, interview participants observed that Ukraine's education system has shown resilience and flexibility during this extremely tough period. All stakeholders in the education sector, under the leadership of the MoES, were able to make management decisions that ensured the stability and continuity of the education process in Ukraine during times of war.

## 3.2 The impact of war on programme components and key directions for adapting the programme to the challenges of martial law

One of the primary objectives of the program during the current period has been to support the practical implementation of the New Ukrainian School reform and to assist the MoES in developing practical components for this reform. As noted by interview participants, the programme's current focus has been on "*developing the professional competencies of its participants, rather than on the institutional component.*" Members of the Ukrainian project team mentioned that they initially had concerns about the programme's implementation prospects at the beginning of the full-scale invasion. However, unexpectedly, participants showed a high level of

interest and strong engagement in their work under martial law. Programme participants confirmed that being involved in the project helped them cope with the difficulties of daily life during the war, share experiences of working with children in wartime conditions, and support each other. Consequently, the programme's work under martial law has strengthened social bonds among all participants and contributed to the resilience of Ukraine's educational system during this tense period.

The transition of most activities to an online format facilitated the implementation of planned programme activities. The previous period of the programme's implementation during the pandemic "prepared" participants for this type of work by providing them with necessary digital skills. As one interviewee summarized, "*We were fortunate that there was the quarantine because participants were trained and prepared for online learning, so it did not jeopardize the program's implementation*." One of the programme's trainers mentioned that "*COVID gave us the freedom to act*" and significantly expanded educational tools, with the creation of video materials now being actively used.

Despite ongoing massive attacks on various regions of Ukraine, the programme managed to launch and implement most of the activities planned for the reporting period. For instance, the "youth programme" began, combining online sessions with elements of offline work (meetings with mentors); facilitated courses served as a source not only of professional growth but also of friendly support for teachers, enabling them to share experiences on coping with the challenges of the war. Despite the continuous attacks, the preschool component was successfully launched.

At the end of the previous stage of the programme's work, the project team planned in-person events to network professional communities, anticipating the end of quarantine. However, due to safety risks and the innovative nature of such networking under martial law, this planned component had to be "minimized." As one representative of the Ukrainian project team noted, in implementing this component, "*the program had to pivot and place greater emphasis on developing individual competencies*."

Nevertheless, project participants managed to launch several innovative and unplanned programme components at the request of its beneficiaries and to address wartime challenges. Among these were mobile trainer groups that visited schools and conducted activities with both school-age and preschool-age children, integrating children of internally displaced persons as well as building capacity of teachers to deal with diverse classrooms. As one interviewee mentioned, the work of these mobile groups allowed all participants to find a sense of "*stability and support in conditions where very little depends on you.*" The relevance of this activity was driven by the massive displacement of Ukrainians from the southern and eastern regions and the heightened need for integration into local communities. Given that children, teachers, and parents arriving from these areas were traumatized by the events of the war and faced serious psychological challenges, the educational component of the program was expanded to include psychological support.

Another valuable aspect of the programme's implementation has been its focus on research, which has significantly enhanced its relevance under wartime conditions. Two research projects were undertaken to explore the unique experiences of

Ukrainian schools and kindergartens in adapting to work under martial law, and to explore practices of resilience and current challenges.

First, in 2022, the programme conducted a study entitled "Ukraine's Fight for Democracy: The Role of Schools at Wartime" to document the changes and assess their impact on democratic citizenship and human rights. The study collected stories from Ukrainian schools during the war. Interviewees noted that the research findings helped them to identify best practices in dealing with multiple challenges and allowed them to share their experiences with others.

In 2023, another research project was undertaken to better understand the current state of preschool education in Ukraine. From March to June 2023, the programme, in cooperation with the Research Bureau Sociologist (Ukraine), conducted the study "Democratisation of Pre-school Education in Ukraine". This study became an important contribution to ensuring the quality of early childhood education, facilitating the full development of children and transforming the Ukrainian preschool education system as a whole.

Many interview participants highlighted the programme's flexibility, the ability to voice opinions, and the discussion of convenient work formats, which allowed for a swift response to wartime challenges and a reorientation to meet the urgent needs of the programme's beneficiaries. For example, to address current issues with blackouts, programme participants were given the opportunity to extend the duration of their courses and reschedule sessions.

Under martial law, the project trainer network functioned not only as a professional community but also as a network of mutual aid and support. Project trainers shared stories of assisting colleagues from the most affected regions of Ukraine with evacuation, resettlement, and integration. Through the efforts of the project participants, the existing trainer community was not only preserved but also expanded under martial law. Equally important was the inclusion of participants from frontline regions, who were highly engaged in the project.

## 3.3    Persisting non-democratic legacies

From the interviews, we learned that some of the reform goals have been difficult to achieve. Old habits die hard in schools. According to some of our interviewees, teamwork is still not sufficiently understood as a way of working by many school administrators, headmasters. They are reluctant to delegate authority, for example by inviting parents and teachers to help formulate educational plans. At the same time, some teachers are afraid to take on authority and, according to some of our interviewees, are even afraid to speak out and express their opinions. All this leads to a lack of greater teacher involvement in decision making.

In addition, some individual teachers prefer to teach as they did before the New Ukrainian School reform. As one of the participants summed up: "*Many teachers do not understand the New Ukrainian School – they continue to work as they did before.*" This often means teaching from the top down, without opening up the classroom for discussion.

The above factors create some obstacles for the implementation of the reform. Insufficient understanding of student participation and student government among school administrators and teachers is one of the obstacles mentioned by our

interviewees. A lack of appreciation of diversity as a value and the constant pursuit of ratings were also mentioned.

The reform introduced academic freedom in the sense that teachers were allowed to choose between textbooks and methods. This confuses some teachers, who would probably prefer clear instructions from the Ministry.

The reform has introduced a more participatory and pedagogically conducive approach to marking. This includes students' self-assessment and setting their own learning goals. Also these elements of the reform has required some training and follow-up of teachers.

The above highlights the importance of the SfD's focus on training teachers for a more participatory pedagogy, valuing student agency, and supporting active and genuine student governance.

## 3.4 How the Schools for Democracy programme addresses persisting non-democratic practices

The programme provided training in teamwork and group work, with an emphasis on questioning and democratic values. Many interviewees said that they found the programme's toolboxes useful. These toolboxes provide a large number of exercises that develop civic competences.

Participants also improved their skills and knowledge of self-evaluation methods. Some interviewees mentioned that both principals and teachers started to use different forms of feedback (surveys, discussions, comments) to adjust their activities. Student self-government became more visible and sustainable in schools participating in the programme.

During the reporting period, several study visits to Oslo were organised for programme participants and partners to enhance capacity building and coordination between the different components of the programme. Interviewees valued these visits as a unique opportunity to "see democracy in action" and observe the practical implementation of key approaches and principles in Norway. These examples and experiences demonstrated their relevance for the future work of programme participants in Ukraine.

The pre-school component of the programme has facilitated a more child-focused approach in many kindergartens. As one project participant said: "*The programme provided an opportunity to hear the voice of the child*". The programme has helped to change the perception of what successful pre-school education entails. As one interviewee said: "*The child does not have to perform well because the nursery is not a theatre*". The programme aims to help introduce a pre-school that is less about achievement and more about process and developing the child's independence, tolerance, respect and acceptance of diversity. The aim is to help pre-school children to develop self-esteem, to understand who they are. As for the pre-school teachers involved in the programme, they have been trained not to be afraid to initiate and propose changes.

There is an element of 'snowballing' in the way the Schools for Democracy project has been designed. This is conducive to overcoming persistent non-democratic practices. Teachers involved in the programme seek to recruit and involve

colleagues in the programme. There is also a strong tendency for those who participated in the previous phase of the programme to join the current phase, which in many cases means that they take on the role of committed 'agents of change'.

## 3.5    Democracy in pre-schools – a unique niche

The inclusion of pre-school education in the 2021-2024 phase of the programme is a novelty in Ukraine. The aim is to develop a pre-school sector that facilitates the acquisition of democratic skills from an early age. This was a novelty in the Ukrainian setting, and as one interviewee said: "*We took the risk. This is a niche no one had worked with in Ukraine before. It has a huge potential*".

The EWC participated in the development of the framework plan for preschool education in Ukraine and in its implementation. The principle of empowerment of children, even very young ones, is enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 12 of the Convention states: "The child has the right to express his or her views on all matters affecting the child and the views of the child shall be given due weight". How to ensure this right for younger children is, of course, challenging. The programme has entered into a training cooperation with experienced pre-school educators from a private Norwegian kindergarten company.

One challenge in the Ukrainian context (as in Norway) is to convince parents that children do not necessarily need to learn reading, writing and arithmetic in preschool. Instead, they need to learn how to be a good friend, how to talk to adults, how to value themselves, in short, how to be "little citizens".

## 3.6    Youth as actors of change

From 2023 the programme has got the third implementation partner – an international charitable foundation SavED and the second wave of their *UActive project* has become a part of the Schools for Democracy programme. UActive is designed for students in grades 8-11 who will be offered a specially tailored civic education program and, therefore, will be able to learn skills that will help them launch socially important projects in their communities. During the reporting period the project brought together 202 high school students from 20 teams representing 10 Ukrainian schools.

The analysis of program activities, along with interviews with partners and beneficiaries, reveals that this part of the programme not only expanded its reach across different age groups but also produced tangible results for the regions in Ukraine most affected by the war. Teenagers received small grants—seed funding—to implement their projects, and the impact of these projects was evident at the local level. Participants also gained advocacy skills and learned how to communicate effectively with various stakeholders and local authorities. As one interviewee noted, "*Our project focuses on restoring life in communities, in specific localities. We generally require our teams, the children's teams, to go out and learn how to speak, lobby, and positively present their ideas and solutions to local authorities and secure their support. Often, this results in local budget allocations for these initiatives.*"

Working with youth was highlighted by interview participants as crucial for Ukraine's future and its reconstruction efforts. They noted numerous opportunities in the

international aid market for developing youth projects, with many donors prioritizing youth engagement. Consequently, the project effectively prepares young Ukrainians to develop independent initiatives in the civic sector.

## 3.7    Impact of the programme on beneficiaries

The programme's components aim to engage not only teachers and educators but also school administrators. According to interview participants, involving school principals and vice-principals in various program activities has enhanced transparency and democratized management processes in the educational environment. As one interviewee noted, the program has fostered an atmosphere where school administrations are more open and inclusive, involving all stakeholders in developing strategies and plans for school improvement. This has built greater trust within the school community and strengthened the cohesion among all participants in the education process.

Research interviews consistently highlighted the importance of involving school administrators and continuing to work with them to enhance democratic management processes within schools. This is crucial because school management often features a "strong centre," where the administration plays a central role in decision-making. Additionally, the principal's support is significant for disseminating program approaches within schools. As one interviewee summarized, "*everything starts with the principal.*" When the principal supports the program's values and tools, it provides "structural support" for the teaching staff to implement the program's principles and approaches. Interviewees shared examples of school administrators who, after participating in program activities, began actively using some of the tools in their daily work, such as recognizing the benefits of teamwork.

Interview participants also noted that the democratization of the school environment is happening "from the bottom up," with the "ordinary teacher" being a key agent of democratic change. Proper training and education for teachers positively impact both parents and students. Programme trainers observed increased participant activism and improved communication skills during program activities. Teachers who received training often recommend the programme to their colleagues, which interview participants identified as an indicator of the programme's effectiveness.

Almost every interview highlighted the programme's significant impact on early childhood education. This includes the innovation and importance of knowledge about democratic approaches in kindergartens, promoting values of equality, accessibility, and partnership, and the practical application of these approaches by educators. As one interviewee summarized the impact of the program's preschool component, "*children feel freer, they are more united, collaborate well, and express their needs and emotions more.*"

These changes have not gone unnoticed by parents, who are direct beneficiaries of the program. Interview participants mentioned that parents of preschool children are particularly pleased with the attention and additional education their children receive. Parents of school-aged children are open and interested in the program's implementation and participation. However, some interviewees pointed out that wartime living conditions, compounded by financial difficulties and daily survival challenges, can dampen motivation. In these situations, parents are often "*happy to leave all the effort of education and upbringing to the teacher.*"

## 3.8 Major achievements of the programme according to participant evaluations

In every interview, participants highlighted various aspects of the programme they considered its greatest achievements. The most frequently mentioned components include:

- **Preschool Component**: This underscores the programme's innovation within the Ukrainian education system, bringing "democratic approaches into early childhood education" by building and supporting a professional learning community, and by training teachers to support free play, encourage children participation and respect children's rights.
- **Trainer Network**: During wartime, this network has demonstrated its resilience, functioning not only as a professional community but also as a support network.
- **Workshops and Facilitated Courses**: These received high praise for the quality of educational materials, the diversity of formats and methods, and for significantly expanding their reach to new audiences during the reporting period.

Additionally, participants noted other significant achievements of the programme, such as its impact on their professional development, the enhancement of their personal skills, and the positive microclimate during program activities. This environment fosters participant engagement and is built on cooperation, support, openness, and flexibility. Participants often concluded that the programme has established a strong brand within the educational community, associated with the quality of the project and its educational products.

The programme activities were particularly appreciated because they took place in an extraordinarily difficult situation for the country when access to quality professional development was limited or totally absent.

## 3.9 Policy support and cooperation with Ukrainian authorities

The SfD programme contributes to policy making, and in the 2021-2024 period representatives of the programmes local Ukrainian partners have taken part in the following working groups as experts:

- Working group on the national curriculum and assessment in upper secondary education
- Working group on the new National Strategy of Education and Science of Ukraine 2030
- Working group on drafting the professional standard of youth workers
- Working group on Early Childhood Care and Development.

As it was summed up by one of the interview participants, the SfD programme works align with the state reforms and enhance its practical components: "*The programme helps implement reforms. We bring innovations, but these innovations still align with legislation and state policy. The programme assists the state and communities in implementing state policy and teaching people how to carry it out*".

Interview participants noted that the decentralisation reform, which began in Ukraine in 2014, has generally increased the interest and openness of local authorities to all processes happening in schools. This reform has also strengthened the role of schools in local development and self-governance. However, participants had mixed assessments of the quality of collaboration between local governments and programme participants regarding the prospects of the programme's implementation and dissemination at the local level.

During the interviews, both successful and unsuccessful cases where participants had to repeatedly justify the importance of their initiatives were discussed. For example, in some cases participants often needed to explain that "*the things we talk about are just as important as mathematics and how they will benefit the municipality.*" Meanwhile, certain activities of the programme attracted the interest of local authorities. One example is the initiatives for internally displaced persons. As one interview participant summarized, "*The schedule of our events with school trainers was even included in the city's event schedule for internally displaced persons, and they were very interested in collaboration*".

Another interesting example demonstrating the effectiveness of the programme's "bottom-up" approach is the proposal for cooperation from the Ukrainian State Center for Extracurricular Education. According to one of the interview participants, this state institution suggested expanding the programme's work with student self-government at the city, regional, and national levels. As the participant summarized, "*This was an acknowledgment and understanding that we have experts in this field. We can work not only with educational institutions and enhance the competencies of the coordinators working within these institutions but also with those operating at the regional and national levels.*"

Participants mentioned that after the decentralisation reform, the demand for the knowledge offered by the programme has significantly increased among local educators and education department staff. As one participant remarked, "*A much broader group of people is coming to us than we expected. These people lack the knowledge and aren't being taught. They've been decentralised, told to do whatever they want, but not taught what they should do. They want to learn, but this target audience wasn't included in our programme this time.*" In previous cycles, the programme involved representatives from municipalities in its activities. According to participants, this contributed to more developed cooperation between schools and local authorities. As one interviewee summarized, "*I would like to say that even local authorities are a bit envious of our schools. Our schools participate in various projects; we encourage them and try to support them with some material and technical resources, especially when they create their safe learning spaces.*"

Opinions varied regarding the Ukrainian authority's awareness about the programme's realisation. Many noted that "*it's impossible not to notice such a significant player in the field of democracy, as the programme has a strong image.*" However, some participants pointed out that "*very few people at the local level (local authorities, education departments in territorial communities) know about the programme.*" Nonetheless, this lack of awareness does not hinder the programme's implementation at the local level. As one interviewee summarized, "*It is important that the programme is known not in the education departments, but in the educational institutions. The fact that these institutions are aware of the programme and that it is well-received is evidenced by the growing number of participants in our events and the feedback we receive after the programme.*"

Participants also had differing opinions on the quality of cooperation and support coming from local authorities. Overall, there is support from local authorities, but the quality of this support was often described as superficial and mostly declarative. As one interviewee summarised such a superficial approach demonstrated by some of the local authorities: "*We made democratic dumplings and celebrated a democratic Pancake Day*". Nonetheless, this fact was not perceived as a hinder for the programme's implementation. As one interviewee mentioned, "*Whenever we reached out to someone, we always received support. Again, it might be more of a declared support, but sometimes that's enough because we are doing our job, and, in principle, that's sufficient.*"

## 3.10 Rural and urban areas in the programme's implementation

The disparity in education quality and the initial opportunities for the programme implementation between urban and rural areas was a key topic of reflection among interview participants. While large cities in Ukraine generally have higher education quality, as confirmed by statistics, interviewees noted that this does not necessarily mean local authorities and schools are more open to participating in the programme activities. In some large cities, local authorities are quite authoritarian and centralized, making it difficult to introduce any innovations in the educational process. The openness of local authorities and their understanding of the motivation behind participating in the programme's projects were identified as crucial factors for the successful geographic expansion of the programme.

Participants noted that working in rural schools can sometimes be easier and more effective: "We loved small schools... Because a school with 200-300, even just over 100 students, feels like a community where everyone knows each other, making it possible to have an impact and achieve better results."

Some beneficiaries and programme's partners highlighted the significant value of working with small communities and villages, especially those with very limited financial resources or those recovering from occupation. As one interviewee summarized, "*We work with those who are extremely challenged, these poor villages... And now we are giving young people at least some chance to try themselves out in practice and understand how they can be valuable and necessary to their communities.*" It highlights the "territorial aspect" of the programme's relevance.

## 3.11 Proposals for improving and developing the programme in the future

In our discussions with interview participants, we explored their vision for enhancing and expanding the programme. This helped us identify aspects that need reformatting and those that could represent a new phase in fostering democracy within Ukraine's education system.

Participants made several urgent suggestions, including more active use of in-person work formats and increased experience sharing between current participants

and past programme "graduates." They also mentioned potential collaborative projects between schools in eastern and western Ukraine.

The need for more in-person interactions was justified by the lack of communication and the more intensive nature of face-to-face work compared to online formats. As one participant summarized, "*2-3 days of in-person workshops are better than a week of online work.*" Another noted that due to COVID-19 and wartime conditions, "*I haven't seen the people I closely collaborate with through the program for 4 years.*" Recognizing the security risks that impede offline work, participants suggested holding in-person seminars at least once a year to facilitate face-to-face communication and experience sharing. Many interviewees stressed the importance of sharing best practices to improve their work locally.

Regarding previously implemented components, participants expressed a desire to revive mini-projects that were part of the programme before the pandemic.

Participants also emphasized the continuation of existing programme components as crucial for future development. Specifically, they mentioned ongoing work with early childhood education and the creation of new facilitated courses. Kindergarten educators involved in the preschool component expressed a need for more cards to use in their lessons and requested "*illustrating not only rules but also stories.*" Interviewees also wanted to resume mentorship for schools and kindergartens, allowing mentors to visit educational institutions and guide changes over time.

Many interviewees suggested new directions for the programme or the revival of previously functioning ones. Wartime realities prompt reflections on the future in de-occupied territories and the need for reintegration methodologies, dialogue facilitation, and mediation.

Given the current support for Ukraine from European countries and reconstruction prospects, there is a need for knowledge and skills in working with donors and establishing more intensive cooperation with NGOs. To ensure sustainable results and expand the programme's impact, participants recognized the need to work with school founders, such as local governments, and to strengthen school-community cooperation by involving community employees in programme activities. This, according to participants, will foster internal support for programme activities at the local government level and enhance interaction between schools and local authorities.

A valuable proposal is to expand the programme to cover extracurricular education, vocational education, and work with students at pedagogical universities in Ukraine to promote democratic changes across all educational levels. As one interviewee summarized, "*We don't need to retrain teachers; we need to train them correctly, which is why working with future teachers at university is crucial.*"

## 3.12   Impact of the programme on society

### 3.12.1   From democratic education to a democratic society

Interview participants highlighted several keyways the programme impacts Ukrainian society, primarily through democratizing the educational environment. Changes initiated by programme participants in each Ukrainian school or

kindergarten serve as catalysts for broader transformations. New approaches and formats in classroom instruction, along with the professional growth of teachers, influence students by enhancing their engagement and self-realization in both educational settings and their social surroundings. One interviewee summarized the programme's impact on children by noting, "*Children feel freer, they are more united, collaborate well, express their needs and emotions more, and have learned to understand themselves and others better.*" Therefore, the programme operates on multiple levels – institutional (school administrations and educational processes) and individual (within families).

This multifaceted impact is evident in the increased involvement of parents, teachers, and students in school decision-making processes. Interviewees observed that the programme improves communication among parents, teachers, and students, builds partnerships among all participants in the educational process, and fosters a sense of collective involvement. This, in turn, makes the educational process more open to change and inclusive in decision-making. As a result, as noted during interviews, "pupils are not afraid to ask questions," and "kindergarten teachers start to truly see each child." This contributes to the improvement of democratic competencies for both learners and educators.

### 3.12.2  Programme participants as agents of democratic changes

The programme also influences civic participation and activity among all educational process participants, particularly students and teachers involved in the programme's activities. Interviewees shared numerous examples of schools that participated in the programme and initiated changes in their districts and communities. These schools successfully submitted and implemented projects for participatory budgets, such as constructing sports facilities and repairing sidewalks near schools, and established long-term interactions between schools and communities. Students, in turn, show increased activity, volunteerism, and civic engagement. Interview participants provided examples of bottom-up influence, where students initiated changes in the school environment that were then supported by teachers and school administrations.

### 3.12.3  Long-term perspective on building democracy

However, many participants noted that it is still too early to fully assess the programme's impact on Ukrainian society, as its effects will become more apparent in the long term. Firstly, the program's beneficiaries are Ukrainian children and youth, who need time to grow up and apply the approaches they have learned in their future activities. Secondly, as one interviewee put it, the program "*has a long tail*," operating on multiple educational levels and yielding results over time.

# 4 Conclusions

This mid-term evaluation shows that the Schools for Democracy programme has been able to achieve its objectives, despite the dramatic change in working conditions following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

The programme has remained ***relevant.*** Unlike many other development assistance programmes in other parts of the world, the SfD programme does not bring about reform, but supports existing reform policies. SfD is closely linked to Ukraine's reform policies. It helps put into practice the democratising elements of education reform and contributes to decentralisation reform. This ranges from contributing to policy development to training teachers and facilitating teacher networks. The interaction with the Ministry is also reflected in the fact that one of the representatives of one of the programme's local partners in Ukraine has been selected by the Ministry of Education to represent Ukraine in a Council of Europe network of policy advisors.

In many ways, the war has made the promotion of democracy even more important. For Ukraine, strengthening democratic practices of participation, equal access to voice and deliberation is vital. First, it is important for building resilience against authoritarian influences. The more Ukraine's practices are based on democratic principles, the more it will be distinguished from contemporary Russia. Second, because stronger democratic norms and practices are part of Ukraine's alignment with the EU. Thirdly, the programme supports reform efforts to make the local school the centre of the local community. As such, schools can play an important role in rebuilding Ukraine and strengthening social cohesion at the local level.

In all, promotion of democracy has become even more relevant than before. The war has brough a number of new challenges. Among these are the war-imposed need to strengthen the central government, new social cleavages in the society, everyday aggression due to traumatic experiences, mental and psychological fatigue, disinformation, and corruption. Education can address these challenges by supporting decentralised governance of schools and kindergartens, building inclusive learning environment, developing critical thinking and other democratic skills, and promoting integrity in education.

After the invasion, Ukraine slowed down legislation and reduced funding to the civilian sector beyond the minimum necessary. To a certain degree, the educational sector was an exception to this pattern. Under pressure for the public, a new minister of education and science was appointed shortly after the invasion as one of very few ministerial positions that were changed during 2022. This can be seen as the central government understands the importance of keeping children in Ukraine and educational reforms are key. Also educators are very active and motivated.

The Ukrainian authorities have been forced to prioritise military capacity and the reconstruction of damaged infrastructure. Schools, among others, have suffered. Some investments in furniture and equipment that would allow for more participatory teaching methods have been put on hold. The war has also slowed down policy-making and legislation in the civilian sector of society. This situation could have made the programme somewhat irrelevant. However, the development of legislation and the implementation of policies already adopted are continuing. The programme has contributed to both. The EWC believes that the programme's efforts to lay the

foundations for active citizenship among the new generations are an important contribution to the country's future resilience and to the reconstruction of Ukraine on the basis of democratic principles. Recent polls confirm that a growing percentage of younger people wish to take an active part in rebuilding their local communities (Info Sapiens, 2023).

The war has raised a number of sensitive issues that need to be addressed. These include the large influx of internally displaced persons (IDPs) into certain regions of Ukraine and the consequent overcrowding of schools, public transport, housing markets and health centres. Another sensitive issue relates to the grey areas of cooperation with the occupiers in the occupied territories. These issues need to be resolved peacefully, democratically and in a principled and dialogue-based manner in order to avoid damaging social divisions. The attitudes and skills developed through the programme can be helpful in this regard.

The programme has demonstrated its relevance through flexible decision-making and adaptation of activity formats. By prioritising online activities and communication, the programme has maintained sustainable implementation despite numerous challenges such as displacement, power cuts and air raid alerts.

The programme has been *effective*. Despite the full-scale invasion, SfD was able to implement its programme activities. Some changes were made and additional activities were carried out as a result of the invasion, but everything was done within the budget. For example, psychological support was integrated into the facilitated courses and additional activities were carried out with IDP children to improve their integration into local communities.

The programme has created and maintained networks between participants and a commitment to continue working together. Many teachers who have taken courses come back to help with new courses. Tracking of activities after participation in the programme shows examples of participants engaging in social entrepreneurship or initiating participatory budgeting projects. The programme is reported to have been a catalyst for this.

Feedback in the form of post-programme self-assessment methods - surveys and active student self-governance - was used to adjust activities.

As noted four years ago in the previous mid-term evaluation, there is still a lack of coordination between the various international actors involved in supporting Ukraine's education sector. For example, many ministries report a need for psychological support, but there is little coordination, which would have made the support more effective. EWC has chosen to focus on its niche.

The programme has produced *results.* The programme is characterised by a wide variety of activity types. Despite the war, these activities have been carried out in large numbers (outputs are quantified in table 3 above). SfD has managed to maintain its chain of activities, from participation in MoES working groups, to training of educators and provision of learning resources, to support for educator networks. This means that the programme is well embedded in the Ukrainian education sector.

Thanks in part to the programme, Ukrainian teachers are now more like other European teachers. This means that when they go abroad for meetings, workshops or training, they use more or less the same professional system of concepts and share many of the same concerns. From being mainly recipients of new knowledge,

they are now reported to be also contributors, which in turn means that they benefit more than before from European professional interfaces.

The fact that the online courses were run with such a high level of participation during an ongoing war must be considered a success. Participants from areas under constant bombardment also took part.

The 2021-2024 programme is a combination of continuity and renewal. Many of the trainers were retained from the previous phase. The implementing partners from 2017-2021 have been retained, but an additional partner has been added. The fact that the trainers have been working together for a number of years and have got to know each other are factors that are conducive to building competence and trust, which was particularly important due to the war, when the professional network also functioned as a support network. Despite the ongoing war, the programme participants have been deeply involved in the programme's activities.

The programme filled a previously almost empty niche with its component on democratisation in pre-schools.  UNICEF and some smaller projects do work in the pre-school education, but none of these have been focusing on strengthening democratic skills in early childhood,

*Outcomes* occur when approaches and skills acquired through the programme activities are applied 'in real life'. A large number of educators participated in the previous phase of the programme. Many of them came back for further training. A large number of new participants have also joined the programme who had not previously participated in the programme. These are indicators of an emerging segment of practitioners within the Ukrainian education sector who want to contribute to a more democratic education in line with the adopted policy. Results are achieved to the extent that participants in the programme's many activities return to their schools and apply new and more democratic approaches and methods - and also manage to convince reluctant colleagues. One obvious obstacle to this, as the interviews revealed, is the fact that many schools are still quite hierarchical.

The sustainability of the programme's outcomes are challenged by the unstable situation target groups find themselves in. External and, partly also internal, migration among target groups that have taken part in programme activities challenges sustainability of outcomes. Acquired skills and insights may not be put in use in the refugees' and IDP's new settings.

# 5    Recommendations

This is a mid-term evaluation, but as the programme ends in 2024, there is little need for recommendations for the remaining months of the programme. Therefore, our recommendations are intended to be useful for a possible future phase of the programme.

From the outset, the programme has been designed to cover all of Ukraine. This has been possible due to the predominantly online nature of the activities, which do not depend on the geographical location of the participants. Since, 2022, the war has led to a situation in which different parts of the country are affected in quite different ways. For instance, according to interviews with programme participants, it is most difficult to discuss democracy in areas where human rights are seriously violated. In this context, working with the most affected amalgamated territorial communities in Ukraine becomes particularly important, both in supporting civil resistance against the enemy and in strengthening democracy in the future reconstruction of these territories. The programme has succeeded in working in this direction through close cooperation with a new partner - SavED. Meanwhile, the emergence of "new types" of territories in Ukraine during the period of martial law (de-occupied territories, active combat zones, frontline areas), together with the constantly shifting front line, highlights the need to develop and refine the "geographical dimension" of the programme in the future. This would include a strategy to include new participants from these regions and a balance between urban and rural areas involved in the implementation of the programme.

**Recommendation:** to clarify the geographical component in the objectives of the programme, based on the essential needs to support democracy in Ukraine.

The results of the programme show that it is expanding in scope and that its intellectual "products" (courses, modules, materials) are becoming more diverse and more numerous. The programme continues to attract new participants. As the Programme approaches its final phase in 2024, it would be beneficial to contextualise its outputs with general statistical data (such as the number of schools and kindergartens in Ukraine and those participating in the Programme, as well as the total number of teachers and those involved in the projects). This will help to assess the quantitative scale of the programme's implementation, highlight the need to continue this work and highlight its ongoing quantitative impact.

**Recommendation:** to contextualise the results of the programme with the general statistical data (number of schools and kindergartens in Ukraine and those participating in the programme; number of teachers in general and those involved in the projects, etc.).

A comparison of the programme outputs for the reporting period with the planned targets for 2024 has shown that some targets have already been achieved, while others need further work by the end of 2024.

**Recommendation:** to focus on outcome 3 "Learning communities of educators strengthened" and enhance the project team's efforts regarding outputs 3.2 and 3.3 by the end of the programme period in 2024 (the number of educational and teacher training institutions, including NGOs, involved in training programs on strategic planning and development, as well as the number of participants in networking and community-building events).

During the reporting period, the programme included two research projects, which contributed both to a better understanding of the challenges and needs of the target groups during the war, and to ensuring the quality of the programme's activities and approaches to pre-school education. Research as a method of data collection and evaluation of activities proved its strengths in the interviews with both the project team and the beneficiaries of the programme.

**Recommendation:** to maintain the research component in programme's goals and objectives with the focus on wartime needs and challenges experienced by target groups.

In order to follow the holistic approach in the development of democracy through all levels of education in Ukraine, it seems useful to extend the programme to cover out-of-school education, vocational training and work with students at pedagogical universities in Ukraine. This will help to promote democratic changes at all levels of education and make the results of the programme more sustainable over time.

**Recommendation:** to expand the programme of out-of-school education, vocational training and work with students at pedagogical universities in Ukraine.

Unlike the programme prior to 2021 the current phase does not target parents. Since schools (including pre-schools) are the responsibility of the municipalities, targeted programme work with local politicians and local administration should be considered.

**Recommendation:** for a possible next phase of the programme consider reintroducing parents as a target group and the representatives of amalgamated territorial communities. Both measures increase the chances of achieving results.

Due to the war, sustainability of the programme's outcomes is challenged.

**Recommendation:** Measures to increase sustainability:

1) to expand the programme of out-of-school education, vocational training and work with students at pedagogical universities in Ukraine to cover all levels in the educational circle;
2) Include municipal decision makers (councillors and people from the local administration) as target groups to enhance the cooperation between educational institutions and local authorities in local development;
3) if the programme continues in a new phase after 2024, make sure most of the current activities are continued;

This helps making the "critical mass" of "agents of change". Continuing with more or less the same programme activities as before, of course, may be perceived as lacking in innovation, but continuity of (the most successful) activities strengthens sustainability over time.

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