

EVALUATION



Ministry for Foreign
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RIGHT TO EDUCATION, RIGHT TO LEARN –
FINLAND'S DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION
IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR

Volume 2 • Case Studies



Evaluation of Finland's Development Policy and Co-operation

2023:7



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EVALUATION

RIGHT TO EDUCATION, RIGHT TO LEARN – Finland's Development Cooperation in the Education Sector

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ETHIOPIA CASE STUDY

CRIANA CONNAL



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Acronyms and abbreviations

AfDB	African Development Bank
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DFID	The Department for International Development (United Kingdom)
DP	Development Partner
DPG	Development Partners Group
ECW	Education Cannot Wait
EETP	Ethiopia Education Transformation Programme
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
ESDP	Education Sector Development Plan
ESTWG	Education Sector Technical Working Group
EU	European Union
EUR	Euros
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
FGD	Focus group discussion
FinCEED	Finnish Centre of Expertise in Education and Development
FTVET	Federal Technical and Vocational Education and Training
GEQIP-E	General Education Quality Improvement Programme
GIZ	German Agency for Development Cooperation
GoE	Government of Ethiopia
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
HEI ICI	Higher Education Institutions Institutional Cooperation Instrument
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IERC	Inclusive Education Resource Centre
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
KEO-50	Unit for Development Finance and Private Sector Cooperation
KEO-70	Unit for Humanitarian Assistance and Policy
KII	Key Informant Interview
MEUR	Million Euros
MFA	Ministry for Foreign Affairs
MIP	Multi-Annual Indicative Programme
MoE	Ministry of Education
MOPEDE	Capacity Building for Modernizing TVET Pedagogy in Ethiopia
MYRP	Multi-Year Resilience Programme
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NLA	National Learning Assessment
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OOSC	Out-of-School Children
POL-60	Centre for Peace Mediation
SNNPR	Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region
SSIED	Special Support and Inclusive Education Department
TA	Technical Assistance
ToT	Trainer of Trainers
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WB	The World Bank
WFP	World Food Programme



1 Introduction

The purpose of the case study is two-fold. First, to generate findings from the perspective of key informants in a purposive sample of Finland's long-standing Country Partners; these findings serve as an additional evidence stream for the evaluation, supplementing global findings presented in the main report. Second, the case study generates findings to develop a 'Contribution Story' as a critical instance of the ways in which the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland's (MFA) Country Programmes support and strengthen and influence (or not) Finland's Education Development Co-operation and related policy. A cross-analysis of the case studies is found in 5.1.2 of the main report.

In line with the purpose, the overall methodology is theory-based contribution analysis, using a 'nested' theory of change as a vehicle for the development of a country-specific Contribution Story (see Chapter 2 of the main report for details). The Contribution Stories are grounded in the results frameworks presented in Finland's Country Programmes for the respective case countries. These programmes guide and monitor the delivery of specific Impact Areas of development cooperation, which feed into the larger strategic objectives identified in the Country Strategy.

The main methods used by the evaluation team were targeted document review (a full list of documents is found at the end of this study) and interviews; the scope of the Case Study is based on a sample of Official Development Assistance (ODA) and non-ODA interventions (the full list of sampled interventions is found in Annex 3 in the main report, and it is based on the lists of interventions received from the MFA). The interviews were conducted in-person and remotely (where key informants were not available during the scheduled field visit) with staff responsible for the following ODA interventions:

- The General Education Quality Improvement Programme (GEQIP-E);
- Technical Assistance (TA) for inclusive education to GEQIP-E;
- The Education Cannot Wait (ECW) facilitated Multi-Year Resilience Programme (MYRP) 2021-2023, managed by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF);
- The World Food Programme's (WFP) engagement in the MYRP;
- A Non-Governmental Organisation's (NGO) project under Wycliffe Raamatunkääntäjät ry;
- A Finnpartnership project: Sera Helsinki Oy.

The team also interviewed staff engaged in the Higher Education Institutions Institutional Cooperation Instrument (HEI ICI) Project 'Capacity Building for Modernising Technical and Vocational Education and Training Pedagogy in Ethiopia' (MOPEDE), as well as Finland's other key partners in Ethiopia, such as Norway and Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) as well as the delegation of the European Union (EU).

As a case study rather than a full evaluation, this report does not provide a definitive performance assessment of the Finnish education sector assistance in Ethiopia during 2019-2022. Rather, it offers limited insights to inform the wider evaluation, particularly the development of a 'story' of the contribution of Ethiopia's Country Programme to MFA's higher-level outcomes.



2 Country and sector context

2.1 Brief overview of country context

Ethiopia is one of the fastest growing economies in the world, showing a six-fold increase in per-capita gross national income since 2000; it is also one of the poorest countries in the world, with a per capita gross national income of 940 United States Dollars (USD) in 2021 (MoE, 2023). The country has seen important social and political developments. Following public protests and a state of emergency in 2016-17, a new administration under Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed launched major reforms in 2018, including amendment of the anti-terrorism law, privatisation of state-owned enterprises and liberalisation of key economic sectors. These have brought regional ethnic tensions to the fore, increasing the country's volatility.

The conflict that broke out in Tigray in November 2020 and spread south to the Amhara and Afar regions in June 2021 has impacted Ethiopia's growth and provision of social services. The Ethiopian government and regional forces from Tigray signed an agreement on a permanent cessation of hostilities on 2 November 2022. However, coming hard on the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic, the recent conflict has only deepened the learning crisis in Ethiopia and further widened existing inequalities triggered by school closures during the health crisis.

Ethiopia is also vulnerable to natural disasters, being prone to flooding and drought. Between July and October 2022, floods displaced around a third of a million people and damaged or destroyed schools, while other parts of the country experienced the most severe example of drought in 40 years. Climate change is expected to increase the severity and frequency of these shocks, with internal conflicts increasing as a result of competition over resources (e.g., disputes over grazing, arable land, and water) (UNICEF 2019; MoE 2023).

Man-made and climate-related disasters have triggered a displacement and refugee crisis. Even before the recent armed conflict, there were more than 2 million internally displaced people in Ethiopia, with 1,623,716 conflict-affected internally displaced persons (IDP), 499,336 climate-induced IDPs and 680,861 refugees (360,175 women and girls and 292,770 school-aged children including 138,214 school-aged girls) (UNICEF, 2019). In the Somali region alone, flooding and drought in 2018 triggered 296,000 new displacements (IOM 2023).

Regional assessments in 2019 noted that 469 schools were affected by emergencies, with 242 closed, 107 totally destroyed, and 120 partially damaged due to conflict and drought, with many serving as shelters for displaced populations (UNICEF, 2019). Between 2020 and 2022, more than 11,300 schools were damaged or destroyed as a result of conflict between 2020 and 2022 in Afar, Amhara, Oromia and Tigray, and the floods in 2022 destroyed over 100 schools in Gambella and Afar (MoE 2023).

As a result of a confluence of school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic, armed conflict and climate shocks, nearly two million students were unable to attend school, and thousands of teachers were displaced (MoE, 2023). In this volatile country context, 'Finland responded to the situation, in



line with the EU, through increased humanitarian assistance', making adjustments to existing projects and putting on hold the planning of new bilateral projects with the government (MFA, 2021).

2.2 Education sector achievements and challenges

Over the last two decades, Ethiopia has made significant progress - sometimes described as 'spectacular' with an increase in the net enrolment rate from 22% in 1996 to almost 100% in 2021/22 - in promoting universal access. However, the impact of multiple crises on the education system is equally significant, and the extent of poor and declining learning outcomes was evident in the 2019 National Learning Assessment (NLA), showing very low and significantly decreasing competence in reading in Grade 2 English and Mathematics in Grade 8 (MoE, 2023). An overview of the current status in terms of **access, equity, internal efficiency and quality in General Education**, as well as the persistent challenges to learning, have been captured in the most recent Education Sector Statistical Abstract, outlined below.

Pre-primary education. In 2018/19, the **pre-primary gross enrolment ratio** was 44% (Female: 42.7 and Male: 45.3, an improvement on the 2014/15 baseline of 39%, with significant regional disparities (122.2% in Addis and 9.8 % in Somali). Challenges included a lack of adequate classrooms and facilities, a lack of formal structure and personnel at the grassroots level responsible for pre-primary education, a lack of clarity on the goals and modalities of pre-primary education among Regional Education Bureaus and woredas, and limited budget; additionally, initial baseline data was flawed as it was based on population projections, not the actual school-age population (MoE, 2021a).

Primary education. The **gross enrolment ratio for Grades 1-8** was 97.2% (Female: 92.8 and Male: 101.4) again, with significant regional disparities: 157.7% in Gambella and 55.8 % in Afar. The **net intake rate in Grade 1** has risen very slightly from 92.4% in 2018/19 to 92.6%, against a target of 98%, with a notable difference in the number of boys enrolled in Grade 1 compared to girls (Female: 88.3% and Male: 96.8%), with the highest in Sidama (123.8%) and the lowest in Addis (50.6%).

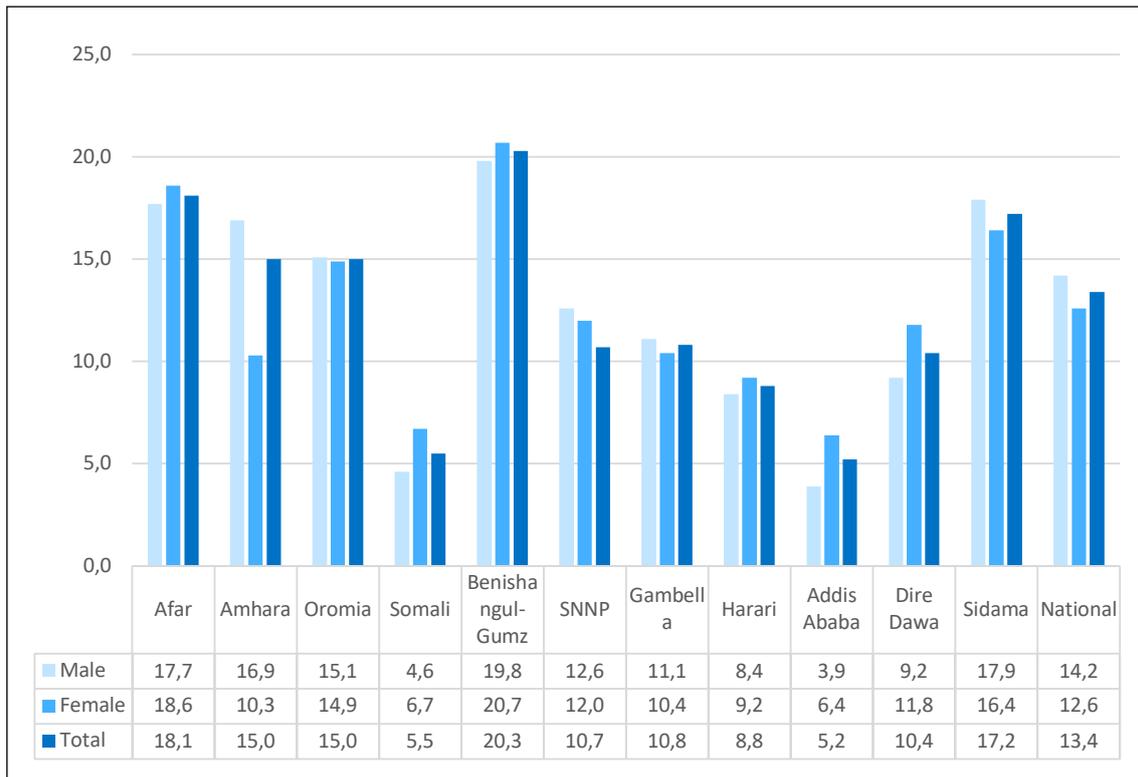
Secondary education. There has been a decline in the **gross enrolment ratio in Grades 9-12**, from 48.5% in 2018/19 to 45.6% (Female: 44.6 and Male: 46.6) against the target of 74%, with the highest in Addis Ababa (124.2%) and the lowest in Afar (19.7%). Challenges to secondary schooling include low capacity, low secondary school expansion rates, low transition rates from Grade 8 to Grade 9, as well as general socio-economic and cultural barriers. Specifically, the lack of sufficiently accessible secondary schools has been shown to be a major problem, particularly in rural communities and for girls (MoE, 2021a).

Persistent problems in emerging regions are related to both school-based constraints and non-school-based cultural and societal factors, including incompatibility of the educational structure with pastoralists' livelihoods; poor retention of qualified teachers; problems related to the language of instruction; insufficient school facilities, including lack of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH); lack of school feeding; irrelevant curriculum; and managerial issues between schools and woredas offices (MoE, 2021a).



Internal efficiency: Grade 1 dropouts had increased over the Fifth Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP) period, from a 2013/14 baseline of 19% for both sexes to 25% in 2017/18 but have fallen in 2022/22 to 14.8%. Dropout rates for boys are slightly higher than for girls (Female:14.6% and Male:14.9%). Regional data is not available for specific grades, but it is available for Primary Education (**Figure 1**).

Figure 1. Dropout rates for primary level by region 2020/21 (%)



Source: Education Statistical Annual Abstract (ESAA) 2021/22

In 2018/19, **Survival rates to Grade 5** were 26.8 percentage points behind target; this indicator was not measured for 2021/22. Many interrelated factors cause students to leave school in Ethiopia. In general, the need for children to participate in paid work and home-based activities is a major contributor to school dropouts. Illness of the children themselves and their family members is another major cause of school absenteeism and dropout. Poor school quality, including inadequate infrastructure and WASH facilities, inadequate learning resources, overcrowded classrooms, poorly trained teachers, and teacher absenteeism, often contribute to children leaving school (MoE, 2021a).

Quality: Teachers. The ESDP V target was to have 100% appropriately **qualified teachers** at all general education levels (except for pre-primary, where the target was 15%. In 2021/22, qualified **pre-primary teachers** are 80.1% female and 76.5%. Qualified **primary teachers** are 68.6% female and 60.2% male, and at the **secondary level**, the figures are 95% female and 93.5% male. Significant progress has been made in mother-tongue teacher training, English language training and in-service training in mathematics and science. The main contributing factors to the success of teacher training include implementing different incentive mechanisms, stakeholders' commitment, NGOs' participation, and government bodies' focus on teachers' professional development (MoE, 2021a).



Key remaining challenges concerning in-service training are the high turnover of trainers of trainers (ToT), inadequate follow-up and monitoring of the classroom practice of trained teachers, shortage of competent trainers and module developers, unreliable school data on the number of trained teachers, and lack of planning capacity to identify training needs. In 2018/19, 52.5% of parents ranked teaching as a high-prestige profession, against the target of 60% (MoE, 2021a).

Curriculum, teaching and learning materials. It was planned to implement a curriculum reform, but progress has stalled. The target of a 1:1 textbook/pupil ratio was achieved at all levels; however, there are considerable regional variations. The problems with textbook shortages lie in the distribution and handling of textbooks rather than in their production, particularly at the regional level. There is also a lack of accurate data on the number of students and the ratio of textbooks per subject, which inhibits good distribution decisions. The regional disparities in textbooks are due to inefficiencies in the process of distributing textbooks to schools and the inaccessibility of particular schools. Some regions also do not have enough space to store textbooks, even when the ministry can deliver the materials.

2.3 Key donors in the education sector

The Development Partners Group (DPG) comprises 30 development partners; its structure includes the DPG Executive Committee, five technical working groups, e.g., Education Sector Technical Working Group (ESTWG), sector working groups (e.g., Education in Emergencies Cluster) and the DPG Secretariat.



3 Finland's country programme

3.1 Country strategy/overall country programme

Finland and Ethiopia have had a 'good and long-standing bilateral relationship' dating back to the 1980s, which has evolved into broader comprehensive partnerships beyond development cooperation, encompassing political relations, trade, and civil society activities, with a growing interest to consolidate, deepen and further diversify relations between the two countries (MFA, 2021a).

Finland's Country Strategy for 2021-2024 was developed in line with Finland's Africa strategy, EU-Africa strategy and Ethiopia's national policies (including the ten-year Perspective Plan and the Homegrown Economic Reform Programme). The Country Strategy is focused on four strategic goals. First, maintaining an open dialogue on human rights, gender and climate change, as well as **diversifying bilateral relations** to increase economic and research cooperation and cooperation with Ethiopia in multilateral forums. Second, supporting an **inclusive political and social transition** which contributes to the stability of the entire Horn of Africa sub-region. Third, supporting Ethiopia in more **inclusive, sustainable and environment-friendly private sector-led economic growth**. Finally, supporting **institutional transformation** to deliver accessible, inclusive and climate-resilient services of good quality to all.

Finland's Country Programme comprises three Impact Areas:

- Impact Area 1: Sustainable economic growth and improved livelihoods for people in rural areas
- Impact Area 2: Improved health and well-being through more sustainable and climate-resilient wash
- Impact Area 3: **More equitable, inclusive education of good quality.**

Support to the education sector in Ethiopia contributes to two of Finland's strategic goals: inclusive political and social transition and institutional transformation that advances reforms and provision of services (MFA, 2021b). Specifically, Finland's support is aimed at contributing to **Impact Area 3**, with particular attention to **improved access and quality of education in emerging regions and rural areas** and to **improved educational opportunities for children with disabilities and children in vulnerable positions and situations.**

3.2 Education focus of the country programme

NB: While the following describes the current Country Programmes, our findings below cover the evaluation period under review (2019-2022) and extend, in some cases, to 2023.

Impact in Area 3 requires progress towards the following outcome-level results.



Outcome 3.1: Strengthened institutional capacity for improving learning outcomes in general education, with a focus on pre-primary education and school-level support. This result is intended to be achieved by:

1. **Strengthening capacity for inclusive pre-primary education**, specifically: (i) supporting the Ministry of Education's (MoE) efforts to introduce 2-year pre-primary education; (ii) enhancing inclusive pre-primary teacher training; and (iii) ensuring that pre-primary education is free, compulsory and accessible for all children of age 4 to 6 (**Output 3.1.1**).
2. **Strengthening quality assurance and school support systems** for improved attendance, retention and learning for all, specifically supporting the efforts of the MoE to provide (i) school inspection services, (ii) the school improvement programme, and (iii) teachers' continued professional development and licensing. (**Output 3.1.2**).

Outcome 3.2: Girls, children with disabilities and those living in vulnerable positions and situations have better access to and participation in education, with a focus on emerging regions. This result will be achieved by:

3. **Increasing access to education for those living in vulnerable positions and situations**, specifically: (i) providing flexible education opportunities in pastoralist areas and in emergency settings, and ii) providing school meals. (**Output 3.2.1**).
4. **Strengthening institutional capacity to provide inclusive education**, specifically (i) improving the functioning of Inclusive Education Resource Centres (IERC), which support learning for children with disabilities, including the collection of more context-relevant data, (ii) supporting a whole-system approach and a joint vision based on an agreed definition of inclusive education (**Output 3.2.2**).

Finland's **risk analysis** of the situation in Ethiopia points to a 'number of significant strategic risks': the security situation, political developments, human rights, natural disasters, demographic growth and population movements (MFA, 2021b).

Fiduciary risks are managed through careful planning, screening and selection of partners and funding channels; all programmes report on the use of funding and the results of their work; the MFA regularly commissions external audits.

The Country Programme is monitored closely. Monitoring and evaluation activities are identified in the monitoring and evaluation plan, which is updated and followed up regularly and includes reporting activities (annual reports, biannual synthesis reports, mid-term reviews and external evaluations). Two important lessons learned from the previous programme period are: 'it has been a strength to have projects working both at the grass-root and at the federal level [enabling] participation in the policy dialogue in sector working groups'; and Finland's success in 'leveraging additional resources from other donors and the Government [...] should continue to be a key feature of Finnish assistance to Ethiopia' (MFA, 2021b).



3.3 Funding for education

The financial framework for the Country Programme 2021–2024 is approximately 75 million euros (MEUR), not including humanitarian aid, private sector instruments or Civil Society Organisation (CSO) support, with 37% allocated for the education sector (31% for Impact 1 and 32% for Impact 2).

Budget performance was on track. The final contribution of 4.15 MEUR to the sector programme GEQIP-E was paid to the Multi-Donor Trust Fund in May 2021. Additional funding for GEQIP-E of 4 MEUR was paid in November 2022. The 2 MEUR support for MYRP in Tigray was released upon signing of the contract with UNICEF in July and paid in August 2021. A total of 5.3 MEUR (including a 1.3 MEUR top-up) was committed for Amhara, and 2 MEUR was paid in July 2022. Only the TA support had some delays in expenditures, with a delivery rate of 70 %. Total disbursements for Impact Area 3 were 6.8 MEUR, which is about 35 % of the total funds available in the Country Programme for 2021.

3.4 Instruments/channels used and Finland's key partners

Finland's main partners in Ethiopia were the Special Support and Inclusive Education Department (SSIED), the Federal Ministry of Education, and the Regional Education Bureaus in Tigray, Amhara, Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region (SNNPR), Oromia, Somali, Gambella, Benishangul-Gumuz, and Afar.

During the period under review, the instruments/channels utilised and respective key partners were as follows.

Policy dialogue through the ESTWG, including the World Bank, UNICEF, EU¹, FCDO, Norway, United States Agency for International Cooperation (USAID), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Denmark and WFP, and International NGOs (INGO) such as Save the Children and national NGOs such as Imagine 1 Day. Key bilateral partners included FCDO (the TA-support TARGET programme for GEQIP-E) and Norway (supporting ECW's MYRP in Somali and Afar).

Sector support (bilateral co-financing) to the General Education Quality Improvement Programme (GEQIP-E) coordinated by the World Bank (4 MEUR); and TA for inclusive education to GEQIP-E (1.45 MEUR: 850,000 EUR original funding and 600,000 EUR funding during extension).

¹ While the EU in Ethiopia was heavily involved in ESDP I, it is not active in the education sector at present due to the current political situation in the country. The EU's current Multi-Annual Indicative Programme (MIP) for 2021-2024 (40 MEUR allocated over a three-year period) is channelled through three Individual Measures: UNICEF interventions (alternative learning for OOSC and school readiness interventions), World Food Programme's (WFP) school feeding in conflict-affected areas and Plan International's measures in pre-primary education in conflict-affected areas. Assuming the Government complies with the EU's 'asks', including access to conflict-affected areas and establishment of a justice system in Ethiopia, the MIP will extend to 2027.



Post-conflict humanitarian support to the ECW-facilitated MYRP in Amhara (4 MEUR) and Tigray (2 MEUR), partnering with UNICEF and WFP, specifically supporting school feeding interventions in Amhara (1 MEUR).

The **HEI ICI** Project 'MOPEDE' supports higher education and Vocational Education and Training (VET) institutions (1,232,926 EUR; MFA share 986,341 EUR);²

Support to two International **NGO projects** provided through MFA's dedicated project support to CSOs: SOS-lapsikyläsäätiö ry (735,039 EUR) and Wycliffe Raamatunkääntäjät ry/SIL. (225,000 EUR).³

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- 2 During the period under review Finland did not partner with the AfDB, China, USAID (the READ project aimed to improve early grade reading and implemented an early grade reading assessment (EGRA) and JICA (supporting improved quality of science and mathematics education at primary level and access to secondary education as well as school construction to mitigate regional disparities) (MoE, 2023).
 - 3 Please note that the provided case studies contribute to the main report and represent a selected sample of CSOs. While these case studies feature specific CSOs, it is important to note that there are additional CSOs (such as Interpedia, Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission and Disability Partnership) beyond this sample that operate in the education sector with funding from Finland.



4 Findings for the period 2019-2023

4.1 Response (EQ1): measures taken by development partners in responding to the learning crisis and improving the quality of education (relevance, efficiency, coherence)

4.1.1 Relevance of development partners' efforts in terms of addressing the learning crisis and improving the quality of education

Ethiopia has maintained a strong working relationship with its development partners, including Finland, with a focus on the continuing expansion of equitable basic education provision, including increased access to preschool and secondary, technical and higher education, and at the same time, highlighting 'major challenges in improving the quality of education provision' (MoE, 2023). The forthcoming Ethiopia Education Transformation Programme (EETP) (see **Box 1**), the successor to GEQIP-E, shows a shift of focus from access to quality, with equity remaining a major area of concern with regard to regional disparities in access to pre-primary education, enrolment and retention at the primary level as well as in learning achievement; gender inequity (lower pre-primary enrolment for girls, and higher primary and middle school dropout rates for boys); and 'very low enrolment of children with special needs' (MoE, 2023).

Finland's strategic objectives remained valid during the period under review, but the methods for implementation required constant adaptation to the changing context. Indeed, we found something of a disconnect between the Country Strategy, which emphasises the advancement of trade relations and use of Private Sector Instruments, and the Country Programme progress reporting, which underlined 'considerations of the double or triple nexus approaches'; active engagement with the MFA's Unit for Humanitarian Assistance and Policy (KEO-70) on humanitarian issues and the Centre for Peace Mediation (POL-60) was required for 'nexus-type cooperation', with a focus on school feeding in conflict-affected areas, as well as with the Unit for Development Finance and Private Sector Cooperation (KEO-50), to ensure GEQIP progressed as planned (MFA, 2021).

There were several challenges encountered by development partners during programme implementation. First, while donor coordination functions well and the ESTWG meets regularly, the trust between partners is diminishing. According to interviewees, the Ministry are more and more holding things in their hands – Development Partners (DP) are not involved, only kept informed, which could be a good sign in that the Government is taking ownership of sector development, but it is also a loss of opportunity. Second, the civil society 'space' has been shrinking: with the exception of CSOs described by the MoE as 'significant' INGOs, CSOs do not participate in the ESTWG, and the MoE has a separate CSO-Government forum; a "*climate of control is improving, but it's not yet gone*" (Key informant interview (KII): MFA).



Box 1. Education transformation: improved learning outcomes with an emphasis on equity

The four-year EETP is an initiative of the MoE to tackle barriers to learning achievement and retention across the General Education sector. The initiative responds to the call raised during the 2022 United Nations (UN) Transforming Education Summit not only to find ‘solutions to recover pandemic-related learning losses’ but **also** to ‘sow the seeds to transform education in a rapidly changing world’ (UN, 2022b).

This Programme follows and builds on a succession of multi-donor General Education Quality Improvement Programmes (GEQIP), starting with GEQIP I (2008-2013), GEQIP II (2014-2019), and GEQIP-E (2017-2025). The EETP’s focus is on learning outcomes, addressing the **quality** of education provision, **access** to education and education **efficiency**, noting that poor early learning increases dropout, whilst dropout can stultify future learning as well as **equity** for girls, children with special education needs including learning difficulties, and those potentially disadvantaged by other factors.

The programme envisages a series of five transformative outcomes in Ethiopia’s education sector, including transforming **schools into effective learning centres**, transforming **the ability of children out of school to return to school** or otherwise access education, transforming **teaching**, and transforming **systems of quality assurance**. Underpinning these outcomes are efforts to **transform systems of planning, management and monitoring** to support this overall transformation, tackling the complexity of the governance and management structure, the quality and use of data and strengthening relationships and management capacities; ‘technology is one of the key tools in bringing about this transformation’.

A major part of the funding will be from central government allocations through the national budget and will be supported by pooled funding from the International Development Association, Global Partnership for Education (GPE), UNICEF and major bilateral funders; 70% will comprise investment financing, and 30% will be results-based financing. In line with lessons learned from GEQIP-E results-based financing, the main Disbursement Linked Indicators will be based on government actions to achieve national learning outcomes rather than on the outcomes themselves.

Source: MoE, 2023

Last but not least, the review period saw a full-blown crisis all over the country: schools have been destroyed, new pre-primary and secondary curricula were introduced, and there are no textbooks; the quality of teaching is a huge problem; the façade is that schools are back up and running, but they’re empty.

4.1.2 Views on Finland’s strengths and added value of collaborating with Finland in the education sector

Finland’s **perceived strengths** are grounded in the reputation of its domestic education system (“*we ride on this*” (KII: MFA); “*our education system is good, but Finland’s is even better*” (KII: DP). This is accompanied by Finland’s pro-poor values, that is, “*being a force for good, with an emphasis on the right to education for children and the core value of ‘leave no one behind’*” (KII: DP).



Specific strength is Finnish **expertise in inclusive education**: *They started special needs education in Ethiopia*” (KII: Government of Ethiopia (GoE)). While multiple donors have contributed to the establishment of the IERCs, they are considered the results of Finnish support primarily because *“the Finns are the ones who created awareness, advocated for it, provided technical assistance, and showed the way”* (Focus group discussion (FGD): GEQIP-MoE). Following their support, the number of actors working on inclusive education has increased substantially: *“This is a great contribution of the Finnish”* (KII: GoE). Finland’s *“systems-based and student-focused approach”* in the **VET** sub-sector has also been a *“special”* (KII: GoE).

Education governance, specifically a transfer of knowledge and experience in decentralised education systems, is another of Finland’s perceived strengths, particularly where there is a lack of accountability for learning outcomes. Finland’s support from the Ministry to school levels has allowed for coordinated efforts through the administrative hierarchy to strengthen inclusive education. (KIIs MoE, DPs.)

A further strength is **the importance Finland gives to policy dialogue**. While Finland’s financial contribution has been relatively small, their support in policy dialogue has been very important; for example, Finland has played a pivotal role as co-chair for the ESTWG, which has been *“an immense contribution; with no exaggeration, they are more concerned than us [Ethiopians] on education in Ethiopia”* (FGD GEQIP).

With its **adaptive programming** approach, the Embassy in Ethiopia has *“shown extreme resilience in catering to the needs of the country in a very uncertain and fast-changing environment”*, and as a long-standing partner in GEQIP-E, the Embassy has also *“contributed significantly by helping to align partners support for programming in Ethiopia”* including a GPE proposal for 1.17 million United States Dollars (USD) (KIIs: DPs).

The value addition of Finland’s cooperation begins with the **long-standing commitment of Finland’s Education Development Cooperation** in Ethiopia” *“Finland is highly appreciated by MoE, not least for its long partnership with Ethiopia”* (KII: DP): Finland’s support *“has been consistent and reliable; they don’t change their support because of political changes in Ethiopia, they are partners who can be trusted”* (FGD: GEQIP/MoE).

The MoE describes Finland’s **direct sector support** as a key strength; *“Whereas some donors provide budget support through implementing organisations [who then sub-contract other implementing partners] making a long chain of partners, this type of budget support allows us to directly address the needs of schools and students and the use of donor money is more efficient”*. Stakeholders across the board recognise the value addition of **Finland’s TA in inclusive education** *“money alone wouldn’t have allowed us to achieve what we have achieved”* (KII: GoE); in addition, the TA has helped to put marginalised children and special needs education on everyone’s agenda.

Other cooperation channels, such as Finland’s **support for the ECW-MYRP**, are helping to meet the costs of conflict in a context where, with an annual Government budget of 12 billion USD, the annual cost for education reconstruction and recovery in Tigray alone is 1 billion. In addition, support for school meals is *“a great contribution of Finland; school feeding means more access, better quality, better equity [...] it is everything”* (KII: GoE).



4.1.3 Timely implementation of planned interventions

Although strategic, operational and fiduciary risks are assessed and monitored closely, they sometimes materialise despite the precautions taken; ‘therefore, flexibility in the implementation of the Country Programme is needed to adapt to new situations in the country’ (MFA, 2021b). Generally, outcomes in the results logic cannot be revisited during the implementation of the Country Programme, but outputs and indicators can be amended at the time of annual reporting (Results Report MFA, 2020).

Indeed, in the case of GEQIP-E, to mitigate the implications of school closures (lasting nine months) during the COVID-19 pandemic, a third restructuring of the sector support programme GEQIP-E was undertaken in early 2021, including extended timelines to meet targets. A fourth restructuring was agreed upon in December 2021, including the reallocation of funds for conflict recovery and strengthening technical aspects of the interventions, such as revisiting teacher training budgets. (MFA, 2021). During the conflict in Tigray, adjustments were also made in the Finland-supported TA to GEQIP to ensure the safety of staff (MFA, 2021).

Engagement in the MYRP is a further example of adaptive programming, as it was not foreseen in the current Country Programme. Nevertheless, a range of factors have led to delays in the implementation of the MYRP: in addition to school closures, COVID-19 safety restrictions and armed conflict, “*we had a lot of bureaucratic procedures in recruitment and contracting of implementing partners*”; in addition, deeply-rooted beliefs and attitudes limited the return of children with disabilities to schools when they reopened (KII: MYRP-CU).

4.1.4 Mainstreaming of cross-cutting objectives in planned interventions

In terms of **non-discrimination**, disability inclusion is at the heart of Impact 3 in Finland’s Country Programme.

Gender inclusion is an issue in Ethiopia, with violence against women and girls on the rise following both the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent conflict.⁴ The Government’s attention has also shifted away from recent success stories. For example, the increase in participation of women in Parliament: “*Conflict is a very masculine arena where gender issues become less and less important*” (KII: MFA). The Embassy takes its strong position on disability inclusion as a point of departure. While gender is mainstreamed throughout Finland’s Education Development Cooperation programming, this is not the case for, for example, the World Bank’s implementation of GEQIP. There is scope for advocacy in this area: “*We all should speak up more, join hands with partners, such as FCDO, who has a strong profile in gender inclusion*” (KII: MFA).

4 Gender- and age-specific vulnerabilities among Ethiopian IDP adolescents include the push towards exploitative forms of informal labour to support their families, and violence against children is prevalent in diverse forms with important gender dimensions to consider. (Jones, N., Yadete, W., and Kate Pincock, K., May 2019. Raising the visibility of IDPs: a case study of gender- and age-specific vulnerabilities among Ethiopian IDP adolescents; <https://odihpn.org/magazine/raising-visibility-idps-case-study-gender-age-specific-vulnerabilities-among-ethiopian-idp-adolescents/>)



Climate resilience does not feature in Finland's current Education Development Cooperation in Ethiopia. But going forward, we note a risky assumption behind the EETP theory of change: 'interventions will not be significantly impacted by future natural or human source crises' (MoE, 2023); indeed, 'there are signs of a shift of attention from conflict in Tigray to conflict over water resources' (UNICEF, 2019). This suggests a role for Finland in policy dialogue going forward.

4.1.5 Synergies created between cooperation instruments

As the Embassy observes, *"the link of our Country Strategy to the education sector is weak"*; this is possibly because the Country Strategy was developed prior to the emergence of education as a standalone policy priority and the setting of thematic priorities. Moreover, 'the portfolio is challenging' in terms of multi-actor partnerships (MFA, 2021). For the Embassy, country programming is less about thematic synergies between specific 'instruments' and more about making good use of multiple sources of funds. *"We want to explore possible linkages, but we're missing a proper overview of what the instruments are designed for and how we can target the use of a particular instrument to promote partnerships between multiple actors"* (KII: MFA). In this regard, guidance is lacking on how different sources of funds can be combined (and tracked) to achieve a single outcome: the embassy is expected to make the connections, but it's difficult to do this without guidance from the Headquarters.

Indeed, in 2021, the Embassy reported the need for management guidance as 'a conditionality for planning' (MFA, 2021). Reflecting on the spread of Education Development Cooperation instruments, as well as future priority strategies for engagement in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and digital solutions, bringing in private sector instruments, the total size of the portfolio needs to be kept manageable, but the number of the outcome areas in the Country Programme is high, and some of them rely upon labour-intensive bilateral project format (MFA, 2021). At the same time, communication through levels in MFA's administration is a challenge. From the perspective of Finland's representation in the UN in New York, *"We don't know what's happening at the country level, and they don't know what we're doing"* (KII: MFA). This is a challenge shared by Finland's peer countries, too.

In the case of both creative, synergistic programming, as well as better communication between global and country-level Education Development Cooperation, ultimately, it's about sufficient human resources. While bilateral programmes in other sectors are able to include communications expertise in their budgets, this is not possible in joint sector support.

4.2 Result (EQ2): effectiveness of the measures taken by Finland

4.2.1 Effectiveness of interventions in thematic areas

Overall, in terms of MFA's priority thematic areas, we found the following:

Thematic area 1 (Country Programme Outcome 3.1. Quality of general education is improved). Over two consecutive cycles of GEQIP, access to education steadily increased, but the **outcome-level targets for improving quality were not reached**. Against a backdrop of multiple



crises, the MoE struggled to improve the internal efficiency of the education system: capacity development for an inclusive pre-primary showed stagnation; school performance continued to remain extremely low, with only 8.5% re-inspected schools reaching the required quality standard level 3 or 4; and teacher performance is a serious challenge to improved learning outcomes (MFA, 2020; and 2021).

Thematic area 2 (Country Programme Outcome 3.2: Access and equity of general education are increased). Progress towards this outcome was good in terms of the achievement of the GEQIP-E indicator targets, but major disparities in equitable access (for children with disabilities and children in emerging regions) remain, **suggesting the need for significant system strengthening** if the TA-Project’s achievements are to be sustained (**Table 1**). Systemic constraints included the capacity for planning and management of inclusive education and data capture and the use of evidence-based planning (MFA, 2020; and 2021).

Table 1. Effectiveness rating

EXPECTED RESULTS	RATING:					
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Outcome 3.1:	check	S	S	S	U	S↑
Output 3.1.1	S↑	S	S	S↑	S	S↓
Output 3.1.2	S↑	S↑	S	S	S↓	S↓
Outcome 3.2:	S	G	G	G	G	S↑
Output 3.2.1	S↑	G	G	G	G	S↑
Output 3.2.3	G↑	G	G	G	G	S

Rating guide (colour codes):

- G Good:** achievement of over 80% of the target.
- S Satisfactory:** achievement of 60-80% of the target.
- U Unsatisfactory:** achievement of 0-60 % of the target.

Source: Annual Progress Reports for 2020 and 2021 (MFA, 2020; and 2021).

Thematic area 3. The Country programme’s expected results do not include this thematic area, but achievements in the VET domain are discussed below with regard to the HEI ICI project, MOPEDE.

In terms of **policy influencing**, Finland’s influential and widely acknowledged *policy dialogue for equity* resulted in a strong equity emphasis in GEQIP-E (E for equity); “Finland is one of the most active and technically strong partners in inclusion and Ethiopia advance in this area would probably not have happened without them”. This, in turn, resulted in budget decisions to strengthen equity in the new ECW programme (KII: DPs).



Development partners' joint policy dialogue was consistent, resulting in the Government reallocation of approximately 10.7 million USD towards the provision of school feeding in affected areas, but it did not bring results in terms of allocation of government funding to school grants (MFA, 2021). Finland's longstanding presence in Ethiopia provides entry points for future policy dialogue beyond development cooperation partners, including private sector companies in the Team Finland spirit, but Finland's political and economic repositioning in terms of Education Development Cooperation in Ethiopia, in line with the EU, has also meant political conditionalities for advancing new development projects (MFA, 2021).

Effectiveness of sector support (GEQIP-E Multi-Donor Trust Fund). Through bilateral co-financing of GEQIP-E, Finland has supported the following measures: the provision of School Grants to more than 36,000 schools, including teaching-learning materials to 25 million students and 674,000 teachers; the provision of more than 10,000 schools with preschool 'O-Classes'; continuous classroom assessment in over 10,000 schools; and the provision of annual Performance Based Awards to 3,500 schools (MFA, 2023). **Table 2** shows that more children of the right age are enrolling, but there is a high and increasing dropout before Grade 6; high dropout and/or repetition going from Grade 1 to Grade 2; a decline in learning outcomes; and low enrolment, with only slight improvement in gender equity in enrolment in the Emerging Regions (Afar, Somali and Banishangul-Gumuz).

Table 2. Access/efficiency, quality and equity outcomes in terms of GEQIP-E indicators

OUT-COME	INDICATOR	BASELINE 2016	TARGET 2022	ACTUAL 2021
Access/efficiency	Gross intake ratio (GIR) Grade1 (showing over/under-age entry)	176%	140%	109%
	Grade 2/Grade 2 enrolment ratio (showing early repetition and/or dropout)	76%	83%	78%
	Survival rate to Grade 5	57%	65%	51%
Quality	Grade 2 students are able to read at least functionally in their Mother Tongue (EGRA)	33%	50%	13%
	Grade 8 students with at least a basic proficiency level in English (2022 figures based on 2019 NLA data)	74%	85%	52%
	Grade 8 students with at least a basic proficiency level in Maths (2022 figures based on 2019 NLA data)	62%	72%	55%
Equity	Gross enrolment ratio of girls in Grades 5-8) in Afar, Somali and Banishangul-Gumuz	39%	60%	41%
	Overall Gross enrolment ratio in Afar, Somali and Benishangul-Gumuz, Grades 1-8	92%	96%	86%
	The ratio of G8 girls'/boys' English proficiency as a percentage	95%	-	95%
	The ratio of G8 girls'/boys' English proficiency as a percentage	92%	-	93%

Source: MoE, 2023.



Through TA support to GEQIP-E, Finland drove the establishment of IERCs across all states except Tigray (see below for details). However, as **Table 3** shows, the enrolment of children with special education needs remains very low.

Table 3. Gross enrolment ratio of students with special education needs in primary middle schools by region and sex

REGION	POPULATION WITH SENS (7-14 YRS)			STUDENTS WITH SENS			GER (%)		
	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
Afar	27,517	25,978	53,495	782	551	1,333	2.8	2.1	2.5
Amhara	337,371	325,081	663,453	29,840	24,174	54,014	8.8	7.4	8.2
Oromia	602,706	589,061	1,191,767	45,827	33,782	79,609	7.6	5.7	6.7
Somali	100,490	98,631	199,121	392	297	689	0.4	0.3	0.3
Benishangul-Gumuz	17,672	17,104	34,776	4,066	2,854	6,920	23	16.7	19.9
SNNP	211,975	215,349	427,324	51,950	43,214	95,164	24.5	20.1	22.3
Gambella	6,476	6,305	12,781	1,179	974	2,153	18.2	15.4	16.8
Harari	3,336	3,222	6,558	1,573	1,049	2,622	47.1	32.6	40
Addis Ababa	37,260	38,273	75,533	6,328	5,941	12,269	17	15.5	16.2
Dire Dawa	5,706	5,574	11,281	675	448	1,123	11.8	8	10
Sidama	78,551	76,290	154,841	5,519	5,083	10,602	7	6.7	6.8
SWEP	68,883	68,712	137,595	23,646	19,870	43,516	34.3	28.9	31.6
National	1,497,946	1,469,580	2,967,526	171,777	138,237	310,014	11.5%	9.4%	10.4%

Source: ESAA 2021/22



4.2.2 Effectiveness of instruments/channels

Effectiveness of the GEQIP-TA Project (bilateral programme). The Technical Support for Enhancing Equitable and Inclusive Education in Ethiopia Project (2018–2020 and extended to 2023) benefited from Finland and Ethiopia’s long-standing bilateral partnership.⁵ Strong consensus across stakeholders verified the claim that strong technical expertise through the TA and at the Embassy on inclusive education supported implementation and kept inclusion on the agenda of the Ministry and sector partners (MFA, 2020). The most cited achievement of the project was the establishment of 753 IERCs (94% of the target number, 800); of these, 640 were newly established, with the remaining 113 established in 2015 and 47 not established due to the conflict in Tigray. Another major result and innovation was the establishment of preschools within IERCs. The project had three expected outcomes:

Outcome 1. Strengthened support systems enabling inclusive education, including the effective allocation and utilisation of School Grants targeting IERC cluster schools and support for the effective functioning of IERCs. Achievements included the following: the target for children with disabilities enrolled in IERCs (set at 24,000 by 2020 from a baseline of 41,000) was exceeded, with total enrolment reaching 91,012 in 2022, and the percentage of girls with disabilities climbing from 44% at baseline to 48% by the end of the project (see **Table 3**; the achievement is even more noteworthy considering that 24% of the schools under study during baseline did not submit data due to conflict in their area); 100% of the targeted schools (excluding Tigray) received School Grants by 30 November 2022; Guidelines for establishing and running IERCs (including a monitoring framework for IERCs) were developed and distributed all IERCs and a total of 1,506 directors and itinerant teachers received initial training; resource rooms were established to house learning materials and assistive devices procured using school grants; and IERC Directors conducted self-assessments using a checklist prepared by the TA team.

Outcome 2. Strengthened capacities for inclusive and equitable education, specifically capacities for planning, supporting, and monitoring inclusive, equitable education at all levels and for inclusive teaching-learning and school improvement. Achievements included the following: a total of 9,326 people were reached through training and field visits (exceeding the end-project target by 30%), and social media platforms were set up and used for knowledge transfer; a total of 3,426 planning events were held; 4,500 teachers and administrators were trained in inclusive education skills, exceeding the target by 500 persons; and 1,760 teachers were trained in sign language, 1,525 in braille and 1,704 in Montessori skills. Importantly, the project also initiated “*changes in the attitude of officials, experts, and communities about the right of children with disabilities to learn*”, though we were unable to find convincing evidence for this claim (KIIs: GoE).

Outcome 3. Improved evidence base for planning and management of inclusive, equitable education, specifically improving the availability of reliable and relevant data for decision-making. The main achievement was the enrolment data generated by 709 IERCs; the remaining IERCs did not submit data due to conflicts in their area (**Table 4**). However, key indicators such as dropout rates are not measured by the system; we found only anecdotal data on key efficiency and quality indicators (e.g., only one student out of 70 students with disabilities in the Somali region returned to school) reported by the TA Team (MoE/MFA, 2023).

5 The project emerged out of the Finland supported Special Needs Education Project (1994–1998) in Amhara and Benishangul-Gumuz, which continued through Finnish TA to the MoE from 2004 until 2007, resulting in the Special Needs Education Program Strategy (2006) which was endorsed by the MoE in 201 as the Special Needs/Inclusive Education Strategy. Finnish TA subsequently supported implementation of the Special Needs Education Program Strategy (2008–2012), which led to the ‘Enhancing Inclusive Education Capacity of Teacher Education and Resource Centers in Ethiopia’ project (2013–2017) and development of the Master Plan for Special Needs Education/Inclusive Education 2016–2025.



Table 4. Number of enrolments in each region during 2018–2022, disaggregated by sex and type of disability

DISABILITY / SEX		REGIONS												
		ADDIS ABABA	DIRE DAWA	AFAR	SOMALI	SOUTH WEST	SIDAMA	SNNP	OROMIA	HARERI	GAM-BELLA	BENISH-ANGUL	AMHARA	TOTAL
Visually impaired	M	416	226	199	26	375	380	1,921	1,293	188	73	695	683	6,475
	F	387	146	153	19	309	383	1,774	1,204	149	55	994	609	6,182
Hearing impaired	M	403	203	130	308	352	419	1,361	1,101	200	96	608	1,198	6,379
	F	354	148	118	163	288	398	1,321	1,072	150	75	384	1,212	5,683
Intellectual disability	M	180	159	111	160	410	160	531	875	253	58	685	2,096	5,678
	F	136	81	72	124	314	111	416	794	153	24	447	905	3,577
Physical disability	M	136	147	95	272	390	234	762	804	99	142	580	329	3,990
	F	122	98	55	158	275	141	575	713	70	73	337	244	2,861
Learning	M	486	148	410	0	5,570	305	2,111	1,484	230	22	590	684	12,040
	F	379	98	364	0	6,356	285	2,008	1,434	166	18	465	566	12,139
Behaviour problems	M	357	60	161	0	1,783	315	1,801	988	414	49	436	610	6,974
	F	302	33	112	0	1,460	249	1,644	886	208	30	347	383	5,654
Others	M	744	212	287	15	1,859	471	1,743	1,325	159	49	351	99	7,314
	F	628	222	266	8	1,394	368	1,457	1,121	135	39	221	107	5,966
Grand total	M	2,722	1,155	1,393	781	10,739	2,284	10,230	7,870	1,543	489	3,945	5,699	48,850
	F	2,308	826	1,140	472	10,396	1,935	9,195	7,224	1,031	314	3,195	4,026	42,062
	T	5,030	1,981	2,533	1,253	21,135	4,219	19,425	15,094	2,574	803	7,140	9,725	90,912

Source: ESAA 2021/22



As noted by the Regional Education Bureau Director in Oromia, *“the identification of children with special needs is much better in schools with inclusive education resource centres”*, as evidenced by project data: 17,000 of the 92,000 students with special needs were from 138 schools with inclusive resource centres. However, there are a number of systemic constraints regarding data on children with disabilities, including the lack of capacities amongst teachers to identify children with disabilities during registration and the need to integrate the assessment of children with disabilities into pre-/in-service training; *“Monitoring Special needs education is considered as an additional activity even at the Ministry level”* (KII: GoE). Indeed, we note that a key performance indicator for Outcome 3, the Education Management Information System, which includes relevant Inclusive Education Indicators, has been swept under the carpet in TA reports (the late development of a planned IERC Monitoring Framework, which finally took place at the tail-end of the project, is nowhere mentioned in reports).

A range of challenges experienced during implementation proved the following assumptions behind the Project’s theory of change to be risky ones:

- **Implementation will be carried out without interruption;** in fact, school closures (from March to December 2020) and violent conflict resulted in significant displacement of children with disabilities and destruction of infrastructure;
- **Trained teachers and experts that are trained by the TA team will be in their positions for a reasonable amount of time;** in fact, the turnover of trained directors, itinerant teachers, and WEO was high;
- **Budget allocation by Regional Education Bureaus for inclusive education will gradually increase as awareness about the rights of children with disabilities increases by policymakers;** although all Regional Education Bureaus initially allocated additional budgets for inclusive education, this trend was reversed with the coming of the COVID-19 pandemic, the drought and the conflict in the north;
- **There will be a smooth coordination of activities and a monitoring system;** in fact, there was no counterpart for the CTA at the federal level and with inclusive education cutting across several departments in the Ministry (beyond the SSIED), it was next to impossible to develop a coherent strategy, going forward.
- **Counterparts at the different levels in the Regional Education Bureaus and itinerant teachers will be active participants in the inclusive education efforts,** but itinerant teachers were ‘highly disappointed’ because of their unclear place in the structure of the school. Itinerant teachers do not have a career structure or recognised job description.

The sustainability of the project’s results is an issue. Discontinuing the TA support project has always been part of the Embassy’s exit strategy. IERCs have been mainstreamed into the forthcoming multi-donor financed EETP, and the MoE has a strategy in place for IERCs already established by GEQIP to continue with the Regional Education Bureau’s own financing; *“SNNP and Dire Dawa governments also started establishing these centres with their own-source funds”* (KII: MoE). However, although the project ‘produced system level changes’, the TA team assert that the Ministry still does not possess adequate capacity to advance these changes (MFA, 2021).

On the one hand, the Embassy acknowledges the Ministry was not happy when they withdrew. On the other hand, Finland’s partners confirm that *“IERCs must be sustained but not through more*



donor funding”; “now we have the buy-in, it is up to everyone to take it forward” (KII: DPs). Yet, withdrawing TA is a risk. One suggested solution is that Finland “rebrand their support as a ‘pilot’ so that the Ministry can mobilise additional resources to scale it up” (KII: DP).

Effectiveness of Education in Emergencies. In response to the increased number of children affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the conflict in Tigray, which spilt over to neighbouring States, additional support from Finland was directed to strengthen resilience and Education in Emergencies through the framework of the ECW/MYRP: “Finland participated in the sign of the MYRP, ECW provided seed funding and UNICEF’s huge resource gap was filled by Finland (supporting Amhara and Tigray) and Norway (supporting Somali and Afar)” (KII: MFA). The support takes a nexus approach, ‘laying the foundations for continued development with a focus on child protection and education, while provision for school feeding was included to secure a daily meal for students in the targeted schools’ (MFA, 2021).

From other donors’ perspectives, although Finland was heavily involved in the development of the MYRP, it was hijacked by UNICEF. The EU’s future programme (2024-2027) is still under internal discussion, but it is likely that it will have more of a development focus than the MYRP, targeting out-of-school (OOSC) across all regions, not only conflict-affected areas. For MYRP’s expected development outcomes, see **Table 5** below. Meanwhile, FCDO contributes 3 million to the ECW framework, which will be increased in Amhara and Afar as a new emergency programme with an Education in Emergencies component is being designed to be implemented by UNICEF.⁶

Table 5. The expected outcomes of the MYRP

PROGRAMME OUTCOMES	
Outcome 1	Equitable access to safe, protective and gender-sensitive learning environments for emergency-affected girls, boys, including children with disabilities is increased.
Outcome 2	Quality and relevance of education for emergency-affected girls, boys, including children with disabilities is enhanced.
Outcome 3	Retention and transition to higher grades for emergency-affected girls, boys, including children with disabilities is improved.
Outcome 4	The capacity of education institutions and communities to provide gender and crisis-sensitive education for emergency-affected girls, boys, including children with disabilities is strengthened.

Source: Multi-Year Resilience Programme (MYRP) 2021-2023

However, due to security issues and a lack of access to conflict-affected areas, implementation has been on hold since the launch of the programme. Indeed, as the Embassy reports, ‘the effectiveness of the adjustment in response to the conflict through engagement in Education in Emergencies through ECW/MYRP cannot yet be evaluated’ (MFA, 2021). As UNICEF confirms,

6 UNICEF is the partner of choice in Ethiopia’s education sector for several donors, primarily because they have the in-country presence.



despite some gains at the output level⁷, it is too early to comment on the project's contribution to achieving the expected outcome/impact at this stage (UNICEF, 2023b).

Effectiveness of multilateral influencing. Finland has seconded an education expert to the EU-Delegation in Ethiopia to improve results in the area of inclusive and quality education for girls, children with disabilities and other vulnerable children. However, for this strategy to yield results in terms of multilateral influencing, two things need to happen. First, the secondment needs to be longer-term; *“there’s not much a person can do in one year”* (KII: DP). Second, the deployed expert needs to be given strategic guidance on Finland’s role in the EU from Helsinki. The focus on inclusive education is clear and strong in the Country Programme, and this is matched by the expertise needed to implement policy priorities. However, the strategic focus of multilateral influencing at the country level is less clear.

Effectiveness of HEI ICI. The MOPEDE project was designed as a ‘solution to the learning crisis’, with a focus on teacher education for TVET. It is a partnership between the Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences (JAMK), Centria University of Applied Sciences, and the Federal Technical and Vocational Education and Training Institute (FTVET) in Ethiopia. The project’s overall goal was to improve the accessibility and quality of VET teacher education, modernising VET across regions in Ethiopia.⁸

Support from Finland has built the capacity of TVET instructors to use digital platforms for content development and delivery among FTVET instructors; in addition, with the technical capacity that had been built, trained instructors were able to leverage infrastructure worth 400,000 USD. Finland also endorsed a visit of FTVET instructors to Germany to build linkages with the German Agency for Development Cooperation (GIZ). As COVID-19 restrictions were introduced only two weeks after project approval, the project was restructured with an intensified focus on blended learning and digital content programming; the global pandemic was “a blessing in disguise for this project”, accelerating the use of virtual platforms to deliver VET training.

The digital platform has increased access to TVET materials. As an interviewee says, *“While students in Addis Ababa are relatively more privileged because the university is better equipped, furnished, and staffed, our students are in 15 Federal TVET institutions in the regions”*. The cost-free digital content used by students as additional reference materials (video records, collaborative platforms, interactive content virtual labs, resource sharing, simulations) can be accessed remotely at any time. Nevertheless, gender balance is a major challenge in the university, with only 33% of female students currently enrolled; disability inclusion, too, was not specifically mainstreamed into the project. A further challenge has been the high student-facilitator ratio.

Effectiveness of CSO support. In Ethiopia, the MFA supports two projects delivered by CSOs: the **SOS-Villages** ‘Basic Life Skills for Youth and Adults’ Educare Project in Nekemte Oromia Regional State and **Wycliffe’s** ‘Early Childhood Education: A Fair Start - Mother Tongue Preschool Education’ project in the Konso and Ale Communities. Neither feature specifically in the Country Programme, but they are linked to the expected outcomes.

7 In Amhara, for example some 1,500 children (742 girls, 758 boys) were engaged in resilience-building activities through integrated programming with the accelerated learning program; 5,468 IDPs (1,437 boys, 1,211 girls, 1,700 women, and 1,120 men) were reached with GBV messages; 2500 women and girls were provided with dignity kits and 13 GBV cases (girls) were reported and referred to relevant services; and 21,930 school bags with stationary were procured; in Tigray 5,510 (2,857 girls) internally displaced children were able to access learning opportunities (UNICEF, 2023b; UNICEF, 2023c)

8 <https://www.opf.fi/en/projects/mopede>



The latter addressed a key issue: Language has been a major barrier to education because children who do not speak Amharic tend to drop out of school; the introduction of mother-tongue education has increased retention and allowed parents to help their children. Wycliffe Finland works with a local partner, SIL-Ethiopia (part of a global faith-based network, SIL-international), committed to building capacity for sustainable language development through linguistic activities, translation, training, and materials development. Finland's support has focused on mother tongue education, specifically, ten local languages (e.g., Alle, Derashe, Bench, Sheko) in the Bench-Maji/Konso Zone.

Unlike other partners, Wycliffe-Finland is, according to an interviewee, *“special in that they focus on local development work instead of relief activities, using local experts in the development of teaching materials; this contributes to sustainability”*. The partnership has a strong focus on equity through its work with minority communities, as well as an emphasis on girls' education; for some activities, there is a quota system that encourages girls' participation. Again, unlike donors who provide funding and disappear until project closure, Wycliffe-Finland conducts regular monitoring and offers continuous guidance. However, there has been no meaningful collaboration between SIL and Finnish experts from other projects/initiatives; for example, disability inclusion was not integrated into the project.

The project has established pilot schools, introducing mother-tongue languages as the medium of instruction, training teachers and developing teaching-learning materials (student books and teacher guides); the pilots are developed in collaboration with the Regional Education Bureau, so the intention is for local government to scale it up. Indeed, the Embassy reports that the MoE at the federal level may take the pilots forward by paying more attention to mother-tongue instruction at the policy level. However, academic research points to the need for a 'balance of pressure and support [...] especially in situations where there is uneven consensus about the merits of the policy' (Courtney, 2018).

Among the challenges encountered during project implementation were the ingrained negative attitudes of communities and parents toward mother-tongue education, coupled with politically motivated competitive attitudes from Amharic-speaking communities; the scarcity of qualified teachers who can teach in mother-tongue languages; and insufficient funds, given the number of languages covered. Important next steps include awareness creation for government officials and local political leaders, including peacebuilding and trauma healing in conflict-affected communities such as Alle and Derashe.

Effectiveness of multi-actor approaches, their cumulative and synergistic effects. Multi-actor partnerships are a foundation of ECW's overall strategic approach, and partnerships with state and non-state actors are critical for the ECW-facilitated MYRP (ECW, 2022). In Amhara, for example, in addition to collaborating with the MoE and State-level Governments and donors such as Finland, the programme is being implemented through a partnership between UNICEF, WFP⁹ and World Vision Ethiopia (UNICEF, 2023b). Similarly, in Tigray, the implementation partners are UNICEF, Save the Children International and Imagine 1 Day (for project implementation in Abdi Abi and as part of an arrangement to build the capacity of local NGOs) (UNICEF, 2023c).

Ethiopia's Education Sector Roadmap recognises the lack of Public Private Partnerships in the sector as a systemic weakness and calls for a diversification of funding sources (UNESCO, 2018). While there is some private sector engagement in the education sector, primarily in the form of

9 Note, we discuss Finland's engagement with WFP in Ethiopia, Kenya and at global level, in section 5 of the main report.



private universities and colleges, and refugee education has benefited from some partnerships with private sector actors, such as the IKEA foundation, Education in Emergencies has not benefited from private sector investments (UNICEF, 2019). MYRP partnerships with the private sector, however, seem unlikely in the foreseeable future, given the existing systemic challenges of coordinated planning and financing across the three education architectures (see **Box 2**).

Box 2. Challenges of coordinated planning and financing the MYRP

Partnerships for education in emergency settings have raised challenges in Ethiopia. There are three distinct planning structures for Education in Emergencies, and these ‘undermine efficiency and effectiveness’. The education architectures with associated funding streams and resource mobilisation processes are:

- **The national education sector**, led by the MoE at the federal level, Regional Education Bureaus at the state level, and Woredas as the primary educational authorities responsible for the establishment and implementation of all general education activities. The ESTWG convenes the MoE and sector development partners to oversee the development and implementation of major national sector programmes and funding mechanisms.
- **The Education in Emergencies architecture** is built around a Cluster system co-chaired by MoE, UNICEF, and Save the Children, with a regional layer led by the Regional Education Bureaus.
- **The refugee education system** is coordinated by the Ministry of Peace’s Agency for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA) and largely supported/funded by UNHCR with the support of operational and implementing partners.

Different planning cycles and funding mechanisms lead to disjointed resource mobilisation efforts, under-lining the need for stronger integration amongst these structures and joint planning as an opportunity for greater coordination and efficiency. Financial tracking mechanisms across the three sectors, particularly for external financing to the education sector directed through off-budget channels, ‘remain weak’.

Source: UNICEF, 2019

Meanwhile, from the Embassy’s perspective, coordination of the MYRP has been mildly disappointing. The MYRP programme coordination unit (housed by the MoE but financed by Save the Children) has not, for example, responded to the Embassy’s request for the establishment of Regional Steering Committees. Yet regional-level partnerships are essential if gains are to be sustained: Communities and NGOs are promoting inclusive education, and local government has now started allocating budget for inclusive education. At the same time, the Embassy staff expressed disappointment in the limited opportunity for hands-on engagement and follow-up in programming.



4.3 Future (EQ3): outlooks for better results

4.3.1 Emerging needs and future thematic areas requiring Finland's support (financial and expertise)

The trajectory of sector programming (GEQIP I and II, GEQIP-E) shows a shift in focus from access to equity and quality and, as underlined by the forthcoming EETP, a renewed focus on improving learning outcomes by means of systems strengthening.¹⁰ Stakeholders feel that Finland should have a **clear phasing-out plan**: “*Don't abandon inclusive education*” while also providing **systems-level support** by “*expanding to other areas*” (KII: DP). This said, the EETP is currently still a broad concept and something of a wish list; it is important that Ethiopia's development partners do not engage in cherry-picking and dragging the programme in different directions. The suggestion is that Finland should provide sector-wide support without earmarking their contribution for inclusion; earmarking is raising financial management challenges for the Ministry (KIIs: DPs, GoE).

The **humanitarian–development nexus** is emerging as increasingly important in Ethiopia's education sector. The Ministry representatives assert that “*in the context of Ethiopia, we need a balance between support to children with special needs and addressing the challenges facing the general body of children; conflict, drought and all these emergencies have affected the education of millions of children*” (KII: GoE).

Indeed, Finland and its partners all recognise the need to think about the distinction between development and humanitarian assistance programmes and focus on resilience.; To improve the access and participation of vulnerable children, emergency responses must recognise development needs, including education (MFA, 2021b); however, “*the current response is a humanitarian one, not resilience building*” and “*we need to have one pot, not two pots*” (KIIs: DPs).

From the perspective of the EETP, stakeholders need to “*be clear about what type of post-conflict recovery we're aiming for – it's too soon to say*”. However, “*the climate agenda is extremely important – if it is put in the context of drought or floods to make it relevant to daily life so it becomes teachable – and any meaningful support in this area is welcomed*”. Indeed, given Finland's expertise, climate resilience may be a future topic for Finnish advocacy, supported by like-minded partners such as Norway: “*no one is talking about it; the MYFP includes it, but the strategies are not spelt out*” (KIIs: DPs).

Finland may choose to be a pioneer in the climate education area.¹¹ But in the context of the **triple nexus** (humanitarian-development-peacebuilding – HDP), all partners mentioned a need for peacebuilding and peace education “*to mitigate crises which are within our control, such as the spread of conflict from one region to another*” (KII: DP). This is in line with the goal of Programme 2 of the ESDP VI (2021-2025), ‘Values: National unity in diversity’ (Federal MoE, 2021).

¹⁰ A recent RISE study explored why learning levels have decreased despite long-term inputs to improve the quality of education, concluding that the need to strengthen the education system is urgent, in order to accommodate new-generation learners attracted to schools through educational reforms (Arya, 2023).

¹¹ We note implicit synergies between the Country Programme's impact areas: i.e., education in relation to improved community-based agricultural practices (Impact 1) and WASH management (Impact 2). Indeed, in the past, the AfDB, DFID, WB, UNICEF and Finland supported a One WASH Programme in Ethiopia with three intervention areas: water supply for schools, sanitation and hygiene, and capacity building (UNICEF, 2018).



Finally, employment and employability are critical challenges in Ethiopia; “*support to the TVET sector should be prioritised beyond targeting General Education*”, including the mainstreaming of TVET into General Education starting from Grade 7, as planned by the MoE (KII: MOPEDE; MoE, 2021a).

4.3.2 Future measures to strengthen the multi-actor approach and set up

There is potential for partnerships between state and non-state actors in Ethiopia’s education sector. Examples are:

- Reinstating the National Inclusive Education Taskforce, which serves as a platform for coordination and collaboration between many actors and the education and health ministries.
- Revitalising the regional cluster model for teacher education, championed by Finland in the past.
- Expanding the scope of IERCs, enabling them to function as remedial learning centres for targeted categories of OOSC and/or skills training for OOSC youth.
- Piloting digital learning solutions which target the needs of vulnerable children and/or hybrid models for technical and vocational education and training (MFA, 2021b).

In each case, such multi-actor approaches in the context of the EETP require TA support in parallel with Finland’s contribution to pooled funding: “*We’ll be engaging with regions more directly, and govt systems make it difficult to achieve results, so there’s a bit of handholding*” (KII: DP).

However, Finland and its partners raise the following issue with regard to multi-actor partnerships, asking:

Partnership for what? A multi-actor approach “*needs to achieve something, rather than being a partnership for partnership’s sake*”; there may be scope for but “*we have to present a clear message*” (KIIs: DPs, MFA).

Partnership building with what human resources? “*It’s a nice idea, but I don’t see how Finland or Norway can do it when we both get less and less in terms of money and people*”; the issue of human resource gaps is particularly acute “*when you have to work with the MoE; just working with the govt is already 50% of one person’s time*” (KIIs: DPs).

Longer-term partnerships to pilot digital solutions with what financing? There are examples of successful long-term pilots in the African region which have gone to scale¹². However, such pilots are not feasible within a four-year programme cycle because the channel of funding for this type of intervention needs to be predictable.

¹² We discuss such examples as the *onebillion* Learning Centres in the main report.



5 Implications for the main report

5.1 Summary of summative findings (EQ1 and EQ2)

The priorities of Government decision-makers and development partners are **relevant** in terms of addressing the learning crisis, given their shared focus on the quality of education and equity (across regions and for vulnerable children); Finland's Country Programme has remained relevant in a climate of growing mistrust between partners as well as a multi-crises context; there were some challenges in the coordination between the Embassy and MFA Headquarters, required to implement an adaptive country programme.

In addition to the reputed excellence of its domestic education system and its pro-poor values, the **perceived strengths** of Finland include not only its well-recognized expertise in inclusive education but also its experience in decentralised education governance, as well as the pivotal role played by the Embassy in advocacy and donor harmonisation through policy/sector dialogue. The **value-addition** of Finland's cooperation is the constancy and reliability of its trusted partnership with Ethiopia, as well as a balanced choice of Education Development Cooperation instruments.

The multiple crises experienced in Ethiopia, coupled with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, impacted the Country Programme's timely implementation and has underlined the importance of flexibility and adaptation in programme implementation.

While the **cross-cutting objectives** of non-discrimination and gender inclusion are integral to Finland's Country Programme, there is scope for more and better mainstreaming across Ethiopia's education programming.

Synergies within a Country Programme are about creating linkages between multiple sources of funds. MFA's thematic priority areas are clear, and all cooperation instruments fall under one or other priority areas. However, the creation of synergies requires clearer guidance from Headquarters on how to make **strategic** choices in Education Development Cooperation and how to combine and **target** instruments to meet needs, as well as communication between tiers in the administration. It also requires resources.

Results in thematic areas. Finland has contributed directly to addressing the learning crisis in Ethiopia in terms of policy dialogue and targeted financing for gender- and disability-inclusive education and has provided indirect support for youth-focused VET; its contribution to strengthening the capacities of teachers, schools and education providers to improve the quality of education has been less effective.

Results by instrument. There is strong consensus that TA bilateral support has been effective in spotlighting equity issues in Ethiopia's education sector, but it is not clear if/how gains will be sustained and much remains to be done to strengthen elements of the education system, including the Education Management Information System; Finland's engagement with the EU and support of ECW's MYRP has been fundamentally constrained by the country context and the deployment of seconded expertise to the EU-Delegation via the Finnish Centre of Expertise in Education and



Development (FinCEED) may prove to be limited by its duration and scope. While the results of the HEI ICI project are likely to be taken forward by sector stakeholders, it is not clear how stronger complementarities can be built between Finland's CSO support and other interventions.

While the MYRP in Ethiopia may be described as a multi-actor approach in post-conflict settings, it experiences systemic challenges in terms of coordinated planning and financing across three Education in Emergencies architectures and in the absence of fit-for-purpose coordination structures and processes, it is impossible to comment on the MYRP's 'synergistic effects'.

5.2 Summary of findings for formative/futures-thinking (EQ3)

The renewed focus on the education system strengthening is a means of addressing the root causes of the learning crisis. Underpinning efforts to strengthen the education system in Ethiopia, including the VET sub-sector, is the need to set priorities for double/triple nexus programming; climate resilience (also in relation to conflict mitigation) is important in the Ethiopian context.

Future programming using multi-actor approaches may focus on institutionalising disability-inclusive education, a cluster model for teacher education, extending the function of IERCs, and piloting digital learning/VET training solutions. However, such approaches raise fundamental questions in relation to achieving results, additional human resources, and long-term, predictable financing.



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NEPAL CASE STUDY

EILA HEIKKILÄ



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Acronyms and abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AWPB	Annual Work Plan and Budget
CDC	Curriculum Development Center
CEHRD	Centre for Education and Human Resource Development
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DLI	Disbursement Linked Indicator
DP	Development Partner
ECED	Early Childhood Education and Development
EdTech	Education Technology
EDUFI	Finnish National Agency for Education
EU	European Union
FCA	Finn Church Aid
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GoN	Government of Nepal
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
GPI	Gender Parity Index
HE	Higher Education
HEI ICI	Higher Education Institutions Institutional Cooperation Instrument
JAMK	Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences
JFP	Joint Financing Partner
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
KII	Key Informant Interview
KUSOM	Kathmandu University School of Management
LDC	Least Developed Country
MEUR	Million Euros
MFA	Ministry for Foreign Affairs
MoEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
NEHLOS	Nepal Lhomi Society
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OAMK	Oulu University of Applied Sciences
ODA	Official Development Assistance
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SESP	School Education Sector Plan
SSDP	School Sector Development Plan
TA	Technical Assistance
TECSES	Technical Cooperation Support to Education Sector
TTP-Nepal	Teacher Preparation Programme through Open and Distance Learning Mode for Enhancing Quality in Education
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UN	United Nations
UN DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Cooperation
USD	United States Dollar
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme



1 Introduction

The **purpose** of the case study is, on the one hand, to generate findings from the perspective of key informants in a purposive sample of Finland's long-standing Country Partner of Nepal. These findings serve as an additional evidence stream for the evaluation, supplementing global findings presented in the main report. Second, the case study generates findings to develop a 'Contribution Story' as a critical instance of the ways in which the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland's (MFA) Country Programmes support and strengthen and influence (or not) Finland's Education Development Cooperation and related Policy. A cross-analysis of the case studies is found in the main report.

In line with the purpose, the overall **methodology** is theory-based contribution analysis, using a 'nested' theory of change as a vehicle for the development of a country-specific Contribution Story (see Chapter 2 of the main report for details). The Contribution Stories are grounded in the results frameworks presented in Finland's Country Programmes for the respective case countries. These programmes guide and monitor the delivery of specific Impact Areas of development cooperation, which feed into the larger strategic objectives identified in the Country Strategy. The main **methods** used by the evaluation team were targeted document review (a full list of documents is found at the end of this study) and interviews; the **scope** of the Case Study is based on a sample of Official Development Assistance (ODA) (the full list of sampled interventions is found in Annex 3 in the main report, and it is based on the lists of interventions received from the MFA). The interviews were conducted in person with staff responsible for the following ODA interventions. Those interviews, where key informants were not available during the scheduled field visit, were conducted remotely:

- Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST), Kathmandu, Nepal
- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Pulchowk, Lalitpur
- Wycliffe Raamatunkääntäjät ry / Nepal Lhomi Society (NEHLOS), Bouddha, Kathmandu
- Interpedia / LooNiva Child Concern, Bhainsepati, Lalitpur
- Lääkäriin Sosiaalinen Vastuu ry / B. P. Eye Foundation, IMPACT Nepal, Nepal Association for the Welfare of the Blind, Nepal)
- GOI Finland Oy (Finnpartnerhip project)

The team also interviewed the Embassy of Finland staff, the MFA Headquarters' desk officers responsible for Nepal, staff engaged in the Higher Education Institutions Institutional Cooperation Instrument (HEI ICI) Projects, Oulu University of Applied Sciences (OAMK) and Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences (JAMK) staff in Finland and Young Innovations Pvt Ltd, Lagankhel, Lalitpur, Online and Distance Education Centre, Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur, Kathmandu University School of Management (KUSOM), Balkumari, Lalitpur, Idea Studio, Bagbazar in Nepal. In addition, the team interviewed Finn Church Aid (FCA) in Baluwatar as well as the European Union (EU) Delegation in Nepal on multilateral cooperation.

As a case study rather than a full evaluation, this report does not provide a definitive performance assessment of the Finnish education sector assistance in Nepal during 2019-2022. Rather, it offers limited insights to inform the wider evaluation, particularly the development of a 'contribution story' of the contribution of Nepal's Country Programme to MFA's higher-level outcomes.



2 Country and sector context

2.1 Brief overview of country context

Nepal is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-lingual, and multi-religious country and aims to transform it into an inclusive society by ending exclusion and discrimination based on caste/ethnicity, class, religion, gender or region (The 2015 Constitution). There are around 142 (125 of them recorded in Census 2011) recognised ethnic and caste groups (Census, 2021) and 123 spoken languages in Nepal. The official language is Nepali, which serves as a lingua franca among the Nepali people of different ethnolinguistic groups. It is spoken as a mother tongue by 44.9% of the population (Census, 2021).

Nepal has undergone a drastic political change in the past two decades, transforming from a monarchy to a Federal Republic. As stipulated by the new Constitution, there are governments at the federal level (one), provincial level (seven) and local level (753). The formulation of new Acts and Laws in line with the new constitution at the federal, provincial, and local government levels is still in progress. The lack of acts and laws is hampering the smooth functioning of governments at different levels. The country's new governance structure has significantly changed how the education sector is governed and managed. The lack of the Education Act has resulted in tensions and confusion regarding the roles and responsibilities among the three tiers of government. However, the new system is expected to bring benefits and services of development closer to people.

Box 1. Demographics of Nepal

Population: 29.1 million, 66.1% of people living in urban areas and the share of female population is 51.1%. The proportion of people living in cities is projected to double by 2050, concentrating in market and border towns.

Surface area: 147,181 km² (cf. Finland 390 980 km²). More than 80 % of the land consists of hilly and mountainous terrain with serious accessibility problems. The mountains occupy 15%, the hills 68%, and the Terai southern plains 17% of the country's area. Mountain and rural hill areas are becoming depopulated as the population density increases in the Terai and urban areas.

Source: World Population Review 2023; UN DESA 2018

According to the 76th United Nations (UN) General Assembly meeting on 11 November 2021, Nepal will graduate from the Least-Developed Country (LDC) to a Lower-Middle-Income Country, earliest in 2026 (UN 2023). It was noted that a five-year preparatory period would be necessary for graduation and to effectively prepare for a smooth transition. A lengthy planning period is required as Nepal is still in the post-COVID-19 recovery and implementing policies and strategies to reverse the economic and social damage incurred by the COVID-19 shock. To this effect, MFA commissioned a study 'Transition from development cooperation to broader forms of cooperation in Nepal: Comparisons, lessons learned and recommendations for policy and action (Avinash D.,



Uma S., Uttam B. S. 2022). In the study, it is recommended that Finland lead Nepal's transition thinking, planning and execution together with other development partners, especially in thematic areas where it has a long history of cooperation and expertise in Nepal, including education, as well as cross-cutting issues in gender, human rights, and climate change.

The gross national Income per capita was 1090 United States Dollars (USD) in 2019, thus surpassing the income threshold for lower-middle-income countries. The economic wealth is unevenly distributed over the seven provinces. For example, Province 2, which accounts for 20.4% of the population, has the lowest wealth per capita, followed by Karnali and Sudurpashchim provinces. Disparities also exist between rural and urban populations. Over half of the rural population is considered poor nationwide.

The economic growth in Nepal has slowed in the past years, reflecting lower revenues in trade and tourism and broader disruptions caused by the COVID-19 outbreak. The economy depends on remittances that Nepali workers send home. The main economic sectors include the service sector, agriculture, and industry, which constitute over 50, around 21 and over 10 %, respectively, of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In 2019— 2020, the remittance from abroad decreased to 19% due to the pandemic, as many emigrant workers had to return home.

In 2021, the largest proportion of ODA for education came from the World Bank, followed by the EU and Asian Development Bank (ADB). The support for education comprised grants (36,81%), loans (52,19%) and Technical Assistance (TA) (10,99%) (Government of Nepal, Ministry of Finance 2021).

2.2 Education sector achievements and challenges

Nepal's formal education system has made significant strides in recent decades. Access to schools has expanded nationwide, including remote areas with small and scattered communities. More than eight million children are studying in 35,674 basic- and secondary schools, including over 1 million children enrolled in 37,700 pre-primary and early childhood education development classes and centres across the country (UNICEF 2018). According to the Educational Statistics of 2020 (CEHRD 2020), more than two-thirds of the children enrolled in Grade 1 (70.2%¹³) have experience in Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) for one year or more. At the lower basic level (Grades 1–5), the net enrolment rate of 97.1% shows that education at this level has reached a stage which is accessible and readily available to almost all children (**Table 1**). The net enrolment rate at the basic education level (ECED to grade 8), which is defined by the State as compulsory and free, has reached 93.4%. Even at the secondary education level (grades 9–12), the net enrolment rate has increased to 47.6% in recent years.

13 The figures differ slightly regarding the sources of the different Ministries of the Government of Nepal.



Table 1. Government Education Sector Indicators in Nepal 2017 – 2020

SOCIAL SECTOR	INDICATORS	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Education	Expected Years of Schooling	12.6	12.8	12.8
	Mean Years of Schooling	4.7	4.9	5
	Net Enrolment Rate (1-5)	97.2%	96.5%	97.1%
	Net Enrolment Rate (1-8)	92.3%	92.7%	93.4%
	Net Enrolment Rate (9-12)	43.9%	46.4%	47.6%
	Literacy Rate (15+)	-	58%	-

Source: Government of Nepal, Ministry of Finance, Economic survey 2020/2021

However, the education system of Nepal also faces several challenges, often like those encountered by other developing countries. For example, despite an increase in the enrolment rate, a high dropout rate remains a challenge in school education. The Government's Economic Survey 2021/2022 shows over two-thirds of the students enrolled in Grade 1 drop out of the school system by the time they reach Grade 12, which is the final year of school education (Government of Nepal, Ministry of Finance 2021/2022).

The retention rate up to Grade 12 (age 18) in 2023 stands at 29.2%. The government has implemented different programmes in a sector-wide approach to increase the retention rate in schools, remarking an important sector to develop further. For example, free mid-day meals to all children from grades ECED-Grade 5 across the country and have committed to expanding it up to Grade 8, free sanitary pads to around 1.35 million girls, scholarships to girls and students from marginalised communities and others. However, education experts interviewed during the field mission say that these programmes have not delivered the desired results. This is mainly because they do not address the underlying causes of children dropping out of school.

Poverty is the major reason for high school dropout rates, as parents from poor communities tend to mobilise their children in income-generating activities to support their families. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) plays a crucial role in creating pathways to gainful employment, reducing the prevalence of low-wage jobs, and combating issues such as human trafficking. Lack of parent education is another factor. In addition, lack of proper school infrastructure and poor learning environment is also responsible for higher dropout rates. Many public schools lack toilets and other infrastructure and do not provide a conducive learning environment for students, especially girls. Some harmful social norms and practices, such as early marriage, gender-based discrimination and violence against girls at home and schools, also play crucial roles in girls' educational attainment and performance. Furthermore, as noted by the experts, proper attention has not been given to increasing retention and boosting the quality of education.

The Gender Parity Index (GPI) score at the basic- and secondary education levels (0.99 and 1.00, respectively) further indicates that Nepal's education sector development has been achieved in a gender-responsive manner. Regarding Nepal's commitment to making the country fully literate, the literacy rate has reached 85% in the age group of 5 years and above and 94% in the age group



of 15–24 years. These achievements have been made possible by the Government of Nepal's (GoN) commitment to education, continuous efforts of federal, provincial, and local governments, teachers, parents, school management committees, students, private sectors, the non-governmental sector, development partners, and other stakeholders.

The Economic Survey (2021-2022) confirms that the academic year 2019-2020 was badly affected due to the COVID-19 pandemic. All educational institutions and centres across the country were closed. The regular teaching-learning activities of all classes and levels of about 8.7 million students from school to university levels were disrupted. The conduction, evaluation, and publication of exam results of various classes and levels, including school level, local and national levels, had not been accomplished on time. In addition, the examinations, including the Grade 10 (SEE) and Grade 12, were adjusted into school-based examinations and evaluations for the two consecutive academic years: 2020 and 2021. With the second wave of the pandemic, examination programs from the school level to the university level of the academic session 2021 were affected (Government of Nepal, Ministry of Finance, 2020/2021).

2.3 Key donors in the education sector

The key donors in the education sector in Nepal are the eight Joint Financing Partners of the sector-wide approach: ADB, EU, Finland, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Norway, UNICEF, and World Bank. The support of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) is channelled through the World Bank. Finland has been a joint financing partner since 1999. Civil Society Organisations (CSO) contribute separately to the education sector, especially targeting marginalised children and families living in remote and hilly areas.

The Joint Financing Partners supported the School Sector Development Plan (SSDP) in 2016-2021 through the Sector-Wide Approach modality guided by a joint financing framework called Joint Financing Arrangement (JFA) signed by all Joint Financing Partners and the Ministry of Finance, Government of Nepal. The plan was initially prepared for seven years (2016-2023). However, due to many challenges (the aftermath of the earthquake, the introduction of the federal system, COVID-19), it was decided to finalise implementation earlier than planned, in 2021. The main reason was federalisation and the systemic changes it brought about. The Mid-Term Review 2019 recommended concluding the SSDP after a five-year implementation period and developing the new education sector plan aligning with the federalised context.

As of 2023, the Joint Financing Partners have supported a Sector-Wide Approach of the School Education Sector Plan (SESP) 2022- 2032. It was developed to give continuity to SSDP to strengthen equity, quality, and efficiency in education and ensure the relevance of programmes and reforms in the emerging context. The SESP 2030 plan commits the Nepali State to ensure compulsory and free education up to the basic level and free education at the secondary level, as guaranteed by the Constitution of Nepal, aligned with the National Education Policy (2019) and to achieve the fourth goal of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).



3 Finland's country programme

3.1 Country strategy/overall country programme

Finland has been engaged in development cooperation in Nepal since 1983. Nepal and Finland have enjoyed longstanding, friendly and wide-ranging relations for many decades. Bilateral development cooperation is a central pillar of this relationship, and Finland remains committed to supporting the transition and development of Federal Nepal.

Current Finland's Country Strategy for Nepal 2021-2024 has the overarching goal of fostering a federal, democratic, inclusive, and resilient Nepal. The Country Strategy addresses two major contemporary challenges: it supports "building back better and greener" after the COVID-19 pandemic and institutionalisation of federalism, its implications for local governance, and the capacity development of local authorities.

Finland's strategic goals for the Country Strategy period are:

- To reduce inequalities by addressing the connections between gender, disability, discrimination and other forms of exclusion and marginalisation.
- To support sustainable development and climate and disaster resilience in the areas of education, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), livelihood development and gender equality.
- To diversify and further enhance political and economic cooperation between Nepal and Finland to prepare for Nepal's future transition to a middle-income country.

The Country Programme in 2021-2024 partly covers the time period of the evaluation and provides information on forward-looking plans. It is aligned with the Country Strategy and focuses on addressing two major contemporary challenges mentioned in the strategy. Firstly, Nepal has been going through a lengthy and complex transition towards a new federal structure during the past few years. Secondly, the COVID-19 pandemic is having widespread socio-economic impacts that affect Nepal's growth strategy beyond the pandemic.

Finland's Country Programme 2021-2024 comprises three Impact Areas:

- Impact Area 1: Communities' improved climate resilience and health through sustainable water supply, sanitation and hygiene and livelihood for development:
- **Impact Area 2: An inclusive Education system that provides students with the necessary skills contributing to Nepal's economic and democratic development**
- Impact Area 3: Equality and prosperity to ALL women and girls including those with disabilities and those in vulnerable positions is enhanced



Finland's support of the education sector in Nepal contributes to Finland's strategic goals in terms of Impact Area 2: An inclusive education system that provides students with the necessary skills to contribute to Nepal's economic and democratic development.

3.2 Education focus of the country programme

NB: While the following describes the current Country Programmes, our findings below cover the evaluation period under review (2019-2022) and extend, in some cases, to 2023.

Finland's current education sector support (Country Programme 2121-2024) is built on the previous Country Strategy (2016-2019), which states that education is Finland's priority sector in Nepal. Both documents recognise that Nepal has achieved remarkable results in improving access to education. Nepal's goal of providing better and more equitable education for all children, with a special emphasis on girls and disadvantaged groups, aligns well with Finland's development policy. In addition, Finland's considerable expertise in contributing to the education sector is also mentioned as a justification for continuing to support the education sector in Nepal.

The programmatic elements have remained largely the same during the period of this evaluation. The current programme places slightly more emphasis on an inclusive education system, quality of pedagogy and embedding soft skills to enhance employability. Importantly, there is more focus on resilience in emerging challenges.

According to the Country Programme 2021-2024, Finland's development cooperation in the education sector supports economic equality, improving a school system that promotes democracy and inclusive education.

Impact Area 2: An inclusive education system that provides students with the necessary skills to contribute to Nepal's economic and democratic development (SDG 4, Targets 4.1, 4.5. 4.c.1) requires progress towards the following outcome-level results.

Outcome 2.1: Improved quality of education and student learning outcomes in basic and secondary education. This result is intended to be achieved by:

1. **Improving the quality of pedagogy, curriculum and learning materials in the classrooms:** specifically improving the quality of pedagogy, curriculum and pedagogically oriented learning materials and embedding soft materials both as a means and as an end learning outcome, particularly in relation to employability skills (personal, creativeness, business, communication and thinking skills) in the curriculum, teacher training (**Output 2.1.1**), and
2. **Enhancing institutional capacity and resilience in emerging challenges** (such as natural disasters and pandemics), specifically focusing on improved quality and student learning outcomes of basic and secondary education by enhancing institutional capacity and resilience in emerging challenges, by contributing to Comprehensive School Support, Disaster Risk Reduction related plan and implementation channelled through UNICEF CPAP 2018-2022, repurposing the programme and budget in 2021 and 2022 to address the COVID-19 related learning loss, as well as providing additional support to GoN/MoEST for COVID-19 response activities. (**Output 2.1.2**).



Inputs under Outcome 2.1 include (ongoing and planned projects and other inputs):

- Support to the SSDP 2016-2021)
- Support to the SESP 2021-2030
- Support to the UNICEF Country Programme Action Plan 2018-2022
- Technical Support Cooperation to School Education Sector in Nepal (TECSES 2023-2027)
- Support to COVID-19 Education Sector Contingency Plan (2020-2021); institutional capacity enhancement and resilience for, e.g., adapting alternative learning methods, training and capacity building of MoEST staff and teacher trainers, as well as the development and distribution of materials;
- Policy Dialogue

Outcome 2.2: Access, equity and inclusiveness of education are strengthened and different needs are accommodated (replacing the 2016-2020 cycle Outcome 2.2: Improved equitable access to basic and secondary education). This result is intended to be achieved by:

1. **Improving capacity to address equitable access and participation and to ensure an inclusive learning environment**, specifically supporting the capacity of the MoEST and Centre for Education and Human Resource Development (CEHRD) is for them to be better equipped to address equitable access and participation in the most disadvantaged areas and to ensure an inclusive learning environment. (**Output 2.2.1**)

Inputs under Outcome 2.2 include (ongoing and planned projects and other inputs):

- Support to the SSDP 2016-2022;
- Support to the SESP 2022-2032;
- Support to UNICEF Country Programme Action Plan (2018-2022);
- TECSES (2023-2027);
- Support to COVID-19 Education Sector Contingency Plan (2020-2021);
- Policy Dialogue.

Support for Nepal's new SESP in 2022–2032 is in its starting phase. The Government of Nepal plans to finance around 90% of the plan. Finland will be one of eight donors with a contribution of 19 million euros (MEUR) between 2022 and 2026.

Support to the education component of UNICEF's Country Programme Action Plan 2023–2027 is 4.2 MEUR, targeting to improve education quality, equity, inclusiveness, and resilience.

Finland's current **risk analysis** of the situation in Nepal points to 'a high-risk environment' (MFA-Nepal). The risks are related to the political challenges of the transition to federalism, the weak implementation capacity of government, the potential for political instability, high dependency on remittances, inequalities, discrimination, social exclusion and the country's high vulnerability to



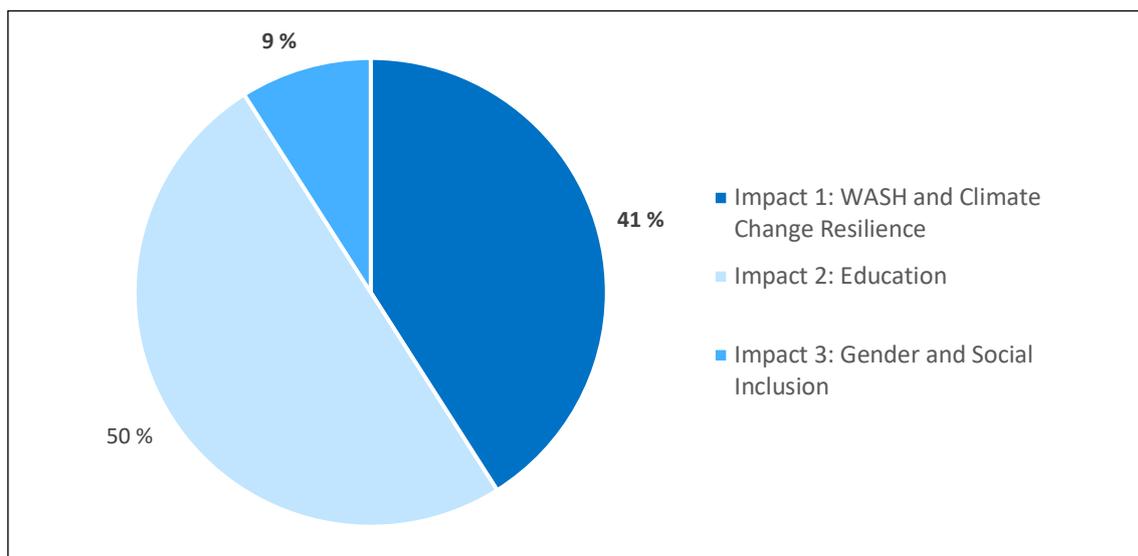
emergencies, climate change have all strategic, operative, and fiduciary implications for Finland's development cooperation in Nepal.

The fiduciary level risks include weak internal control, capacity for accounting, and financial reporting at the local governments and school levels. These risks are mitigated by active coordination with the Government of Nepal. Nepal remains committed to macroeconomic stability and coordinates its humanitarian-development nexus response measures with the International Development Partners Group and Financial Institutions. According to Finland's Country Programme, its implementation is expected to be monitored closely. The Country Programme monitoring and evaluation are expected to be done to understand how the Programme is performing in relation to planned results in order to direct the work towards the expected results, adjust as needed, learn and be accountable for the Country Programme results. As Country Programmes operate in complex and dynamic environments, monitoring the context and its implications on the validity of theories of change are also considered important. Monitoring and evaluation activities are identified in the monitoring and evaluation plan, which is updated and followed up regularly by MFA (KII: MFA-Nepal).

3.3 Funding for education

Finland's financial framework for the Country Programme for Nepal in 2021–2024 is approximately 56 MEUR. The financing plan covers funding channelled through bilateral assistance and planned at the country level under the Country Programme (Sector-Wide Approach, multi-bilateral cooperation, and bilateral projects). For example, core and thematic funding for multilateral organisations is not included. In addition, the financial framework does not include humanitarian aid, private sector instruments or Finnish CSOs' support. The share for education (Impact 2) is 50% (**Figure 1**).

Figure 1. MFA Financing in Nepal by Impact Areas 2021-2024 (total funds 56 MEUR)



Source: MFA: Nepal country programme 2021-2024



3.4 Instruments/channels used and Finland's key partners

The main signatory or competent authority for Finland's development cooperation is the Ministry of Finance of Nepal. The main executing/implementing partners regarding the education sector support are the GoN/MoEST and the CEHRD.

During the period under review, the following modalities were utilised to deliver education support sector-wide programmes (Sector-Wide Approach), a multi-bilateral programme, and a bilateral project (TA):

- Sector-Wide Approach:
 - The Support to the SSDP is a national education sector programme covering education from early childhood education to grade 12. Finland's contribution was 20 MEUR in 2016–2020;
 - SESP 2022-2032 is 19 MEUR for the first five years (2022-2026);
 - Support to Nepal's SSDP COVID-19 response (2.514 MEUR).
- **Multi-bilateral programme:**
 - Support to UNICEF Country Programme Action Plan (2018-2022)
- Bilateral project:
 - TECSES 2023-2027 launched end of 2023 (5 MEUR + EU contribution 5 MEUR);
 - Technical Assistance for Competence-Based Soft Skills Development in School Education in Nepal (TASS) 2019-2022 supported the Government of Nepal in including/integrating soft skills policy, curriculum and teacher training, as well as in developing and endorsing integrated curriculum for grades 1-3.

Country-level multilateral cooperation (multi-bilateral assistance). Finland started supporting UNICEF Nepal's Country Programme (2018-2022) in the education sector as part of Finland's Country Programme for 2021-2024. The education component of UNICEF's Country Programme (2018-2022) was aligned with the SSDP 2016–2022.

EU: Finland-EU's collaboration during SSDP is through subscription of some common Disbursement Linked Indicators (DLI), e.g., equity and inclusion/out-of-school children, i.e., only the programmatic collaboration based on cooperation in formulating and following similar protocols for achievements and verification of the results to decide the disbursements. The EU will partner in Finland's Technical Assistance (TA) TECSES project with a financial contribution of 5 MEUR and continue to subscribe to two DLIs (equity and teachers' professional development) in SESP 2022-2032. However, collaboration with the EU on TECSES falls outside the scope of the evaluation, as only the planning was ongoing when the evaluation was carried out.

Policy dialogue. Finland's practice for policy dialogue in Nepal is strong. Apart from direct discussion with the Government and multilateral organisations, the Joint Financing Partners (signatories of the JFA) and the wider group called Local Education Development Partners Group are Finland's key policy dialogue platforms in the education sector. The Local Education Development



Partners Group includes all Joint Financing Partners and non-Joint Financing Partners, such as the Association of International Non-Governmental Organisations and the National Campaign for Education Nepal (a coalition network of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO)/CSOs in Nepal).

Joint Financing Partners, including Finland, Non-Joint Financing partners, and other Development Partners (DP), are involved in the implementation of the Sector-Wide Approach to maximise effectiveness and synergy. The Joint Financing Partners rotate annually the roles of the focal point and co-focal point, leading and coordinating the Local Education Development Partners Group and communicating with GoN/MoEST. Improved learning outcomes, disability-inclusive education and strategizing to minimise learning loss during the COVID-19 pandemic and disaster situations were a key focus of policy dialogue, and Finland actively participated (document review; KIIs in Nepal). Finland co-chaired the Local Education Development Partners Group together with the EU in 2020/21. The Embassy actively engaged in various technical working groups and supported organising and conducting the annual Joint Review and Budget Review Missions. As Local Education Development Partners Group Co-Chair, Finland contributed to an expert group for the initial drafting of the new SESP of the federal and provincial government. Additional TA for SESP 2022-2032 development at the federal, provincial, and local levels was channelled through UNICEF programme funding.

Advocacy work and policy dialogue are important parts of Finland's engagement with Nepal. Strengthening equality, inclusion and non-discrimination, promoting social inclusion, and supporting the rights of the most marginalised groups are a cornerstone of Finland's policy dialogue (MFA 2021a). As one of the few EU and Nordic countries present in Nepal, and because of its long-term presence and support in the country, Finland can use its close relations with Nepal to engage in active dialogue around key policy issues. Finland conducts policy dialogue with the GoN bilaterally through regular contacts with relevant ministries and authorities (MFA 2021a; KIIs in Nepal).

Support to CSOs and projects in education. A number of Finnish CSOs¹⁴ provide programmatic or project-based education-related support and work in the impact area of education by supporting persons with disabilities and marginalised groups (e.g., language minorities).

HEI ICI instrument. Three HEI ICI projects supported by the MFA have contributed to the education sector development in Nepal:

- (a) Developing Pedagogy for 21st Century Skills is a HEI ICI project implemented by JAMK;
- (b) Bucsbin Project on Teacher Education implemented by OAMK;
- (c) Teacher Preparation Programme through Open and Distance Learning Mode for Enhancing Quality in Education (TTP-Nepal)

project enhances the quality and relevance of education in Nepal by improving access to teacher qualification upgrading programs via Open and Distance Learning.

Finnpartnership. Finnpartnership supports the Nepal-Finland Innovation Cluster on Education policy and administrative management. Finnpartnership project of GOInternational Finland is "A Nordic International Accelerator with a mission to create a platform of co-creation between Nordic innovations and emerging markets" (Finnpartnership 2023).

14 Such as Fida International, Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission and Finn Church Aid)



4 Findings for the period 2019-2023

4.1 Response (EQ1): measures taken by development partners in responding to the learning crisis and improving the quality of education (relevance, efficiency, coherence)

4.1.1. Relevance of development partners' efforts in terms of addressing the learning crisis and improving the quality of education

Shared priorities: The GoN's priorities on education have been consistently developed under the Sector-Wide Approach of SSDP 2016-2022 and SESP 2022-2032.

The SSDP 2016-2022 builds around three key components. Basic education aims to develop the physical, socio-emotional, cognitive, spiritual, and moral potential of all 4-12-year-old children by ensuring school readiness and universal access to quality basic education and promoting life skills and value-based education. Secondary education aims to make students ready for work by developing skilled human resources, providing options between technical and general secondary education, strengthening institutional links and facilitating the transition to higher education. Literacy and lifelong learning aim to enhance functional literacy and cultivate reading and learning habits among youths and adults.

The overall objectives of the SSDP, set to improve the equity, efficiency, governance and management of the education sector, are:

- **Equity:** To ensure that the education system is inclusive and equitable in terms of access, participation and learning outcomes, with a special focus on reducing disparities among and between groups identified as having the lowest levels of access, participation and learning outcomes;
- **Quality:** To increase students' learning by enhancing the relevance and quality of the learning environment, the curriculum, teaching and learning materials (including textbooks), teaching methods, assessment and examinations;
- **Efficiency:** To strengthen and reorient governance and management systems in the education sector to make them robust and accountable to local governments while assuring agreed overall minimum standards in teaching and learning processes and the learning environment;
- **Governance and management:** To accommodate the political and administrative restructuring of the education sector in line with the identified needs and the federal context and to ensure sustainable financing and strong financial management by introducing a cost-sharing modality between central, provincial, and local governments;



- **Resilience:** To mainstream comprehensive school safety and disaster risk reduction in the education sector by strengthening school-level disaster management and resilience amongst schools, students and communities to ensure that schools are protected from conflict.

Then again, the focus of SESP 2022-2032 is on improving the quality of education and access (equity) in education. It has two main objectives:

Objective 1: To ensure equitable access to and participation in quality pre-primary, basic- and secondary education for all children, especially those who are socially and economically disadvantaged, children from marginalised groups and children with disabilities (SESP, 2022-2032).

Objective 2: To enhance the quality and relevance of overall school education, ensuring minimum learning achievements for each child.

Assessment findings confirm that selected objectives in Finland's Country Programme are highly relevant in the Nepali context. Similarly, the interviews also confirm that the current sector program, SESP 2032, is 'owned' by the Government in its real sense. Finland, together with the Joint Financing Partners (JFP) has contributed to addressing the learning crisis with the endorsement of SESP 2022-2032.

The objectives for education in Finland's Country Programmes have been consistently developed. The programmatic elements have remained largely the same during the period of this evaluation. The current programme places more emphasis than the earlier programme on an inclusive education system, quality of pedagogy and embedding soft skills to enhance employability. Importantly, there is clearly more focus on resilience to address the challenges of a changing operational environment. These aspects also enhance relevance in view of the global discussion on the quality of education and resilience and important linkages between education and job opportunities.

Education is a standalone policy priority under the Country Programme impact areas. This implies the importance Finland places on education and its relevance in the Nepali context. Finland's thematic area of supporting teacher education in Nepal has long traditions. According to the interviews, there is good cooperation and communication between the MFA Headquarters, the Embassy, and the MoEST. This enhances keeping the support relevant, based on mutual understanding, and reacting to changing situations easier, e.g., in the case of the earthquake and COVID-19. The interviews indicate that Finland's strength is its flexible approach to addressing the needs of the actual situations in crises by working together with JFPs, especially UNICEF, which enhances the relevance of the support in changing contexts.

Finland is contributing to the inclusion of girls and/or children with disabilities, especially in the ongoing SESP 2022-2032, in line with its objective to focus on especially those who are socially and economically disadvantaged, children from marginalised groups and children with disabilities.

The two learning crises, the earthquake and COVID-19 have highlighted the need for more flexibility and adaption of the methods. *"After the COVID-19 outbreak, there was a learning crisis in Nepal. A joint effort of development partners was to support the continuation of learning of children despite the school closure. Finland has contributed to the UNICEF program to accelerate the support to education during the crisis. For example, toolkits were delivered through community facilities. They included multi-grade, multi-level and multi-lingual learning materials. Also, radio programs in education were developed as online and self-learning materials. Parents were also trained to*



support their children's learning at home" (KII: MFA). Regarding COVID-19, a joint effort of Joint Financing Partners supported the continuation of learning of children despite the school closure with specific measures.

Finland channelled support through HEI ICI during the crisis, focusing on online communication and distance learning. The relevance of HEI ICI programmes has been well demonstrated during COVID-19 since the instrument and the projects have greatly contributed to digitalisation and on-line provisions of higher education and supporting cooperation and contribution between higher education institutions during the crisis.

According to the interviews, the sector-wide programme (SSDP 2016-2022) related to 'girls' education, including those with disabilities and those in vulnerable positions' has not achieved the planned results. This is partly because of challenges related to access to challenging remote locations. For example, the CSOs are more agile in reaching out to LGs and schools in remote areas, but the Government has not fully recognised their role. This is planned to be improved in SESP 2022-2032, and the challenge has been recognised by MoEST (KII: MFA). The forthcoming TECSES project, together with the EU, partly addresses the challenge. However, it is primarily a teacher education technical assistance programme, which aims to teach teachers skills to better serve the needs of children with various learning needs.

4.1.2. Views on Finland's strengths and added value of collaborating with Finland in the education sector

Consistency of support: It is perceived by the interviewed Finland's development partners that Finland is, and has been, consistently supporting Nepal's education sector. It has been working, in coordination, towards the same goals with the GoN and the donors and has an important role in supporting the education sector's development. Finland has actively pushed for the reform of curriculum to improve the quality of education. In the current sector plan SESP 2022-2032 and in TA TECSES in cooperation with the EU, Finland will support teacher education to improve the quality and inclusion of education with a special focus on children with disabilities.

Flexibility: Finland has proven flexibility to adapt to new situations in Nepal. During the COVID-19 outbreak, Finland contributed to addressing the crises with UNICEF by repurposing the fund to address COVID-19-led learning loss and support to children and other JFPs to accelerate the support. Finland has addressed the COVID-19 crisis with additional funding to SSDP for the implementation of the Education Sector Contingency Plan (2020-2021). As part of HEI ICI, Finland has flexibly supported institutions to transfer to an online mode of development and communication to support the online and distance education provision.

Providing sector support: In the school sector, Finland, with other donors, has supported integrated curriculum development. As a result, an integrated system and methodology have been developed, which, e.g., the United States Agency for International Cooperation (USAID) has started to follow in their education development in Nepal. Finland has developed a system and guidelines for curriculum development, which has become a standard and has been taken up and followed by the Nepal Government (KII: MFA).



Availability of expertise (providing TA support): Finland's added value has included defining the digital scope in Higher Education. It has made higher education programs in Nepal more relevant and supported to develop, e.g., thesis, curriculum design and integrated curriculum. The specific added value has been the co-design and co-creation of methodologies used in curriculum design and teaching, which have expanded the Higher Education (HE) training offer. For example, as a follow-up, one of the companies interviewed is working with the HEI ICI co-creation method with 12 local governments. Finland's added value has been to support the development of Master program courses in education and to integrate digital programs in the HE system. *"The support in digitalisation was beneficial during COVID-19 since the university staff could work with online meetings in the HEI ICI programme"* (KII: HE).

Focus on inclusive education and CSOs: Finland's added value in supporting CSOs is specifically related to equity and inclusion in education. Findings suggest that CSOs can more flexibly than government programmes address ethnicity and gender, which are drivers of inequalities in education, especially in remote areas. CSO interventions are more adapted to specific needs. This experience on how to better include marginalised populations can be shared with the Government (KII: CSO).

4.1.3 Timely implementation of planned interventions

The document review indicates that the launch of the new SESP 2022-2032 was postponed by a year until 2022. SSDP 2016-2021 was finalised in 2021, which was earlier than planned due to the challenges. The period from 2021 to 2022 has been a transition year for Finland to conclude all SSDP DLIs and prepare the SESP 2022-2032, which was finalised in July 2022. There have been some delays in SSDP due to the introduction of the federal system and COVID-19, which came unexpectedly, dismantled the teacher training and management system, and caused school closures during the pandemic.

Finland timely adapted its support to the changing context caused by COVID-19. Finland could flexibly channel the funding, e.g. in SSDP, UNICEF and HEI ICI programmes. Activities were timely continued by supporting teachers with digital learning, supporting children with home-based materials, etc.

DLIs have been used to measure progress for, e.g., out-of-school children and improvement of quality of education. Multilaterals such as the World Bank and ADB have been using DLIs for disbursements since the beginning, and the same goes for the EU. Finland was the only bilateral donor that took the indicators in use to monitor the progress and make a linkage to disbursement. Later, the World Bank and USAID also adopted a specific indicator on equity, which Finland used from the beginning (KII: MFA).

4.1.4 Mainstreaming of cross-cutting objectives in planned interventions

Finland's strategic goals for the Country Strategy Period are to reduce inequalities by addressing the connections between gender, disability, discrimination and other forms of exclusion and marginalisation.



Inclusion. Disability inclusion is at the heart of Impact Areas 2 and 3 in Finland’s Country Programme. Finland has strongly contributed to policy dialogue to improve the focus on children with disabilities and other vulnerable children in remote areas both in the new SESP 2022-2032 sector programme and in the planned bilateral TA support (TECSES 2023-2027).

Article 31 of the Constitution of Nepal, B.S. 2072 has ensured access to compulsory and free education for all, including children and persons with disabilities. Persons with different needs, such as hearing and visual impairments, will have rights to education using sign language and Braille script. While the constitution delegates the responsibility of providing and managing education for children with disabilities to local governments, it is unclear how this will impact the goal of inclusive education. The decentralisation of political and administrative systems, including the education system, has been transferred to local governments. Students with disabilities, as well as those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, remote areas, marginalised castes, and disadvantaged ethnic groups, are expected to face disproportionate challenges in accessing education. There exists a significant gap in access to education for these groups (KIIs in Nepal).

Gender. Gender inclusion is a priority in Finland’s Country Programme in Nepal. Gender has been a key indicator in SSDP. The GPI score at the basic and secondary education levels (0.99 and 1.00, respectively) indicates that Nepal’s education sector development has been gender-responsive (SESP 2022-2032). Gender parity was already achieved before SSDP. In completion rates and net enrolment to the secondary level, girls are starting to outperform boys. Importantly, national-level data hides a lot of regional differences. Although national-level parity has been achieved, specific issues regionally, e.g., related to menstruation, still make it difficult for girls to attend school every day.

Climate resilience. Impact 1 of the Nepal Country Programme addresses climate resilience in terms of Communities’ improved climate resilience and health through sustainable water supply, sanitation, hygiene and livelihood development. Under Impact Area 2, comprehensive school safety and disaster risk reduction are incorporated in cooperation with UNICEF and SSDP 2016-2022.

In December 2019, climate education was included for the first time in Nepal’s education goals in the national curriculum developed and published by the Education Ministry’s Curriculum Development Center (CDC). The goal is to “prepare citizens [to be] capable of reducing possible risks and managing disasters while being aware of climate change, natural and manmade disasters.” However, multiple education experts and schoolteachers from across Nepal state that access to educational resources on climate change remains limited, and progress has been more positive in the higher education levels (The Third Pole, 2023).

4.1.5 Synergies created between cooperation instruments

MFA channels support to Nepal’s education sector using several instruments. The sector support and support channelled through GPE are the main financial support systems. In addition, support is channelled through bilateral TA, HEI ICI, CSO funding and others.

The Country Programme notes that different forms of support to public institutions, private sector and civil society organisations will be promoted where applicable. Nevertheless, interviews and project documents do not mention cooperation between instruments. For example, the interviews indicate that synergies could be improved between, e.g. HEI ICI and bilateral TA, focusing on co-creation to support job creation and employability. HEI ICI methodology could support women micro-entrepreneurs in designing their businesses for the local market (visit to KUSOM College). The



interviewees suggest improved cooperation between different instruments to improve the relevance of programming by engaging different types of institutions and target groups in development cooperation across the different layers of society. However, this is challenging and not easily achievable, as the instruments are scattered under different institutions and MFA departments and programs.

Institutions also in Nepal work in silos. Interviewees suggest that there is a need for enhanced engagement and involvement across the Ministries. For example, HE and TVET are not properly linked (KII: MFA). It was noted during the interviews that HEI ICI actors in HE do not know about the SESP developments in general education, even though students progress from school to higher education. *‘To make HE colleges in teaching to work with the school sector, we could use more pulling HE and TVET together to make linkages with the education sub-sectors beyond the swap (Sector-Wide Approach)’* (KII: UNICEF).

4.2 Result (EQ2): effectiveness of the measures taken by Finland

4.2.1 Effectiveness of interventions in thematic areas

Thematic area 1: (Country Programme Outcome 2.1: Improved quality of education and student learning outcomes in basic and secondary education).

The Country Team’s overall progress rating for this outcome is satisfactory (MFA Annual Results Report, 2022) (**Table 2**).

Table 2. Effectiveness rating – Outcome 2.1

EXPECTED RESULTS	RATING: 2021	2022	2023	2024
Outcome 2.1:	S↓			
Output 2.1.1 Improved quality of pedagogy, curriculum and learning materials/environment in the classrooms	S↓			
Output 2.1.2 Enhanced institutional capacity and resilience in emerging challenges (such as natural disasters and pandemics)	S↓			

Rating guide (colour codes):

- G Good** (fully on track, no need to adjust plans and/or strategies), i.e. achievement of over 80% of the target.
- S Satisfactory** (generally on track - but adjustments and/or speeding up necessary), i.e. achievement of 60-80% of the target.
- U Unsatisfactory** (off track – major corrective measures are necessary), i.e. achievement of 0-60 % of the target.

Source: MFA Results Report 2021



According to the report, the year 2021 was challenging for the impact area. There was a delay in completing the SSDP 2016-2022 and the start of SESP 2022-2032. Many of the SSDP activities, especially those under DLIs were not achieved and were pending verification due to COVID-19-led school closures and travel restrictions across the country. As a result, the two major DLI partners (ADB and World Bank) decided to wait until July 2022 to accomplish their SSDP DLI-related pending works and support the launch of SESP from 2023 onwards.

Despite the pandemic situation and disruption of regular educational opportunities, the year 2021 witnessed a slight increase in children (50.9%) entering secondary education (G9-12) compared to 2020 (47.6%). The pandemic has influenced the GoN allocation in the education sector, as the health sector was a high priority and in need. Finland succeeded in disbursing as planned. This was possible due to the updated programme document, indicators, bilateral agreement, and budget division prepared already in 2020. These updates were made both because of the federalisation and COVID-19.

According to the interviews, the contribution to strengthening the capacities of teachers, schools and education providers to improve the quality of education has not been sufficiently effective due to the federalisation, dismantled structures in education administration, and teacher training institutional system (lack of Education Act) as well as COVID-19 restrictions and closure of schools. There has been limited progress in enhancing learning outcomes, and there is a concern that the quality of education might decline. Addressing this challenge requires investments in professional training for teachers and ensuring that schools meet the minimum requirements for effective learning environments. However, these critical measures have not been fully implemented as of yet (KII: UNICEF).

Thematic area 2: Country Programme Outcome 2.2: Access, equity and inclusiveness of education are strengthened and different needs are accommodated (mother-tongue, caste, disability, gender, and pre-primary education).

According to the MFA Results Report (2022), Finland’s support to the outcome area through sector programmes and the UNICEF education programme under the Country Programme Action Plan 2018-2022 has been good overall (**Table 3**).

Table 3. Effectiveness rating – Outcome 2.2

EXPECTED RESULTS	RATING: 2021	2022	2023	2024
Outcome 2.2:	G↓			
Output 2.2.1 Improved capacity to address equitable access and participation and to ensure an inclusive learning environment	G↓			

Rating guide (colour codes):

- G Good** (fully on track, no need to adjust plans and/or strategies), i.e. achievement of over 80% of the target.
- S Satisfactory** (generally on track - but adjustments and/or speeding up necessary), i.e. achievement of 60-80% of the target.
- U Unsatisfactory** (off track – major corrective measures are necessary), i.e. achievement of 0-60 % of the target.

Source: MFA Results Report 2022



Targeted results are progressing, except that the educational equity index is missing data for 2020/2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and related disruptions. However, other results show impressive progress despite the challenging situation. In 2021, there are some discrepancies in the number of students receiving midday meals, but it seems it is the same as in 2020 (2,058,763), a bit lower than the target in 2021 (2,260,780). The nationwide out-of-school children aged 5-12 years were reduced to 5.4%, close to the target 2021 (5%), a significant reduction compared to 2020 (6.2%).

The SSDP final evaluation acknowledges that the SSDP 2016-2022 has convincingly addressed the challenges in reducing social disparity by including children with disabilities and out-of-school children at the basic level. A Consolidated Equity Strategy for the School Sector in Nepal was prepared (DoE 2014), including issuing an Equity Index and corresponding monitoring system (Education Management Information System) and annual implementation plans (Annual Work Plan and Budget, AWPB). The SSDP 2016-2022 lists various measures to be taken in addition to the above key measures. The situation has improved, but serious challenges remain to be addressed related to access.

Participation of children from groups in disadvantaged positions, such as Dalit and Janajati, has increased. However, challenges remain in having adequate learning environments and materials for students with different types of disabilities and needs. It continues to be important to support and monitor these areas in the coming years, as disparities still exist.

During SSDP 2016-2022 programming, progress has been achieved as indicated. The Gross Enrolment Rate of Dalit students has increased in basic and secondary levels: 19.6% in grades 1–5, 15.6% in grades 6–8, 12.6% in grades 9–10 and 9.7% in grades 11–12. Likewise, the gross enrolment ratio of various Janajati communities has increased: 33.4% in grades 1–5, 37.3% in grades 6–8, 37.3% in grades 9–10 and 38.5% in grades 11–12. Compared to the proportions of these groups in the population, the gross enrolment ratio of Dalit students in grades 11–12 seems low, whereas the proportions of Janajati and Dalits in other grades seem high compared to their proportion in the population. Teachers representing minority communities have been appointed for Dalit, Janajati and Madhesi ethnic minority communities for improved inclusion of diverse groups (SESP 2023-2032).

Finland is not supporting secondary-level TVET in Nepal. According to the interviews, TVET is an underdeveloped and under-supported sector in Nepal's education sector. In this respect, Finland could do more TVET development cooperation to support the economy to reduce export labour, e.g., to take one TVET level at a time. COVID-19 showed that the economy lost remittances due to travel restrictions; therefore, VET supporting economic growth in Nepal is important. School-based TVET stream shall get some share from Finland as well, as Finland 60% of the total funding for SSDP 2016-2022 is utilised for SSDP's overall PRF activities, which includes school-based TVET (9-12) stream.

4.2.2 Effectiveness of instruments/channels

Effectiveness of sector support SSDP/SESP: Finland supports the education sector within the Sector-Wide Approach, continuing from SSDP 2016-2022 to SESP 2022-2032. As part of the sector support, Finland aims to ensure that sector coordination mechanisms work effectively, thereby ensuring clarity on shared priorities, effective policy dialogue, shared learning, improved institutional memory and improved aid effectiveness.



There has been a continuous improvement in the targets for Access, Quality and Equity of basic education in SSDP (2016-2022) (**Table 4**).

Table 4. Targets for Access, Quality and Equity of Basic Education in SSDP 2016-2022

OUTCOME	INDICATOR	BASELINE 2016 %	TARGET 2021 %	ACTUAL 2021 %
Access	Gross enrolment rate in Grades 1 – 5	135.5	125.5	121.97
	Net enrolment rate in Grades 1 – 5	96.6	98.5	96.85
	Gross enrolment rate in Grades 1 – 8	120.1	110	116.31
	Net enrolment rate in Grades 1 – 8	89.4	97	95.1
	Rate of completing basic level	69.6	85	76.23
Quality	Reading competence in Grade 3	12	15.6	35
	Learning achievements in Grade 8 (Nepali, Math, English) Average score %	48	57	69
		35	55	46
		41	55	-
Literacy rate of children above 15	57	75	57	
Equity	Gender Parity Index, Grades 1-8, Ratio	1	1	0.99
	Gender Parity Index, Grades 9-12, Ratio	99	1	1.01
	Female teacher ratio at the basic level	38.8	45	47.20
	Female teacher ratio at the secondary level	15.1	20	20

Source: SESP 2030, MoEST, 2022.

Multilateral partnership with UNICEF: In order to mitigate the implications of school closures, specific measures were taken in collaboration with the Joint Financing Partners as part of the SSDP 2016-2022 to address the emerging need to continue education (KII: MFA-Nepal). In this context, the partnership between UNICEF and Finland proved to be extremely relevant and effective over the past years. Under this model, Finland provides non-earmarked support to UNICEF's Country Programme Action Plan across education, WASH and cross-cutting themes, such as gender and inclusion.

Cooperation has allowed UNICEF to adapt and respond efficiently and effectively to the extremely challenging context that continued throughout the country in 2021. In the education sector, UNICEF supported alternative learning approaches during school closures, such as home and community-based teaching modalities and the learning continuity campaign. UNICEF also provided direct and indirect support to children experiencing the largest loss of learning, particularly in Madhesh, Lumbini, Karnali and Sudurpaschim provinces. This included providing 3,500 young children in the



most disadvantaged areas with early childhood tele-teaching and benefitted 48,000 parents through a parenting education radio series. In addition, UNICEF distributed 110,000 self-learning materials, trained 3,200 teachers on psychosocial support, and provided individual student kits to 5,800 adolescent girls under the Girls' Access to Education programme (UNICEF Annual Report, 2021).

Policy dialogue: Finland's partnership with UNICEF adds to the effectiveness of multilateral influencing in the education sector in Nepal. According to the interviews, UNICEF's partnership with Finland allows it to go out of the 'reporting' burden towards more strategic discussion as a partner and have TA for the grant. It allows more time for strategic planning than reporting. *"There is teaming up a lot, work in thematic Working Groups, and coordination with like-minded people and institutions. We can benefit from each other's strengths in multi-lateral programming"* (KII: UNICEF).

The Embassy is the key actor in Finland's country-level policy dialogue with all the key partners as it is very active in this respect.

Effectiveness of HEI ICI instrument: The effectiveness of HEI ICI programmes has been well demonstrated during COVID-19, and the instrument and the projects have greatly contributed to digitalisation and online provisions of higher education, supporting cooperation and contribution between higher education institutions during the crisis.

Interviews indicate that HEI ICI has good management and administration and good cooperation between the Finnish institutions (MFA, Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI), Embassy) and GoN MoEST. Nevertheless, synergies with different financing instruments and projects are weak. Linkages with public-private partnerships should be improved to enhance effectiveness. Networking between Finland's instruments and actors would support developing follow-up measures and thereby improve the efficiency and sustainability of achieved results. For example, it was noted that CSOs could greatly benefit from HEI ICI programming and their methodologies that are well taken up by the local institutions and have produced strengthened capacities to support, e.g. employability. On the other hand, it is also noted that the limited resources of the Embassy may not allow measures required for enhanced coordination, coherence, and synergy across the different instruments.

Effectiveness of CSOs: CSOs are active partners in Finland's programming in Nepal, working closely with the Embassy. CSOs are, e.g., members of the JFP working group in government teacher education. There is an international NGO association in Nepal, which is perceived as important in the advocacy work. The CSOs point out that some of them have strong education expertise, however, only in a narrow thematic or geographic scope. It is easier for CSOs to operate at the local government level (federalisation), and it provides more value for their financial contribution than other arrangements (e.g. support to GPE). The CSOs point out that the GoN should acknowledge the CSO's cooperation with schools since they have better outreach to remote areas and schools. CSOs are likely to have stronger support and contribution in the forthcoming bilateral TA TECSES Project.

Effectiveness of multi-actor approaches and their cumulative and synergistic effects: According to the Embassy, there are several innovative partnership models, but no clear lessons are available yet. There is, however, a high need for support. Private sector cooperation is just emerging, and in federalisation, there are some opportunities; e.g., UNICEF is planning to establish an innovation hub at the local level. A challenge is that there is no previous culture to work with the private sector. There are some new private schools, and the reputation is that they are better than the public schools (increasing inequalities at risk). They might be ready to do some private-sector



cooperation. Nepal will graduate from LDC to a middle-income country in 2026, and some opportunities may arise for private-sector cooperation. As the Government aims to bring all the actors under a common umbrella, this would increase buy-in and motivation to cooperate with the private sector and improve the enabling environment to do so.

Education sector support (Sector-Wide Approach) is an example of the multi-actor approach in Nepal, although without the private sector. In addition, the support channelled through UNICEF as a COVID-19 response serves as an example. This has enabled Finland to participate in joint missions (EU, Finland and UNICEF visiting the projects together). Joint missions are more efficient, especially when visiting local governments, and this is the plan for the future (KII: EU).

4.3 Future (EQ3): outlooks for better results

4.3.1 Emerging needs and future thematic areas requiring Finland's support (financial and expertise)

The sector programming shows an increasing focus towards equity, inclusion, and access. This is already a strong thematic focus area of Finland's support. Stakeholders feel this is Finland's added value, and support should continue. The selected country programme's impact areas and outcomes are solid. However, more focus could be put on TVET and digitalisation. As Finland already supports the inclusion of soft skills in the curriculum to enhance the employability of students, supporting the TVET sector, in general, could be an option.

The double nexus is important in a country prone to crises caused by earthquakes and flooding and the population living in very distant areas with difficult access.

Fragmentation is also an issue regarding instruments used by MFA. Accordingly, there is a need for more holistic programming involving different key stakeholders in planning. This is challenging as the instruments are scattered under the different institutions and units, e.g., HEI ICI from EDUFI, MFA CSO etc.

There is no strategy or concrete tools to cooperate between the different instruments. There is also commercial cooperation (Finnpartnership, Team Finland, etc.), but not even the Embassy knows all the activities under these instruments.

4.3.2 Future measures to strengthen the multi-actor approach and set up

Potential future programming using a multi-actor approach. Several innovative partnership modalities exist, but there are no clear lessons yet. Private-sector cooperation in public-private partnerships is just emerging, and it is expected to open up further in the post-LDC period. Finland should continue the development in the thematic area of teacher education (based on Finland's expertise), supporting inclusive education in multi-lateral cooperation with UNICEF. Teacher education could focus on special needs (SEN teachers) in the bilateral TECSES 2023-2027 programme.



Another field of future programming could be teacher training in TVET, which would contribute to jobs and growth in Nepal's economy. These areas might also provide possibilities for private sector engagement in the future (e.g., digitalisation; TVET sector digital piloting). In addition, UNICEF is planning to establish an innovation hub at the local level, which might provide some possibilities for cooperation in TVET.

A challenge is that the culture of working with the private sector in Nepal is only emerging. Currently, there are some new private schools which might be able to partner in the multi-actor approach with the EdTech providers. According to the current development cooperation policy, development cooperation grant financing has not been used for private schools as students there are more privileged, and the focus has been on the most marginalised. Currently, there is no real demand for the involvement of the EdTech actors in the education sector as a public good. It is expected that with Nepal's upgraded status in 2026, opportunities might arise. Currently, the Government of Nepal aims to bring all the education sector actors under a common umbrella, including the private sector. This buy-in and motivation to potentially work with the private sector and/or EdTech actors in the education sector improves the enabling environment.



5 Implications for the main report

5.1 Summary of summative findings (EQ 1 and 2)

The priorities of the Government of Nepal and its development partners are relevant in terms of addressing the learning crisis, given their shared focus on the quality of education, access and equity. Finland's Country Programme has remained relevant in a changing country context affected by earthquakes and the COVID-19 pandemic, i.e., multi-crises context. The focus in the current Country Programme is even more than before on inclusion. One of the main drivers for the relevant response to the learning crisis is coherence between the measures taken by the development partners.

Through consistent support over the years and using sector support as a channel, Finland has a stronger position than its funding size would imply to carry on policy dialogue and multilateral influencing. The role played by the Embassy in the joint donor groups is highly appreciated by its partners.

In addition to Finland's branding related to its domestic education system and its focus on human rights, gender and disability, the perceived strengths and added value of Finland include consistency of support, flexibility, and willingness to respond timely in changing situations as well as its support in government-led education sector reforms. With the current federalisation process in Nepal, Finland's experience in decentralised education governance is highly appreciated.

The COVID-19 impacted the timely implementation of the Country Programme. However, the timely implementation of the response support in collaboration with UNICEF is evidence of adaptive programming and underlines its importance.

The cross-cutting objectives of non-discrimination and gender inclusion are integral to Finland's Country Programme. Finland's added value is evidenced in selecting the areas in the education sector which have created less interest among other donors. This is especially the case related to disability, which Finland is focusing on increasingly. Climate resilience is not visible in Finland's support in the education sector support and could be better featured in the future.

Different funding instruments to deliver support are used in Nepal, but the way they are used and implemented, beyond the bilateral assistance and country-level cooperation with selected multi-lateral organisations, is scattered. Synergies between instruments are weak, if any. There is a need for further strategic thinking on which instrument fits best to the needs and how they can be best used to achieve the targets set for the Country Programme's thematic areas. That would require more coherent programming, including joint planning. Currently, the management of different instruments is very scattered within and outside MFA, which is a challenge to more coherent programming. However, synergies should not be created for synergy's sake but after careful consideration.



In terms of results in thematic areas, Finland has contributed to addressing the learning crisis through policy dialogue and targeted financing for gender- and disability-inclusive education, as well as curriculum development. Its selected thematic areas are well-thought-of and have been effective. It is notable that youth-focused TVET is not part of Finland's support, although Finland has expertise in this thematic area. Finland has supported the inclusion of soft skills in the curriculum, which the MoEST adopted and started to introduce gradually from early grades. This is intended to contribute to enhanced employment opportunities, although the outcomes in this regard have not been conclusively demonstrated. In the future, this might also provide opportunities for the participation of the private sector, although private sector involvement is in the very initial stages.

Finland has aimed to improve the quality of education and student learning outcomes in basic and secondary education. Capacities of teachers, schools and education providers have been strengthened. However, there is no clear-cut evidence of improvement in learning outcomes. Teacher training has not been effective due to federalisation and reduced Teacher Training Centres (from 29 to 7). In the SESP 2022-2032, the priority is on teacher education for improved quality.

HEI ICI has been supporting effectively the digital higher education provisions, which is also Finland's added value to Nepal's education sector. HEI ICI has supported the development, e.g. professional thesis design, curriculum design and integrated curriculum. HEI ICI has also successfully introduced the methodology of co-design and co-creation for higher education institutions to serve the different needs of society better.

In Nepal, there are only limited examples, if any, of the multi-actor approach. Several innovative partnership models have been introduced, but there are no clear lessons yet. Private sector cooperation is just emerging, and in federalisation, there might be some opportunities in the future; e.g., UNICEF is planning to establish an innovation hub at the local level. A challenge is that there is no culture to work with the private sector. Nepal's graduation from LDC to a middle-income country in 2026 might provide opportunities for private-sector involvement.

In addition, the same as with potential synergies, if there are separate instruments for different purposes and they are administered from different sources, it might not be realistic to implement a multi-actor approach in its real meaning. If partners are defined separately and conditionalities imposed, the multi-actor approach might not work (e.g., for CSOs getting money if they cooperate; this goes against the principle that they are independent actors).

CSOs have the potential to work in more distant areas to address access, especially in the case of disability. Their role could be thought of more strategically as CSOs are members of the Government working group of teacher education.

5.2 Summary of findings for formative/futures-thinking (EQ 3)

There is sensitivity to the formation of a new kind of relationship (Vietnam as an example) as a result of Nepal's graduation from the LDC. There is a lot of push for international donors to pull out, which brings to the question of the sustainability of the achieved results, including Finland's investments. The risk of donors pulling out, as was the case, e.g., in Vietnam, is real, and it is



highly unlikely that Nepal can sustain a good trajectory with their own financing. Finland's position is strong in Nepal, which gives an opportunity to become even more visible in the education sector development and be a model for sustainable support in education. This country case study is not a full-fledged country evaluation, which would be required to assess sustainability in-depth.

In view of Nepal's graduation in 2026, the progress made until now, and possible funding cuts, it would be advisable to continue supporting the already selected thematic areas, which have proven to be well-selected considering their relevance in the country context and are based on Finland's expertise and added value. Supporting the Government's Sector-Wide Approach and multilateral cooperation (either/or contribution to their Country Programmes or on multi-bilateral terms) with UNICEF has been effective and should continue.

When thinking of Nepal's post-LDC period, the key issue is what the new type of cooperation entails. More focus is then on the trade and involvement of the private sector. However, this does not happen on its own. Finland should start developing the support system already now. Interviews carried out imply that currently, Team Finland has no real brand in Nepal, and it is not visible. Its role is not clear, and there is scepticism about Finland's participation. There is a concern about how Team Finland's operations would benefit Finland and what would be Finland's added value, recognition, profile, and visibility in the new scenario (KIIIs).

Opportunities for future programming using multi-actor approaches in Nepal are currently limited but developing. This is especially related to the private sector (Public Private Partnerships+). The government is expected to be opening up after graduation from LDC status in 2026. Opportunities where Finland already has experience in Nepal could be in the areas of digital learning and piloting TVET sub-sector digital training solutions. This would also require the demand and interest of the private sector and/or EdTech actors to engage in still quite high-risk, fragile contexts.



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PALESTINE CASE STUDY

CRIANA CONNAL



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Acronyms and abbreviations

BRAVE	Building Resilience and Addressing Violence from Early Years Through Adolescence
CPA	Community Protection Approach
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DLP	Digital Learning Platform
ECHO	European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
EU	European Union
FCA	Finn Church Aid
HDP	Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus
HEI ICI	Higher Education Institutions Institutional Cooperation Instrument
ICHR	Independent Commission for Human Rights
IFC	International Finance Corporation
JFA	Joint Financing Agreement
KVS	The Finnish Lifelong Learning Foundation
MFA	Ministry for Foreign Affairs
MoE	Ministry of Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OPT	Occupied Palestinian Territories
PA	Palestinian Authority
TEI	Team Europe Initiative
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
TWB	Teachers Without Borders
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
WBPC	West Bank Protection Consortium
VET	Vocational Education and Training



1 Introduction

The **purpose** of the case study is two-fold. First, to generate findings from the perspective of key informants in a purposive sample of Finland's long-standing Country Partners; these findings serve as an additional evidence stream for the evaluation, supplementing global findings presented in the main report. Second, the case study generates findings to develop a 'Contribution Story' as a critical instance of the ways in which the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland's (MFA) Country Programmes, support and strengthen and influence (or not) Finland's Education Development Co-operation and related policy. A cross-analysis of the case studies is found in 5.1.2 of the main report.

In line with the purpose, the overall **methodology** is theory-based contribution analysis, using a 'nested' theory of change as a vehicle for the development of a country-specific Contribution Story (see Chapter 2 of the main report for details). The Contribution Stories are grounded in the results frameworks presented in Finland's Country Programmes for the respective case countries. These programmes guide and monitor the delivery of specific Impact Areas of development cooperation, which feed into the larger strategic objectives identified in the Country Strategy.

The main **methods** used by the evaluation team were targeted document review and interviews; the **scope** of the Case Study is based on a sample of Official Development Assistance (ODA) and non-ODA interventions (the full list of sampled interventions is found in the Annex 3 in the main report, and it is based on the lists of interventions received from the MFA). The interviews were conducted in person (by the national evaluator) and remotely (by the team lead) with staff responsible for the following ODA interventions:

- Support for implementation of the Education Sector Strategic Plan for 2017-2022 through a Joint Financing Agreement between the Palestinian Authority, Finland, Germany, Ireland, and Norway;
- United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund's (UNICEF) Building Resilience and Addressing Violence from Early Years through Adolescence (BRAVE);
- The Finnish Lifelong Learning Foundation (KVS);
- Suomen YMCA:n liitto ry; and
- The Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR).

The team also interviewed staff engaged in the following, identified by the Representative Office of Finland in Palestine as key complements to the achievement of Outcomes in the Country Programme (a full list of interviewees is found in Annex 2 in the main report).

- The Higher Education Institutions Institutional Cooperation Instrument (HEI ICI) Project 'Teacher Education without Walls – New models for STEM and Teacher Education in the Digital age' (OLIVE);
- The Teachers Without Borders (TWB) programme, managed by Finn Church Aid (FCA);



- United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA); and
- The West Bank Protection Consortium.

Note, as a case study rather than a full evaluation, this report does not provide a definitive performance assessment of the Finnish education sector assistance in Palestine during 2019-2022. Rather, it offers limited insights, generated through a systematic approach, to inform the wider evaluation, particularly the development of a 'story' of the contribution of Palestine's Country Programme to MFA's higher-level outcomes.



2 Country and sector context

2.1 Brief overview of country context

The Oslo Accords, under which the Palestinian Authority (PA) was created in 1994, were intended to lead to a final negotiated settlement between the parties. Over 25 years later, the PA operates as a transitional authority with fragmented authority in the West Bank (divided into Areas A, B and C) and is de facto absent from many aspects of the Gaza Strip. Key 'final status' issues to be resolved through negotiations include borders, security arrangements, the rights of Palestine refugees, the status of Jerusalem, Israeli settlements and control of water resources (MFA, 2020b).

The last general elections in Palestine were held in 2006; a violent confrontation in 2007 saw the intra-Palestinian split between the Fatah-controlled PA in the West Bank and the Hamas-administered Gaza Strip, followed by further hostilities in 2012, and no direct negotiations with Israel since 2014. The presidential dismissal of the entire judiciary and establishment of a transitional Judicial Council in 2019 has seen an increasing concentration of powers in the executive, accompanied by restricted freedoms for Palestinian civil society.

Palestine is at the confluence of a political deadlock, internal divisions leading to de-legitimised leadership and both fiscal and environmental crises, as well as being vulnerable to unpredictable geopolitical currents¹⁵. This has resulted in a '**de-development trajectory**', signalled by high levels of frustration, recurrent waves of violence and a strong sense of despair, particularly amongst youth (EU, 2021).

2.2 Education sector challenges and achievements

The Education Sector Strategic Plan 2017-2022 sets out strategies to develop 'a modern, dynamic, student-centred learning environment based on sound educational assessment systems, skills and competencies transfer, diversified learning and teaching methods and results-based educational management'. As part of this case study, the evaluation team has, among other information sources, analysed data on the current status of the Palestinian MoE's key performance indicators as well as first-hand insights from key ministry officials on the sector's achievements and main constraints.

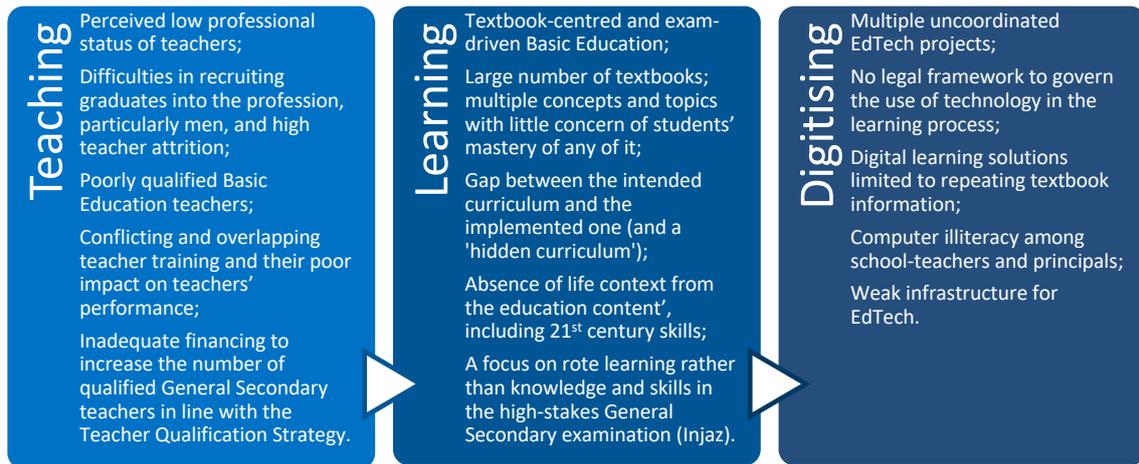
Figure 1 shows key challenges identified in the Basic and Secondary sub-sectors. These are shared challenges for many fragile and lower-middle-income countries (where there often is a high dependency on external assistance). Yet underpinning these challenges is the 'exceptional situation', which raises a challenge that is uniquely Palestinian: the need to 'ensure protection for the students and teachers in schools in Area C and Jerusalem' (MoE, 2020). Indeed, children in

¹⁵ For instance, in 2019 all US assistance to the Palestinian people was stopped, leaving a funding gap for many humanitarian and development interventions.



Palestine are 'exposed to unacceptable levels of violence, exploitation and grave violations'; the two main sources of violence are: 'violence resulting from the occupation and ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict' and violence within Palestinian families and communities, including sexual abuse, early marriage, and child labour (UNICEF, 2019). Apart from physical injury, exposure to violence in the short and long term negatively impacts children's mental, emotional and behavioural well-being.

Figure 1. Key challenges in the Basic and Secondary sub-sectors



Source: MoE, 2017; MoE, 2020

The Education Sector Strategic Plan was revised in August 2020 and extended into 2023, introducing several new priority policy interventions. These include 'strengthening the wellbeing of students', which goes beyond children's health, socio-cultural values and psycho-social development to include 'consolidating affiliation and awareness of the Palestinian narrative', and an education assessment policy that 'seeks to move from the concept of evaluating education to evaluation for learning'. Building on lessons learned during school closures in 2020, efforts to accelerate the Digitisation Policy mentioned in the updated Education Sector Strategic Plan are accompanied by more 'low tech' distance learning interventions. We note that, as **Figure 1** suggests, the notion of 'modernising' Palestine's education system by means of education technology must go hand in hand with reforms that address systemic constraints in teaching and learning.

2.3 Key donors in the education sector

The ten main donors in Palestine, in order of volume of funds, are the European Union (EU), the United States, Saudi Arabia, Germany, the United Arab Emirates, Norway, the United Kingdom, the World Bank, Japan, and France. Finland works with most of the main donors in Palestine by means of the diverse channels mentioned in the introduction, which are elaborated below.



3 Finland's country programme

3.1 Country strategy/overall country programme

Finland's development cooperation in Palestine¹⁶ began more than 20 years ago, in the wake of the Oslo peace agreements, with the aim of supporting Palestinian state-building. The overall goal of **'a peaceful, negotiated two-state solution'** provided the wider framework for Finland's first Country Strategy (2016-2020) for development cooperation in Palestine (MFA-OPT, 2016). As prospects for advancing this goal have 'continued to diminish', state-building aimed at the two-state solution remains at the heart of Finland's Country Strategy (MFA-OPT-2021a).

Finland's early support targeted the newly established Palestinian Ministry of Education, and to this day, **education remains the main focus area of Finland's longstanding support**. For Finland, 'national unity, strengthening of Palestine's democratic foundations, and commitment to human development' are the basis on which the two-state solution may be built, and education is 'one of the cornerstones for a resilient society' (MFA-OPT-2021a). Specifically, Finland aims to **safeguard Palestinian children's right to quality inclusive education**, equipping young Palestinians with 'the values of active citizenship' and the 'higher order thinking skills' required to meet the inter-related challenges of 'state and institution building, sustainable development, conflict resolution and climate change' (MFA-OPT-2021a).

Finland contributes actively to the European Joint Strategy in the education sector and works with the MoE and donors, as well as with UNICEF, UNRWA and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), to promote the right to quality education for Palestinian children. Special attention is given to supporting the Palestinian Authorities (PA) in ensuring the availability of educational facilities in the whole of Palestine (Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and Area C) and protecting children's right to safe access to educational institutions. Finland also supports civil society and the participation of youth and women in society, promoting partnerships between Finnish and Palestinian education sector professionals, civil society and private actors.

Finland's current Country Programme underlines the importance of addressing the **'political drivers of fragility'** (MFA-OPT-2021b). These include the ongoing occupation and conflict, the blockade of Gaza, the structural obstacles to Palestinian development and weak 'ownership of democratically elected Palestinian leadership in tackling political and economic challenges' (MFA-OPT-2021b). Indeed, the evaluation team found that politics – both national and global – were never far from discussions on the education sector in Palestine; *"politics gets into everything at the end of the day everything gets politicised"* (Focus group discussion (FGD): JFA).

During 2021-2024, Finland's development cooperation in Palestine focuses on **three impact areas: education, an inclusive society and resilience**.

¹⁶ This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine.



Impact Area 1: Palestinian children’s right to quality inclusive education is safeguarded while supporting improved pedagogy and learning environments.

Impact Area 2: Finland contributes to inclusive state-building and a strong civil society by both strengthening public institutions and their accountability as duty bearers and by fostering an enabling environment for civil society and citizen participation, with a focus on women and youth.

Impact Area 3: The resilience of those Palestinian communities that are in the most vulnerable circumstances is supported by supporting livelihoods and living conditions, as well as protecting the humanitarian needs of Palestine refugees and Palestinians in Gaza, Area C, and East Jerusalem.

Under **Impact Area 1**, Finland’s support aims to increase **completion rates of primary and secondary education**, eliminate **gender disparities**, ensure **equal access** to education, and improve **teaching and learning environments**. This is in line with the main goals of Palestine’s Education Sector Strategic Plan (2017-2022).

3.2 Education focus of the country programme

NB: While the following describes the current Country Programmes, our findings below cover the evaluation period under review (2019-2022) and extend in some cases to 2023.

Impact in Area 1 (Children’s right to quality inclusive education safeguarded) requires progress towards the following outcome-level results.

Outcome 1.1. Equitable access to education at all levels is enhanced through better identification of disparities, more focused policies and targeted financing, as well as safe access to education. This result is intended to be achieved by means of:

- Improved access to preschool and basic education for children in vulnerable circumstances, specifically by contributing to the establishment of new preschool classrooms and inclusive education resource centres and supporting safe school transport in at-risk areas, and addressing violence from early learning through secondary schooling (**Output 1.1.1**).
- Reduced disparities in learning opportunities for boys and girls in secondary and vocational education, specifically by funding school construction in marginalised areas of Gaza and the West Bank and new vocational schools and stressing the need for evidence-based planning for more targeted programming and budgeting to better address known disparities in policy dialogue (**Output 1.1.2**).



Outcome 1.2. Teaching and learning pedagogy and environments are improved, ensuring that teachers are well trained, motivated and equipped; the assessment of learning outcomes is strengthened; and resources are available for a more student-centred pedagogy. This result is intended to be achieved by means of:

- Developing safe, inclusive and student-centred learning environments, specifically by financing through the Joint Financing Agreement (JFA) the renovation of schools, with resources and equipment to support active learning and extra-curricular activities; addressing violence in schools (through UNICEF's BRAVE project) through improved positive discipline, skills for conflict resolution, and student well-being; and stressing in policy dialogue the need for the implementation of a non-violence policy (**Output 1.2.1**).
- Improving teacher training and motivation specifically by promoting the continuous professional development of teachers (particularly pre-service teacher education in universities and school-based teacher development), and strengthening school supervision and support systems for schools; here, Finland shares its experiences on teacher training and the factors of its success with Palestine (**Output 1.2.2**).

Finland's **risk analysis** has identified 'a plethora' of strategic risks beyond the control of the Representative Office related to the political context, including:

- the annexation of Palestinian territory;
- the erosion of the Oslo framework;
- the disintegration of the PA, its legitimacy and financial capacity, along with its inability to function in Gaza, Area C and East Jerusalem; and
- the defamation and delegitimization attempts against aid to Palestine.

Operational risks are a consequence of measures taken by the occupying power (e.g., access and school demolitions) and are mitigated by continuous monitoring, systematic and principled political dialogue and the reallocation of resources. Fiduciary risks related to Public Financial Management capacity are mitigated by capacity-building efforts, strengthening the human resources of PA and its donor partners, and regular external audits.

Following MFA's Guidelines on Results-based Management, the Manual for Bilateral Programs and the Evaluation Guidelines **monitoring and evaluation** activities focus on monitoring changes in Area C, East Jerusalem and Gaza and internationally politicised development issues, such as Palestinian textbooks (discussed below).

3.3 Funding for education sector

The financial framework for 2021–2024 is approximately 28 million euros (MEUR), not including humanitarian aid, private sector instruments or support for Finnish Civil Society Organisations (CSO). Of this, 50% is allocated to Impact Area 1 (Quality Education for All) and disbursements amounted to 50 % of the annual country programme budget (MFA-OPT, 2021).



3.4 Instruments/channels used and Finland's key partners

During the period under review, the main instruments/channels and respective key partners were as follows.

Sector support for the implementation of the Education Sector Strategic Plan 2017-2022 is provided through the JFA between the PA, Finland, Germany, Ireland and Norway, with Finland serving as the Focal Point (Finland's contribution is MEUR 6, the total contribution for the third phase of the JFA is 22 MEUR). Introduced in 2014, the JFA requires partners to adhere to agreed principles of coordination and harmonisation (MoE, 2019b).

In line with the current European Joint Strategy for Palestine, in its **policy dialogue**, Finland emphasises the right to education for all, including children with disabilities, and the implementation of an inclusive education policy stressing the need for evidence-based planning for more targeted programming and budgeting to better address known disparities.

Through **multi-bilateral support** to UNICEF's BRAVE project, Finland helps to strengthen outreach to out-of-school children, provide child-friendly and gender-sensitive early childhood learning spaces, and promote parental awareness on the rights of children with disabilities (1.6 MEUR annually).

Bilateral programme support is provided to the ICHR (550,000 EUR).

The Country Programme includes the following interventions intended to **complement the achievement of outcomes** of Finland's programme in Palestine.

- HEI ICI Project 'OLIVE', to improve the quality of pre-service teacher education in two Palestinian universities;
- The TWB programme, managed by FCA, provides an opportunity for Palestinian and Finnish educators to interact, contributing to improved teaching and learning pedagogy and improved motivation of teachers;
- Core support to UNRWA, providing learning opportunities for Palestine refugees;
- Project Support to two Finnish CSOs: KVS: The 'Empowerment through media literacy in Palestine' project (204.791 EUR annually); and Suomen YMCA:n liitto ry: The 'Contributing towards peace and justice through promoted resilience and livelihoods of women and youth' project (650,000 EUR); and
- The West Bank Protection Consortium, a resilience programme financed through pooled humanitarian aid.



4 Findings for the period 2019-2023

4.1 Response (EQ1): measures taken by development partners in responding to the learning crisis and improving the quality of education (relevance, efficiency, coherence)

4.1.1 Relevance of Finland's efforts in terms of addressing the learning crisis and improving the quality of education

Finland has worked with the MoE and UNRWA to provide 'safe, gender-responsive, inclusive and equitable access to quality education for all boys and girls without discrimination or exclusion, throughout the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip' (EU, 2020b). In addition to supporting school construction and the rehabilitation of schools damaged as a result of armed conflict, Finland and its partners have contributed to teacher education, including training in digital and distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Finland is highly appreciated by the PA as *"one of the first donors to support the Ministry of Education"* (KII: PA) and is *"one of the countries that has most supported the implementation of our strategic plan"* (KII: PA). Long-standing staff in the Ministry bear witness to Finland's staunch support of the Palestinian education sector since 1996, *"providing financial and technical assistance in line with MoE needs and priorities"* (KII: PA). In terms of system-strengthening, the Ministry's Education Management Information System, the lynchpin of any education sector, has been reinforced, contributing to evidence-based Strategic Plans; Palestine's participation in international education quality assessments has also been supported. To further enhance the MoE's capacities, Finland and its partners have assigned a programme manager position in the MoE's offices as well as established an advisory committee to identify, respond and track the capacity-building needs of MoE staff *"to support quality inclusive education for all across the Ministry's administrative cadres and directorates"* (KII: PA).

Finland has specifically promoted the prioritisation of early learning. A committee, comprising 13 local and international organisations, has been set up to set priorities for early childhood development, meeting four times a year to research and develop preschool interventions; Finland has *"played an active role in allocating a specific budget for the preschool directorate and developing an Early Years Strategy for 2017-2022 (a new one for 2025 is currently under review)"* (KII: PA).

Whereas in the past, the Finnish government contributed to printing textbooks at a time when other donors did not support this, recent political pressures resulted in a withdrawal of European donor support, including Finland. Indeed, at the time of writing, dialogue is taking place with the MoE to clarify priorities. We discuss this further below.



4.1.2 Views on Finland's strengths and added value of collaborating with Finland in the education sector

There is a strong consensus among Ministry officials and development partners that Finland's **most tangible contribution** is in its **long-term commitment to the Palestinian education system**, which has ensured the continuity of the education sector. The importance of continuity of donor support is highlighted by the recent impact of the PA's latest financial crisis on the education sector: since 5 February 2023, teachers have been on strike, demanding a 15% salary increase (the PA offered 5%) in response to post-pandemic inflation as well as implementation of a previous agreement with the government related trade union representation (Middle East Monitor 2023).

The **perceived added value** of Finland's Education Development Cooperation in Palestine is outlined below.

- **Contextual understanding:** *"Finland understands the Palestinian context and how it affects education, specifically, the effect of the Israeli occupation on area C and in the Gaza Strip"* (KII: PA); this is generally perceived to be the result of Finland's long-term partnerships as well as the calibre of its education experts, both in the Embassies as well as technical assistance provided by Headquarters.
- **Flexibility:** *"A no-cost extension gave us enough time to implement the project; they know very well the challenges that affect the education sector and the obstacles coming from the Ministry during project implementation"* (KII: UN organisation).
- **Responsiveness:** financing the MoE's strategic priorities and responding to the sector's emergency needs.
- **Focus on strengthening institutions/state-building:** establishment of the MoE, the Centre for Measurement and Evaluation, the National Institute for Training, the Education Management Information System, the Education Supervision Department and the Special Needs Education Department.

Long-term commitment also reinforces the **strengths** of Finland's Education Development Cooperation, outlined below.

- **Convening power:** Finland was *"among the first governments to discuss the importance of connecting with other donors"*, playing a strategic role in developing the JFA (KII: PA).
- **Policy/sector dialogue:** Finland *"is seen to be one of the countries with a flexible approach in negotiating and responding to the needs of the Ministry of Education"* (KII: PA).
- **Focus on improving access and education quality:** *"Around 60% of Finland's funding for education is spent on construction and rehabilitation, and then on capacity building in preschool education and inclusive education"* (KII: MFA).
- **Technical expertise** in digitised teacher education (applied knowledge and skills in STEM subjects).



4.1.3 Timely implementation of planned interventions

The implementation of planned activities in various interventions has been delayed for many reasons. Some delays are bureaucratic, such as the Ministry's slow submission of its annual plan to the JFA partners. Meanwhile, MFA's approval of the annual budget was also delayed. In 2022, for example, the annual plan was approved only in June and with implementation starting in September, the Ministry was able, within the remaining 3-4 months, to implement only 20% of the budget. Other constraints relate to the internal processes within partners' institutions (e.g., issuing and reviewing building bids can take over 3-4 months), which delay the disbursement of funds and execution of activities. In addition, as the donors' fiscal year and the school calendar year are not aligned, late disbursement of funds leads to delays in implementation (KII: PA).

The UNICEF's BRAVE project against school-related violence experienced the most substantial adjustments and delays due to the pandemic. Full implementation of the project only started in 2021, with a delay of approximately one year, affecting the achievement of the results.

4.1.4 Mainstreaming of cross-cutting objectives in planned interventions

Finland's Development policy principles of the human rights-based approach and 'Leave No One Behind' are deeply embedded in the country programme, 'with special focus on the population living under occupation in Area C, East Jerusalem and Gaza' (MFA 2021a). Particular attention has been given to gender equality in both specific measures and through gender mainstreaming, in line with the EU Joint Strategy for Palestine.¹⁷

Notably, while the education sector strategy mainstreams and incorporates gender equality, the gender gap is mostly in favour of girls (except in the sub-sector of Vocational Education and Training (VET) where the curriculum is not gender-sensitive), with boys lagging behind for most education indicators, mostly due to socio-economic/political factors beyond the education sector (KII: Representative Office of Finland in Palestine). In terms of non-discrimination, policy dialogue has focused on disability inclusion, as most persons with disabilities still lack equal rights to education.

While climate mitigation and adaptation are a key cross-cutting focus in the EU Joint Strategy, this particular Finnish policy objective is not reflected in Education Development Cooperation in Palestine. However, 'climate resilience is a key aspect of resilience and has been embedded in resilience programs' (MFA 2022).

4.1.5 Synergies created between cooperation instruments

The complementarity of certain interventions in the Country Programme has been emphasised; these interventions are discussed below. Yet, from the perspective of MFA staff, "*we don't think in terms of different instruments*", *what is important at country level is that we make strategic choices to increase our impact*" (KII: MFA). In line with this thinking, the Country Programme aims at a

¹⁷ Gender equality and women's empowerment are mainstreamed with particular attention to 'gender-Based Violence prevention and response', 'fulfilment of the rights of women and girls, children, youth, persons with disabilities and the elderly' and 'gender-Based Violence prevention and response' (EU, 2020b).



high degree of coherence between its impact areas: Finland's support to the education sector also contributes to its other two impact areas. *"We tried to lower the fences between these categories, focusing more on synergies, so it doesn't depend on where the money comes from"* (KII: MFA).

In terms of inclusive state-building (Impact 2) 'a unified education system in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and Gaza, is an important part of state-building for Palestinians', and 'a modern, equitable, inclusive and high-quality education system is essential for building resilience (Impact 3), promoting active citizenship, critical thinking and conflict resolution [and] calling for the protection of students, teachers and educational institutions, and promoting the right to an education free of violence in Palestine (MFA 2021b). Partners have appreciated such a focus on coherence across the programme.

With regard to multi-actor approaches, MFA interviewees note that these are difficult to conceptualise from a country-level perspective. Given that interactions between interventions are already a feature of Finland's programming, it is more practical to use diplomatic influence to enhance bilateral cooperation. At the same time, funding decisions made in Helsinki seem to be less likely to link with 'country-grown' interventions. For example, the work of the Finnish CSO, KVS, has little connection with the country programme; this is the case, too, for collaboration with UNRWA, which, according to MFA interviewees, is in competition with the refugee schools supported by the Ministry. For the internationalisation of education, there is no scope for education export in Palestine.

An example of a multi-actor approach which has emerged out of the local needs – the demolition of schools in the context of "a non-existent peace process" is the West Bank Protection Consortium. This is a strategic partnership formed in 2015 between a multilateral organisation, bilateral partners, CSOs and local businesses, specifically, European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), ten EU Member States, the United Kingdom and five international Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO). Finland's funding for the West Bank Protection Consortium (WBPC) is 1.5 MEUR for 2022-2024. We discuss the Consortium in more detail in section 4.2.3.

A further dimension of this multi-actor approach is the **Massader School Rooftop Programme**, a recent International Finance Corporation (IFC) investment supported by a local company. Massader (a subsidiary of the Palestine Investment Fund) received a loan from the European Investment Bank and has leveraged **blended concessional finance** from the Finland-IFC Blended Finance for Climate Program– to enable investment in this high-risk region (IFC, 2020).

4.2 Result (EQ2): effectiveness of the measures taken by Finland

4.2.1 Effectiveness of interventions in thematic areas

Inclusive quality education is a stated policy priority for the PA, and during the period under review, Finland, together with the MoE and other partners 'continued to safeguard Palestinian children's right to equitable and quality education, as well as upgrading the learning environments, raising teacher qualifications and improving students' retention and learning. In terms of MFA's **priority thematic areas**, we found the following.



Thematic area 1 (Country Programme Outcome 1.2. Teaching and learning pedagogy and environments are improved). Partial data shows that the percentage of qualified teachers continued to increase despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (MFA-OPT, 2021). The training programmes provided by the MoE include a professional diploma specialising in education for grades 5-9, for grades 10-12 and School Leadership, and new teacher and principal preparation.

However, as in so many countries, the pandemic presented unprecedented challenges for teachers' pedagogical skills, which many teachers were likely ill-prepared to meet. At the same time, the pandemic impacted pedagogical development; curriculum reform in the area of student-centred pedagogy was largely postponed until the next academic year (MFA-OPT, 2021). Although no new data exists, the MoE anticipates major learning loss at all levels, which will be reflected in learning achievement tests in the years to come. Paradoxically, anecdotal information shows that school closures reduced the loss of class time caused by Israeli violence.

Thematic area 2 (Country Programme Outcome 1.1. Equitable access to education at all levels is enhanced). The JFA support of inclusive education included the provision of facilities, equipment and resource rooms for children with disabilities, as well as transportation for students in dangerous areas. Under the co-chairpersonship of Finland, the theme of the 2017 Annual Sector Review was 'Inclusive and Quality Preschool Education for All' (MoE, 2019a). Following on from this, improvements towards the end of the period under review included opening new public preschool classes (116 new preschools; an increase of 6%) with qualified teachers, as well as new vocational schools and resource centres for inclusive education. However, the temporary closures of kindergartens reduced pupil numbers at least temporarily and will 'likely make 2022-2024 targets unattainable' (MFA-OPT, 2021).

During the previous Country Strategy (2016-2020), the available data showed a 0.5 percentage point decrease in the gross enrolment rate for the basic education cycle, yet the same period saw 'improved net enrolment in secondary, survival to grade 10, minor reduction of secondary drop-out and the retention of students improved considerably while drop-out rates remained low' (MFA-OPT, 2021). On the other hand, equitable learning outcomes remain a challenge: 'the educational attainment of boys in secondary school is significantly lower than that of girls'. More recently, digitalisation and distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in 'challenges in access, especially for the students from the poorest and most marginalised communities' in Area C (MFA-OPT, 2021).



Table 1. Effectiveness rating

EXPECTED RESULTS	RATING:					
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Outcome 3.1	G	G	G	G	U	S
Output 1.1.1	G	G	G	G	N/A	S
Output 1.1.2	S	G	G	S	N/A	S
Outcome 3.2	S	G	G	S	N/A	S
Output 1.2.1	S	G	G	S	N/A	N/A
Output 1.2.3	G↑	G	G	G	N/A	N/A

Rating guide (colour codes):

	G Good: achievement of over 80% of the target.
	S Satisfactory: achievement of 60-80% of the target.
	U Unsatisfactory: achievement of 0-60 % of the target.

Source: Annual Progress Reports for 2019 and 2021 (MFA-OPT, 2019; and 2021)

In its Annual Progress Reports, the MoE rates its spending and technical completion as measures of success in implementing the Education Sector Strategic Plan. In 2021, the spending rate was 23.80%, and the technical completion rate was approximately 62.71%, with the Ministry noting that ‘many of the projects in the plan were not funded’ (MoE, 2022d). The MoE also provides a detailed by-subsector breakdown of the execution rate of activities to achieve key sector performance monitoring indicators. In 2021, the execution rates were for pre-primary: 72.61%; for basic education: 51.29%; for secondary education: 58.44%; for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET): 62.52%; and governance/management: 54.43% (MoE, 2022d).

Under **thematic area 3**, while ‘vocational education options for all vocational students (particularly girls) are improving, these are still limited’; moreover, the introduction of vocational subjects in basic and secondary education was delayed as a result of the pandemic, while TVET programmes suffered proportionally more than other education levels from restrictions to contact teaching, such as practical study in workshops (MFA-OPT, 2021).

4.2.2 Effectiveness of instruments/channels

Effectiveness of Sector Support through the Joint Financing Agreement (JFA) with the MoE:

Finland’s cooperation has been implemented primarily through the joint financing mechanism, which has several benefits: it enables risks to be shared and managed as well as access to areas where the PA cannot easily operate; and as a preferred channel of support for the PA, it is a critical platform for policy dialogue with the partners and the MoE (KII: PA; FGD: JFA).

The JFA partners have supported the Ministry in “developing education sector policies by holding annual sector review meetings, field visits, and giving feedback on annual achievement reports, monitoring and evaluation reports” (KII: MoE-Planning). Financial support “compensates for the



*shortfall in government budgets*¹⁸ and has focused on: “Goal 1, ‘Ensuring safe, comprehensive and fair enrolment in education at all levels of the system’, specifically objective 2: ‘develop student-centred teaching and learning methods and environment’; and objective 3: ‘enhance accountability, results-based leadership, governance and management’ (KII: PA). The MoE budget in 2022 constituted 17% of the Palestinian government budget and 5% of the gross Domestic Product; over the last decade, government expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP has dropped from 18% in 2012, peaking at 21% in 2018 and falling to 16% in 2021 (KII: PA).

As a JFA partner, Finland has contributed to the overall education sector development and service delivery, and Finland’s most significant achievement to date has been in the education sector (MFA, 2020b). However, all the Ministry officials we consulted noted that it is *“not possible to attribute positive change to Finland, specifically”* while acknowledging that Finland’s withdrawal would *“negatively affect our progress and the quality of education”* (KIIs: PA). A major result has been the positive change in terms of gender-inclusive basic education, which is one of Finland’s priority areas. The investment in so-called ‘resilience’ schools targeting marginalised groups such as the Bedouin communities in Area C is also a shared priority. Although it is a priority area for both Finland and the MoE, disability inclusion remains challenging.

Overall, however, the sustainability of education reforms ‘remains precarious’; the sector faces four, among other systemic constraints (MFA-OPT, 2021). First, PA education services depend heavily on aid funding, which has declined. Second, Israel’s building permit regime, demolition threats and other measures prevent sustainable development in East Jerusalem and Area C. Third, the armed conflict in Gaza in May 2021 damaged 130 schools and disrupted learning, in addition to longer-term challenges due to the blockade. Finally, the destruction of school infrastructure necessitated a reallocation of donor resources to emergency assistance and reconstruction; the JFA partners supported the rehabilitation of 30 school buildings in Gaza, following the Education Cluster assessment of 130 needing rehabilitation after damages from bombing.

Effectiveness of policy influencing: In terms of **policy influencing**, gains under the 2016-2020 Country Strategy included the introduction of the first-ever education law, the introduction of vocational subjects in the basic education cycle, and the development of a preschool curriculum framework. During the period under review, Finland has *“introduced best practice based on technical expertise into policy dialogue”*; while each JFA partner has its niche area of expertise, Finland has been *“leading on preschool education”*, also highlighting the need to identify vulnerable students, improve access to basic education for children in vulnerable circumstances, and reduce disparities in secondary and vocational education (FGD: JFA).

In addition, Finland has played *“a key role in moving engagement with ministry ahead with brilliant coordination through its role as the co-chair of ESTWG - a very big and challenging forum – despite Covid-19”* (FGD: JFA). A further keystone is technical dialogue and institutional cooperation between Finnish and Palestinian educators to improve the training and motivation of teachers (MFA-OPT, 2021). Importantly, the partners’ policy dialogue has *“encouraged other global funds, such as Education Cannot Wait (FGD: JFA).*

This said, there has been a shift in Germany’s bilateral cooperation from basic education to TVET (as appears to be the case in many EU member states), with a strong focus on job creation. As a

18 The cost of a student in school education increased from 914 USD in 2020 to 1,041 USD in 2021, while *“the percentage of actual expenditure on education (developmental) compared with the various resource-based developmental budget, decreased from 37.44% in 2020 to 23.8% in 2021”* (KII: MoE-Planning).



consequence, in the personal view of one JFA partner, **“basic education is falling behind, and the JFA is an outrunning model”** (FGD: JFA). This leaves a critical gap – the sector **“needs a trusted group of donors speaking with one voice”** - with no certainty that the gap will be filled (FGD: JFA).

Yet such shifts take place in a broader landscape that is also constantly shifting. Policy influencing is itself influenced by regional/geo-political factors: **“In Palestine, the ‘P’ in the [Humanitarian-Development-Peace] HDP nexus is about politics”** (KII: MFA)

A case in point is the EU-commissioned study by the Georg Eckert Institute on Palestinian textbooks. While the study confirmed there is no widespread or direct incitement to hatred or violence in the content, it triggered politicised discussion, including in the European Parliament; **“the results were used to sabotage the education sector”** (FGD: JFA). The study’s impact on curriculum reform within Palestine has been **“very unfortunate”**, as well as stalling EU funding to Palestine until an agreement has been reached on conditionality linked to textbooks and education reform, ‘a move not accepted by a majority of member states’ (MFA-OPT, 2021c) ¹⁹.

JFA partners, including the MoE, share the view that **“discussion on how to address quality issues in education has been political in nature, and a lot of actors have been scared away from engaging in this critically important issue or pulled out of the sector”** (FGD: JFA). The partners have advocated (unsuccessfully, thus far) within the EU for a comparative study of the Palestinian and Israeli curricula to identify to which each extent the curricula in each case promote peace, tolerance, non-violence and acceptance of the other (FGD: JFA; KII: PA). Indeed, **“one of the earlier debates in curriculum reform was the need to look at both sides equally”** (FGD: JFA)²⁰

On the one hand, **“it is important to be politically neutral and to avoid politicising the education sector”**; on the other hand, **“it is also necessary to move to a political solution to the conflict in the longer term”** (FGD: JFA). A spokesperson from the Ministry puts it simply: **“We hope the European Union and Finland will help the Palestinian people end the occupation, because it negatively affects the quality of education and as a human right”** (KII: PA).

Effectiveness of Multi-Bi support to UNICEF: Against a background of protracted occupation as ‘an obvious driver of conflict and violence’ within Palestinian society, increased violence against children is of serious concern (UNICEF-OPT, 2019). A 2013 analysis of social cohesion found the drivers of violence against children include the normalisation of violence, social norms and gender roles which perpetuate violence against women and girls, and social norms which ‘reinforce violence against children as part of child rearing in Palestinian society, as well as in school’ (UNICEF-OPT, 2019).²¹ As noted elsewhere in this study, children in Palestine are also exposed to ‘different and unacceptable levels of violence on their way to and from schools’ (UNICEF-OPT, 2022). This situation worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic; ‘there has been an increase in the numbers of children experiencing violence or abuse at home by 40% and 26% in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank respectively, attributed to COVID-19’ (UNICEF-OPT, 2022).

19 Since publication of the study in 2021, the textbooks have been revised; a comparison of the selected textbooks for the 2020/2021 academic year with their predecessors showed that text sections and images carrying escalatory potential have been reduced in the current textbooks for 2020/2021 <https://www.gei.de/en/research/projects/report-on-palestinian-textbooks-paltex/faq-answers-to-frequently-asked-questions>

20 In 2007, a project to create and test dual-narrative history texts and teaching methods throughout the region was funded by the EU and conducted by the Peace Research Institute in the Middle East and the Georg Eckert Institute. <https://www.gei.de/en/gei-aktuell/events/details/education-and-conflict-perspectives-from-israel-palestine>

21 According to the most recent PCBS Violence Survey (2011), 92% of children between 1-14 years experienced violent discipline; and the 2014 Multiple Indicator Survey shows that 89% are subjected to psychological aggression and 74% to physical punishment at home and in schools (UNICEF, 2019)



The BRAVE project aims to reduce violence against children and enhance resilience amongst children and adolescents, focusing on the most vulnerable and at-risk children and adolescents in selected communities in the Gaza Strip, Hebron, West Bank and East Jerusalem. The project builds on the results achieved with the previous Finnish funding to a similar project and is part of broader UNICEF support to the MoE in the implementation of the policy on Non-Violence in School. The partnership of UNICEF, MoE and Finland ‘works to strengthen the capacity of all education stakeholders to institutionalise the culture of non-violence in Palestinian schools and wider settings where children live and learn’ (UNICEF-OPT, 2022).

With a planned 18-month project cycle, the BRAVE project has experienced a delay of approximately one year, with full implementation of the project only starting in 2021. This has affected the achievement of the results (MFA-OPT, 2022). The project time has been extended to the end of the month of June. However, UNICEF “*may have to request another extension due to the continuing teachers’ strike*” (KII: UNICEF-OPT).

As reported by the Representative Office of Finland, challenges in the implementation of the activities were mainly linked to the impact of COVID-19 (KII: Representative Office of Finland in Palestine). However, we found that project implementation was delayed for several reasons beyond school closures and health and safety restrictions. These included the “*11-day escalation of conflict in Gaza*”; the MoE’s reluctance to engage with NGOs such as “*highly experienced educational and youth NGOs (the Palestinian Counselling Center in the West Bank and the Youth Future Center in Gaza)*”; the high-turnover of senior-level staff in the Ministry; and the teachers’ strike in the West Bank, as well as strikes by UNRWA workers, with “*no current plan for how the Ministry will compensate for the educational loss due to the strike*” (KII: UNICEF-OPT).

Despite the one-year delay, the BRAVE project has achieved results, including the following: ‘a total of 1,316 adolescents (644 girls, 672 boys) aged 13-17 years in Gaza have been equipped with life skills and citizenship education to act as change agents to combat violence in their communities²²; 6 non-violence committees led by adolescents have been established to work in 30 targeted schools in Gaza; and 50 Children with Disabilities (25 boys, 25 girls) from Gaza participated with their parents in recreational activities focused on creating safe spaces for children with disabilities and their parents (MFA-OPT, 2021).

However, project implementation highlights issues regarding the lasting effects of BRAVE interventions, particularly for a project with a planned 18-month timeframe. ‘Social and behaviour change takes time, especially if it needs to be assessed after the implementation of the designed interventions’ (UNICEF-OPT, 2022); yet social and behaviour change communication in a context of ‘normalised violence’ was included in an 18-month project. Relatedly, ‘the training of MoE educational supervisors as trainers by the Finnish Education experts, is a strong predictor of sustainability’. Yet, the critical capacity building of school principals, counsellors and relevant staff in the detection and referral of child protection cases was delivered in one day before being cascaded to teachers (UNICEF-OPT, 2022).

These issues also raise questions about the appropriateness of a model that may have worked in Jordan but may be less effective in the Palestinian context. We offer three observations:

- (i) Addressing violence ‘is a complex community issue’ requiring concerted efforts of the Palestinian public sector and civil society within an effective coordination framework

²² Note that this result was triggered by a remarkably short (12 hour) training of trainers (UNICEF-OPT, 2022).



defining roles, duties and implementation mechanisms towards a safe society where the human dignity of individuals and groups is respected as an inalienable basic right' (UNICEF, 2019); but as seen above, the MoE is reluctant to engage with civil society.²³ Notably, despite identifying the negative impact of 'the impending Palestinian elections' as a high risk for the project, UNICEF introduced the communications for development component, which involved both CSOs and media.

- (ii) Generally speaking, 'engaging communities in the assessments on violence has created agents for change in these communities'; yet the results of a mapping of ECE services of 47 targeted elementary schools far, to providing 3 out of 20 pre-primary schools with locally procured 'outdoor playing equipment to create a safe playing space for children in these schools' (UNICEF-OPT, 2022).
- (iii) There is a lesson learned for Finnish experts as well. While Finnish partner HUIPPU has expertise in positive pedagogy and the prevention of school violence, its training approach may be particularly effective in classrooms and schools with a low pupil-teacher ratio. HUIPPU made efforts to customise their pedagogical teacher training materials by translating them into Arabic. However, the organisers did not consider the 'heavy teaching schedule during the school semesters', which made the cascading of training to teachers 'difficult to schedule' and may have limited the reach of this type of training.

Effectiveness of bilateral support to the ICHR: The ICHR in Palestine is the national human rights institution, established in 1993 upon a Presidential Decree issued by President Yasser Arafat, which has the core function as an Ombudsman (pending a law passed by the Palestinian Legislative Council). The ICHR has a 19-member Board of Commissioners, an Executive Office headed by the Director General overseeing four departments, and 69 permanent staff members (45 men, 24 women). The ICHR contributes towards the protection and promotion of human rights in Palestine in accordance with the International Human Rights Treaties and the Palestinian Independence Declaration and Basic Law. It receives and handles complaints; monitors and documents human rights violations; provides guidance, counselling and capacity development of duty bearers; mediates between official institutions and civil society organizations; and promotes a culture of human rights with the purpose of creating a democratic and tolerant society (ICHR 2023).

In terms of the right to education, the ICHR notes that the MoE 'monitored and documented Israeli violations, providing actual data documentation to expose Israeli practices and impact on both students and school' (ICHR, 2021).

Additionally, ICHR notes a '*variable*' in the national legal framework (ICHR, 2021). The Law by Decree No. 27 of 2021 and the Law by Decree No. 4 of 2021 introduced two new entities (i) the National Curriculum Centre, with a Board appointed by a decision of the Council of the Ministers and chaired by the Minister of Education; (ii) and the National Commission for Technical and Vocational Education and Training, which is chaired by the Prime Minister and includes the Minister of Labour (deputy chair), the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, the Minister of Education, the Minister of Social Development, and Minister of Transportation.

The ICHR also reports several violations of the right to education: government expenditure on education development has been 'inadequate'; the principle of free education has been breached²⁴;

23 This may be particularly difficult in the area of adolescent behaviour change, where youth themselves engage in violence but the national narrative is one of victimization of the Palestinian people.

24 The MoE invokes Article 45 of the Law by Decree No. 8 of 2017 on General Education, which allows 'the collection of donations at government educational institutions at the beginning of each academic year' (ICHR, 2021).



violence on university campuses has ‘soared’; and school buildings do not meet the needs of children with disabilities (ICHR, 2021). Complaints received by the ICHR on violations of the right to education include complaints about **teaching without certification**. In terms of actions and measures taken to improve the quality of education, the ICHR notes that ‘policy interventions envisaged by the Strategic Plan of the Education Sector 2017-2022 need adequate financial resources and development budget line items for implementation and achievement’ (ICHR, 2021).

Effectiveness of complementary support to Country Programme outcomes: Besides their complementary in terms of improving education quality, ‘these projects created channels for communication and advocacy between Palestine and Finland’ (MFA-OPT, 2021b). The **HEI ICI project OLIVE** is a project designed and implemented by a team from the University of Helsinki, the University of Eastern Finland and two Palestinian universities, Birzeit University and Al-Azhar University in Gaza. The project emerged from a visit from the University of Helsinki, facilitated by the CSO, TWB, to explore how to strengthen teachers’ qualifications, skills and methods to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

The project developed practical training for students to enhance the application of knowledge and skills related to STEM subjects. The project’s focus on creating online learning environments and pedagogy and the use of distance education for teacher training is highly relevant, given the recent experience of the global pandemic and can improve the quality of primary and secondary education in the longer term. The project includes a ‘Student Teachers’ component, which enables any Birzeit University student to apply for a diploma in the Faculty of Education, whether during the undergraduate or post-graduate period. In addition, exchange visits helped Finnish university professors get a better overview of the Palestinian context, as well as helping Palestinian professors build a better understanding of the Finnish education system. The main challenge encountered during implementation was the teachers’ strike in the West Bank, which led to teacher training being postponed to the end of May 2023 and delays in the training of student mentors.

Although disability inclusion was part of the project’s focus, the project team is trying to involve specialists in inclusive education as part of project activities; for instance, one of the main members of the “Zaytouna” sub-project is the chairperson of the Disability Committee and is responsible for the bachelor’s degree program in inclusive education. Going forward, project members would like to build on the mutual trust between the Finnish and Palestinian universities and should the partnership continue. This could include a specific gender-/disability-dimension in joint scientific research.

FCA’s work (with funding from the MFA’s Unit for Civil Society) supported pedagogical development in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Its **TWB** programme brings volunteer Finnish teachers to Palestinian schools. They contributed to education quality through school needs assessment and peer-to-peer capacity building, complementing the JFA partners’ education sector support. In addition, 28 supervisors in Gaza and 12 supervisors in the West Bank were trained as trainers by a Finnish partner (HUIPPU). The teacher training was cascaded by the 28 supervisors in Gaza, while similar training is planned for West Bank for 2022.

While TWB has partnered with the MoE since 2018, the high turnover of high-level staff in the Ministry has been a challenge, undermining the project’s continuity, as not every new minister or general director wants to implement what his former colleague undertook. Weakness in coordination between the Ministry’s departments also affects the implementation of activities. For these reasons, TWB preferred to work with private sector schools. As a consequence, perhaps, the Representative Office of Finland suggests that the TWB initiatives is “not so relevant” for Finland’s Education Development Cooperation in Palestine.



The UNRWA was created as a temporary Agency and, 70 years later, 'continues to provide essential services for the well-being, human development and protection of Palestine refugees, pending a just solution, remaining a key pillar of stability in the region' (EU, 2020b). The 2018 decision of the US to cut its funding to UNRWA came on top of an already unsustainable financial model. It contributed to an unprecedented financial crisis for the Agency, which continues despite the restoration of some United States' funding, with increased urgency to step up the discussion on a sound financial model (EU, 2020b). The EU and the EU Member States remain UNRWA's largest financial and political supporters.

Finland has partnered with UNRWA since 1952 and has been a Member of the Advisory Commission for UNRWA since 2008, playing an active role in UNRWA management. In 2023, UNRWA hosted a number of high-level meetings with Finnish representatives (e.g., the Director-General of the Policy Development Department, MFA, and the State Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs), which is by UNRWA considered "a testament to Finland's support to UNRWA and the well-being of Palestine refugees". In addition, UNRWA has two Finnish employees among the UNRWA team and one working as a Junior Programme Officer. Finland has recently signed a multi-year agreement for the period 2023-2026 (UNRWA 2023), providing MEUR 5 per year over four years with a total of 20 MEUR in line with the previous multi-year agreement, 2019-2022 (UNRWA, 2021). In addition, UNRWA received a two million top-up in 2022, but the top-up has been severely affected by the reallocation of resources to Ukraine.

While UNRWA states that they are extremely grateful for Finland's support, as Finland provides core budget support, it is impossible to clearly identify how Finland's resources were utilised. Rather, UNRWA reports on the core budget as follows:

'Between 2016-22, the Agency made significant progress in ensuring that all enrolled students, regardless of their gender, abilities, disabilities, social-economic status, health and psychosocial needs had an equal opportunity to learn and were supported to reach their full potential. Through the application of UNRWA's inclusive education approach, Agency-wide dropout and repetition rates at both the elementary and preparatory levels decreased on average over the MTS period as a result of strengthened support to students identified with a disability, experiencing a protection risk or struggling academically. Measures were also established to further professionalise teachers and enrich curricula to enhance students' competencies and life skills' (UNRWA, 2021).

Nevertheless, UNRWA reports on 'Agency schools', suggesting a refugee education system that has been set up alongside and separate from Palestine's public education sector. This does not auger well for efforts to strengthen humanitarian-development nexus programming. Following a recent impact evaluation and given its volume of funding, Finland has asked questions about our focus on education. There are views that "*UNRWA's refugee schools are competing with the Ministry's schools*" (KII: MFA). Indeed, UNRWA has set up a parallel Agency-wide Education Management Information System, which was expanded in 2018 through the introduction of a student module and the 2020 rollout of a staff module' (UNRWA, 2021). With more than 20,000 staff, UNRWA is the largest UN operation in the Near East and a major employer in the region, operating one of the largest school systems in the Middle East, teaching nearly half a million children in more than 600 schools (EU, 2020b); "*a month ago UNRWA staff went on strike; all UNRWA facilities are closed in Jerusalem and the West Bank, with the exception of one school and one health centre in Shuafat*" (KII: UNRWA). While UNRWA recently asked Finland to support the establishment of the Digital Learning Platform (DLP), "*they replied that they don't have additional funds for that*" (KII: UNRWA).



4.2.3 Effectiveness of multi-actor approaches, their cumulative and synergistic effects

The Palestine case offers an interesting example of a multi-actor approach in a nexus setting. Generally, humanitarian-development support (the double nexus) is often equated with resilience building. There are critical contextual differences between ‘resilience’ in terms of ‘holding ground’ (development) in Area A, for example, and ‘resilience’ in terms of humanitarian assistance in Area C or Gaza. Finland has taken a pragmatic approach, making ‘effective, contextualised decisions in the allocation of the development cooperation and humanitarian funding’ (MFA, 2020b). Evidence of this is seen in Finland’s engagement as a JFA partner in longer-term system strengthening, on the one hand, and its financial support to the West Bank Protection Consortium in Area C, with a short-term focus on humanitarian assistance, on the other.

The West Bank Protection Consortium (see **Box 1**) operates through 4 pillars: (1) Emergency response to demolitions and to sector violence through in-kind (rebuilding) or in-cash where planning restrictions prohibit constructions; (2) Building resilience through Community Protection Approach (CPA), where needs are assessed (e.g., safe gender and disability inclusive access schools) in Area C and responded to, following which the Consortium partners phase out and connect the communities to local development actors; (3) Legal services to prevent internal displacement, working closely with Israeli lawyers and human rights groups to help displaced families to access the legal system; and (4) Advocacy. Evaluations of the programme have confirmed the effectiveness of the programme and that the operating model has been efficient (Openaid 2023).

Box 1. The West Bank Protection Consortium

The West Bank Protection Consortium provides humanitarian assistance to over 50,000 Palestinians each year at risk of forcible transfer in the West Bank, primarily in Area C, East Jerusalem and H2 Hebron, where Palestinians face a daily threat of displacement due to demolitions and confiscations, settler and military violence, harassment, and restrictions on movement and access to resources, basic services and humanitarian assistance.

Demolitions and seizures are the direct result of a discriminatory planning and zoning system implemented by Israel in Area C (more than 60 % of the West Bank), under which Palestinian construction is made virtually impossible. Trends show an increase in Israel’s destruction of Palestinian property, including do-not-funded structures, in the occupied West Bank, with a 23% increase in the demolitions between 2019 and 2020. “*Schools are built and torn down, and built again and torn down – what’s the point?*” (KII: West Bank Protection Consortium). The reasons for this are not clear but may include the need to appease the Israeli settler movement following ‘the suspension’ of formal annexation plans in July 2020.

The Consortium asserts that ‘condemnation, though an essential component of the EU’s response to Israel’s settlement policy, needs to be matched by more concrete action if future violations are to be prevented; to this end, as a matter of priority available options [for such action] should be mapped and assessed by the EU’.

Source: WBPC, 2021. Supporting Statement made in the Oireachtas Éireann



Of the pillars, the fourth is perhaps the most demanding. The Consortium's resilience-building activities are *"in line with our HDP nexus approach [and] advocacy is about peacebuilding"* (KII: West Bank Protection Consortium). This has been the subject of much debate among the Consortium partners: *"Some say peacebuilding is not possible in the Palestinian context and we should focus on building social cohesion with Palestinian groups (but other actors are better placed than us to do this), and others say we are indeed addressing the 'P' in HDP but **we're interpreting this as 'politics' not 'peace'** – the debate is still going on, there's no internal consensus"* (KII: West Bank Protection Consortium).

Indeed, there appears to be a bottleneck in the advocacy chain of a political solution for peace). While civil society advocacy works well and delegations on the ground bring violations of international humanitarian law to the attention of their capitals, there is *"a gap between the diplomatic level and the higher level, where the EU takes the side of Israel"* (KII: West Bank Protection Consortium).

4.3 Future (EQ3): outlooks for better results

4.3.1 Emerging needs and future thematic areas requiring Finland's support (financial and expertise)

In the **VET subsector**, there is a need for technical assistance in teacher training in work-readiness skills and investing in ensuring VET centres are disability-inclusive, particularly for grade 7-10 students. In the **pre-primary and kindergarten** subsector, there is a need for ongoing efforts to improve access to and the quality of preschooling, including support for (gender- and disability-inclusive) school construction and pre-service as well as continuous professional development for teachers.

There are examples of synergies between the MoE and civil society. In the VET subsector, for example, CSOs fund and equip vocational units, while the ministry meets operational costs and provides human resources. On the one hand, this type of collaboration could be strengthened *"if CSOs adopted a more flexible approach, responding specifically to MoE priorities and needs with full understanding to the Palestinian context"* (KII: PA).

Indeed, from the perspective of the World Bank Protection Consortium, there may be a role for Finnish CSOs to engage in the developmental side of the nexus, supporting teaching and learning in schools that have been built/rebuilt, as well as digital solutions in Area A. On the other hand, the experience of UNICEF's BRAVE project raises the need for more flexibility by the Ministry to allow NGO partners to implement the project activities in public schools.

Relatedly, the TWB is exploring synergies with Birzeit University to overcome the difficulty of obtaining a special visa for Finnish volunteers (the duration of the volunteer's stay in the West Bank or Jerusalem is currently, on average, only three months). Fourth-year students from the College of Education could be selected to work with Finnish volunteers in the fields of translation, participation in preparing training materials, attending training courses, and preparing reports, contributing to the development of pre-service teacher skills and abilities to implement extracurricular activities in schools.

Underpinning Finland's continued efforts in this sector, however, is the 'elephant in the room': *"The Israeli occupation affects all education components"* (KII: PA). The main concern regarding preschooling is the need for protection mechanisms for children and teachers to reach school safely).



However, concerns in the case of the VET subsector are more nuanced. It is hoped that the newly created National TVET Commission will bring together the three pillars of TVET: job creation, VET opportunities in basic and secondary education, and technical education within universities, combining these in a “one-stop shop”. However, there are concerns about the Commission (managed by the Prime Minister, supported by the Ministries of Labour, Higher Education and Scientific Research, Education, Social Development, and Transportation), specifically whether it has a political role or a political and an executive role.

4.3.2 Future measures to strengthen the multi-actor approaches and set up

Continuity of the JFA as a funding mechanism to arrest de-development. A shift away from the basic education focus of bilateral Education Development Cooperation, globally as well as in Palestine, raises the risk of slipping backwards and losing the gains made over decades of state-building. Stakeholders across the board underline the importance of a joint financing mechanism— with Finland remaining on board – and the continuity of efforts to strengthen Palestine’s education sector: “*We have to engage*” (FGD: JFA). It should be kept in mind, however, that “*setting up new basket financing is very political; you need the right partners*” (FGD: JFA).

Walking the talk of resilience. While UNICEF has brought together the ESTWG, the Education in Emergencies Working Group and the Child Protection Working Group, ‘further efforts are required to enhance coordination between the humanitarian and development sectors towards a harmonised and comprehensive response to the situation affecting children in both Gaza and the West Bank’ (UNICEF-OPT, 2022). The EU’s current joint strategy speaks of the need for a better-coordinated response along the HDP nexus to ‘ensure sufficient fiscal space for social sectors spending in Palestine, as an immediate crisis response but also during the recovery period (post-crisis) and for the long term’ (EU, 2020b). Finland has taken steps in this direction by engaging in both development cooperation through the JFA as well as humanitarian support (e.g., the West Bank Protection Consortium) and could continue along this path.

One step at a time. Recent evaluations ‘recommend the adoption of a strengthened HDP nexus’ (MFA-OPT-2021b). Peacebuilding is ‘not explicitly incorporated in the Country Strategy’s results framework’²⁵, and the portfolio includes ‘few interventions addressing conflict resolution’ (MFA, 2020b). Yet in the Palestinian context (as elsewhere), peacebuilding is complex, having two inter-linked dimensions: (i) reconciliation between the PA and the de-facto Hamas government and (ii) a revitalised peace process to find a political and durable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Indeed, partners ask “*What is it? How can you teach peace education to poor people?*” (FGD: JFA). But, as the Ministry points out, peacebuilding is not a subject or an event; it is best seen as an incremental process, implicit such support as “*protecting students and teachers so they have safe access to their schools, lifting house arrest and detention against children, and developing policies to stop school demolitions*” (KII: PA). A former Education Representative suggests that “*our work in the education sector has been Finland’s biggest political contribution to the peace process: state-building and strengthening the institutions*” (KII: MFA).

25 Teachers without borders runs a non-formal education project, targeting education as part of peace making, and this project is being implemented by an Israeli-Palestinian institution. However, this project is not funded by Finland (KII: TWB).



5 Implications for the main report

5.1 Summary of summative findings (EQ1 and EQ2)

The **relevance** of Finland's support in addressing the learning crisis in Palestine is evidenced by its support for the implementation of the MoE's current Education Sector Strategic Plan, which aims to deliver safe, gender-responsive, inclusive and equitable access to quality education for all boys and girls without discrimination. Finland has contributed to school construction and the rehabilitation of schools damaged as a result of armed conflict, teacher education, including training in digital and distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as targeted support of preschooling and foundational learning. Besides helping to develop the Ministry's Education Management Information System, Finland has underlined the importance of strengthening education institutions as part of its efforts to improve education quality.

The **perceived added value** of Finland's Education Development Cooperation in Palestine begins with its most tangible contribution: long-term commitment to the Palestinian education system, which has ensured the continuity of the education sector. This commitment is reflected in Finland's strong understanding of the Palestinian context, flexibility and responsiveness to the MoE's strategic priorities, and a focus on strengthening institutions/state-building. Finland's **strengths** include its convening power and leadership of policy dialogue, as well as its focus on improving access and education quality by providing technical and financial assistance.

The many reasons for **implementation delays** include bureaucratic procedures in the MoE, the internal processes of MFA and those of JFA partners, and, inevitably, the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected the UNICEF project in particular.

In terms of Finland's **cross-cutting objectives**, the human rights-based approach and the principle of 'Leave No One Behind' are deeply embedded in the country programme, and particular attention has been given to gender equality in both specific measures and through gender mainstreaming. While climate mitigation and adaptation policy objective are not specifically reflected in Education Development Cooperation in Palestine, climate resilience is embedded in resilience programs.

In the Palestinian context, **multi-actor approaches** take the form of complementarity between interventions in the Country programme; synergies were created on the basis of strategic choices to increase impact. There are deliberate linkages made between the programme's three impact areas: education, inclusive state-building, and building resilience. Indeed, multi-actor approaches in terms of engagement with Finnish CSOs or Finnish private companies are viewed as difficult to conceptualise and perhaps less relevant in a Palestinian context than they are perceived to be by the Capitals. A 'home-grown' multi-actor partnership is the West Bank Protection Consortium – with interesting ties to the school rooftop programme supported by the Finland-International Finance Corporation (IFC) Blended Finance for Climate Programme – which mitigates school demolitions in a protracted crisis context.



Effectiveness of interventions in priority thematic areas: Finland, with its partners, safeguarded Palestinian children’s right to inclusive quality education. Gains were made in improving teaching and learning pedagogy and environments, and equitable access to education at all levels was enhanced, particularly at the preschool level. However, as elsewhere, the global pandemic impacted pedagogical development, and the MoE anticipates major learning loss at all levels in the years to come; equitable learning outcomes at the secondary level remain a challenge with the educational attainment of boys significantly lower than that of girls. Digitalisation and distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in challenges in access for students from the poorest and most marginalised communities. While vocational education options for all students (particularly girls) are improving, these are still limited, and TVET programmes suffered proportionally more than other education levels from restrictions to contact teaching during the global pandemic.

Effectiveness of Education Development Cooperation instruments: Stakeholders across the board are highly appreciative of Finland’s contribution to the sector support; Finland’s leadership in policy dialogue has helped to keep basic education on the sector agenda, reinforcing its long-term efforts in building a resilient education system as a dimension of state-building; multi-bi support to UNICEF has promised much but so far delivered little, partly due to the Covid-19 pandemic but perhaps also because a successful model created elsewhere was not particularly well adapted to contexts; bilateral support to the ICHR has spotlighted the impact of politics on human rights, in terms of violations at both the individual as well as institutional levels; although the HEI ICI OLIVE project, the TWB programme, and UNRWA’s schools for refugees, do indeed complement sector development, their contribution in helping to bridge the triple nexus divide - which is critical in a country of protracted crisis - is not immediately apparent.

5.2 Summary of findings for formative/futures thinking (EQ3)

Emerging needs in the Palestinian context are not new but rather a matter of **ongoing support** in the areas where Finnish expertise is particularly strong (preschooling and VET). More broadly, Finland and its partners may consider this foundational need raised by the PAs: “Development needs to be accompanied by political support”.

Strengthening multi-actor approaches (indeed education development cooperation in general) requires the continuity of Finland’s engagement in the JFA as a financing mechanism. Relatedly, it requires **rethinking the triple nexus in protracted crisis settings** and coordinating high-level policy dialogue (see **Box 2**).



Box 2. 'Sustainable Growth, Jobs and Resilience'; What is Finland's future role?

The Team Europe Initiative (TEI) in Palestine ('Sustainable Growth, Jobs and Resilience') has the intended '**transformational potential**' to contribute to Palestinian '**sustainable and inclusive economic development and job creation**'. It serves as a platform for coordinated policy dialogue in the following areas, which serves as a 'menu' of options for TEI partners:

1. Strengthening the **business environment**;
2. Developing a **trade programme**;
3. Mobilise **finance and investment** (e.g., through the EU-Palestine Investment Platform);
4. Creating a 'Green Hub' to promote trade and green and smart agribusiness;
5. Developing a joint strategy for **digital transformation**;
6. Engaging in **entrepreneurship skills development**;
7. Promoting **resilience** in double nexus (humanitarian-development) interventions.

While Germany has been "*requested from the Palestinian side to play a policy leadership role*", this does not exclude other partners. Two lessons can be learned from the JFA experience. First, it showed the power of joint policy influencing (although *the JFA partners' policy influencing is mostly about coordinated school construction but the TEI is more high-level*). A second lesson learned is the effectiveness of "*a division of roles, with each partner acting on their comparative strengths*". It may be possible to negotiate a role for Finland "*if we can shape the division of labour carefully*".

For example, given its successful preliminary contextualisation of double nexus in the Country Programme, option 7 in the above 'menu' may present an opportunity for Finland to engage in this TEI. Transforming the triple nexus in the context of Palestine and its neighbours implies a coherent message delivered through trilateral policy dialogue (involving EU members, the PA and Israel) so that decision-makers walk the talk of 'Sustainable Growth, Jobs and Resilience' in Palestine'. However, whether or not Finland can play a role in such policy dialogue will likely be a question of political will.

Source: FGD: JFA, EU 2023

This means clarifying how humanitarian assistance can best complement ODA in immediate crisis situations, during post-crisis recovery, in protracted crises and in longer-term development in countries such as Palestine; it also means deciding on how peace education can be embedded in that trajectory.



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THEMATIC CASE STUDY: TEACHER EDUCATION IN MOZAMBIQUE

DESK-BASED MINI CASE

MERVI KUAJA



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Acronyms and abbreviations

CapEd	Capacity Development for Education
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EdTech	Education Technology
EDUFI	Finnish National Agency for Education
EE	Education Export
ESF	Environmental and Social Framework
ESP	Education Sector Plan
EU	European Union
FASE	Education Sector Common Fund
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEI ICI	Higher Education Institutions Institutional Cooperation Instrument
IT	Information Technology
JAMK	Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences
KEO-30	Unit for Civil Society
MFA	Ministry for Foreign Affairs
MINEDH	Ministry of Education and Human Development
ODA	Official Development Assistance
TEPATE	Theory-Practice Balance in Teacher Education
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
USA	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank



1 Introduction

1.1 Objective and contribution of the thematic case study to the evaluation

This thematic case study is part of the evaluation “Right to education, right to learn” – Finland’s development cooperation in the education sector. The thematic case study concerns the period of 2019-2022 and focuses on teacher education in Mozambique.

Supporting inclusive education systems, partners’ capacity to improve learning outcomes, better learning and teaching practices and educational environments establish some of Finland’s development policy and cooperation goals (MFA, 2023a). Mozambique is one of those partner countries where Finland’s Country Programmes have included major result areas focused on education. In 2019, Stepping Up Finland’s Global Role in Education report concluded that by utilising its strengths in theory and practice balanced teacher education, Finland could support its partner countries in reforming their teacher education (Reinikka et al, 2018). Furthermore, another review explicitly dedicated to Finland’s support for education in Mozambique recommended Finland, among other areas, to focus on improving teaching and strengthening school management (Reinikka & Napaua, 2019). Taking stock of these recommendations, Finland has used many development cooperation instruments to address the needs related to teacher education in Mozambique.

To learn about the development contributions of these efforts, Mozambique, with a particular focus on teacher education, was selected as a country for a supplementary, desk-based thematic case study.

1.2 Methods of data collection and scope

This thematic case study has been produced primarily as a desk review, including a comprehensive set of both open-source and non-public project documentation relevant to the development of teacher education in Mozambique and Finland’s contributions to it. Document review and analysis have been complemented with two semi-structured interviews, providing complementary information on specific interventions in Mozambique and an opportunity to triangulate the desk review findings. Due to their desk-based nature and particular thematic focus, the thematic case study is conducted in a lighter format and hence does not present all elements included in the full-scale country case studies.



2 Country and sector context

2.1 Brief overview of country context

Mozambique remains among the ten poorest countries in the world per the Human Development Index (180/189 in 2019). The absolute number of poor people has been increasing because of the rapid population growth (2.9 % annually). This goes hand in hand with the high unemployment rates: 85 % of the labour force is employed in the informal sector. The country suffers growing geographical inequalities concerning rural and urban populations and differences between provinces. Absolute poverty levels have decreased substantially in the more developed southern parts but have stagnated or even increased in the poorer northern and central provinces. These growing inequalities undermine trust in the government and governance, constituting a long-term challenge to the country's stability. Beyond this, the most critical factor impacting Mozambique's future human development is demography. This growing population is young and will need more quality education and employment opportunities in the coming years. The low level of human development also makes Mozambique more vulnerable to external shocks, such as climate change and related natural disasters and pandemics. Gender inequality is a significant challenge despite the existing legal framework and women's relatively strong representation in national politics. Gender-based violence, including against the sexual and reproductive health rights of girls and women, remains a severe problem, early marriages being one reason behind this. In education, girls are less likely to complete their schooling than boys (MFA, 2021).

2.2 Education sector achievements and challenges related to teacher education

Education is a priority sector for the Mozambican government. Progress has been made in increasing equal access to education, student enrolment at the right age in grade 1, and strengthening education sector institutions and teacher training (MFA, 2021; World Bank, 2023). During 2018-2021, the annual government spending allocated to education ranged between 17.4-19 % (18.25 % on average).

However, the overall education system remains inefficient. A rapidly growing population challenges the system, and regional disparities exist in gender gaps, learning results and access to education. Over one-third of students continue to drop out before grade 3, and under half remain in school throughout the complete primary education. Student learning is improving but still at a critically low level. In 2016, only 5% of grade 3 students could read at the expected level. The system faces additional challenges posed by weather-related emergencies, such as the cyclones IDAI and Kenneth that affected the country in 2019. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic led to the closure of schools. The conflict in the northern part of the country, with around 800,000 internally displaced people, many of them children, poses yet another challenge. The situation will likely result in further enrolment losses and deterioration in the already low learning outcomes (MFA, 2021; MFA, 2022).



The learning crisis in Mozambique is evident, and among the factors that are associated with low levels of learning, there is evidence of limited instructional time, low teacher content knowledge, the prevalence of poor teaching practices in the classroom, and high teacher absenteeism (MFA, 2021; MFA, 2022). The number of graduates from teacher training institutions needs to be increased for the demand, which has been responded to by taking multiple measures, including recruiting many untrained teachers, establishing so-called fast-tracked teacher training, and increasing the intake to grow its capacity (MINEDH, 2017).

After increasing teacher education capacity, Mozambique has improved the share of qualified teachers relatively quickly. The country adopted a policy of only appointing trained teachers, which, along with high teacher attrition rates, quickly put untrained teachers into a minority. Based on 2020 statistics, 98 % of Mozambiquan primary school teachers have received teacher training (World Bank, 2023b). However, this training can range from one to three or possibly more years, and the underlying years of general education range from 4 to 12, which makes the teacher force very heterogeneous. During Mozambique's independence, nearly 20 different models have been applied for teacher training (MINEDH, 2017). Today, teacher training in Mozambique can be divided into three levels: basic, medium, and higher. Teachers on the basic and medium levels are trained at designated teacher training institutions. Basic-level teachers must have completed at least ten years of prior general education, while the number for medium-level teachers is 12 years. Teachers on the higher level, on the other hand, are trained at universities. As educational attainment in the general population has risen, the minimum entry requirements for teacher training have followed. For example, most new primary education teachers enter the profession with only one year of pre-service training (MINEDH, 2020). Perhaps most importantly, these achievements only concern the number of teachers, not their quality, and significant issues remain in teachers' training.

The National Education System Law was revised in December 2018 and established a new structure for the sector, increasing mandatory (and free) education from seven to nine years (GPE, 2023). Mozambique has developed a new Education Strategic Plan (ESP) for 2020-2029. It aims at having "citizens with knowledge, skills, moral, civic and patriotic values capable of contributing to the development of a cohesive society adapted to the constantly changing world". The plan comes with three strategic objectives, building around (1) ensuring equitable and inclusive access, participation and retention; (2) ensuring the quality of learning; and (3) ensuring a transparent, participative, efficient and effective management of the sector (MINEDH, 2020).

2.2 Key donors in the education sector

Many international donors support education sector development in Mozambique. International development partners are financing the Ministry of Education and Human Development (MINEDH) to substantially increase access to education, improve its quality, and reduce gender disparities in the country through a dedicated sector programme, the Education Sector Support Fund (FASE). Besides Finland, key donor partners currently include the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), World Bank, Canada, European Union (EU), Finland, France, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Ireland, Portugal, and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (MFA, 2023b). United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), through its Capacity Development for Education (CapED) Programme, GPE and other partners have supported the MINEDH in developing the ESP 2020-2029 (UNESCO, 2021). Specifically on teacher education, the World Bank-led Coach programme is one of the largest initiatives addressing the learning crisis by capacitating educators. Canada, France, Japan and the United States of America (USA) were implementing bilateral programmes related to teacher education in Mozambique in 2020 (MFA, 2020f; KIIs).



3 Finland's country programme

3.1 Country strategy/overall country programme

Two Country Strategies and Programmes fall under the scope of this evaluation, including the last year of Country Strategy for Mozambique (2016-2019) and the current programming for 2021-2024. Finland was among the first countries to recognise Mozambique's independence in 1975, marking the point of the formal establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Mozambique has remained one of Finland's long-term bilateral development cooperation partners since 1984. Over time, Finland has supported the development of multiple sectors in Mozambique, including infrastructure, forestry, agriculture, and health. Finland's work in Mozambique is rooted in the value base of Finnish foreign and security policy, outlined in the Government Programme: the promotion of human rights, the rule of law, democracy, peace, freedom, tolerance, and equality. As the latest step, Finland has also contributed to supporting the peace process in Mozambique. Furthermore, promoting gender equality and girls and women's rights guides Finland's work as a significant cross-cutting theme. Finland's Country Strategy for Mozambique is aligned with Finland's and the EU's Africa Strategy processes (MFA, 2021)

Since the previous Country Strategy cycle, Finland's focus has shifted to more vital supporting education and good governance (MFA, 2021). During the current strategy period 2021-2024, Finland's strategic goals in Mozambique are (1) contribute to peacebuilding and conflict prevention, (2) invest in youth and gender equality, and (3) contribute to building stronger institutions to foster resilience and equity, and (4) promote economic partnerships (MFA, 2021)

3.2 Education sector focus of the country programme

Education has been one of the main pillars in both Country Programmes 2016-2019 and 2021-2024. Within the previous programming cycle, Finland aimed at improving learning at the primary school level, increasing gender equality and inclusion in primary education, and tackling regional disparities (MFA, 2016).

Finland's 2021-2024 Country Programme for Mozambique has two main impact areas: (1) Equity and resilience increased in Mozambique, and (2) More efficient and inclusive education system provides all boys and girls better learning in primary and secondary education (MFA, 2022)

Within the current programming period, Finland intends to continue its strong support to the implementation of the ESP 2020-2029, in collaboration and close dialogue with the MINEDH as well as other stakeholders, putting particular emphasis on the education of girls, teacher training, and education governance which promotes equality at all levels. It intends to intensify policy dialogue with the Mozambican authorities on gender equality as well as girl's and women's rights, including their sexual and reproductive health and rights, further develop partnerships with relevant Mozambican institutions, civil society organisations and private sector actors, promote dialogue between Finnish and Mozambican education administrations on key reforms in the sector, and continue



close partnerships with multilateral agencies, in particular the World Bank, UNICEF, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UNESCO and United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) (MFA, 2021).

Teacher education being at the centre of this thematic case study, the review focus will primarily be on the second impact area and its **Outcome 2.2 Teachers' and principals' performance improved to enhance learning** that aims to improve the performance of teachers and school principals by better quality initial and in-service training and by the provision of sufficient teaching and learning materials mainly for the early grades. Finland also contributes to improving school-level accountability by developing and implementing tools for school management and strengthening school supervision (MFA, 2022).

3.3 Funding for education sector

The overall financial frame for 2021–2024 is 58 million euros (MEUR), of which 38.3 MEUR is allocated for education and gender equality (MFA, 2023b). It is slightly more than the budget of 52 MEUR for 2016–2019, with 67 % (approximately 35 MEUR) planned for education (MFA, 2017).

The primary support targeted to the capacitating of teachers is the following:

- Support for the education sector via the FASE totalling 28 MEUR in 2020–2024 (only part of the funds goes to teacher education);
- Support for improving in-service teacher professional development via World Bank's Coach initiative, totalling 3 MEUR in 2020–2024;
- Theory-Practice Balance in Teacher Education (TEPATE) project implemented by Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences (JAMK), 1.025 MEUR for 2020-2024;
- UFF Finland's project Improving Teaching Quality and Inclusion in Zambézia Province 2019-2022 (465,536 EUR for 2021-2024) and
- Soprano Oyj has received 65.051 EUR of Finnpartnership funding (funding round 3/2019) for its Accredited business partner for service business in Mozambique project (MFA, 2019d).

3.4 Instruments/channels used and Finland's key partners

Education Sector Common Fund FASE, financed from MFA's **sectoral support budget**, supports the comprehensive development of the country's education sector. FASE facilitates the implementation of the ten-year strategy (ESP 2020-2029) for the education sector with three main objectives, including **(1) ensuring equitable access to education and continuity of education for all; (2) ensuring quality of learning, and (3) ensuring an education administration that is open, inclusive, and effective**. Finland is financing FASE as one of many international development partners, including the GPE, World Bank, Canada, Finland, France, EU, USAID, Ireland, Portugal, and UNICEF. Over the years, Finland has been among the most significant bilateral



donors contributing to the FASE (Government of the Republic of Mozambique, 2021; MFA, 2019; MFA, 2023b).

The Coach Mozambique ‘Aprender+’ program is a **multi-bi project** that adapts the World Bank’s Global Coach program to the local context in Mozambique through a two-year pilot program (World Bank, 2021). The programme responds to the learning crisis by strengthening teachers’ in-service training in the country. Its planned activities include, for example, the development of materials and lesson plans, helping the teachers to improve their teaching and the student’s learning results. The programme provides actual coaches following Mozambiquan teachers’ work in their classroom environments and supports them in using the new methods and materials. The programme makes use of successful methods used in other developing countries. Mozambique pilot is implemented between 2020–2023 in elementary education in two provinces, with the original plan to cover about 400 schools and 1600 teachers (MFA, 2020).

The TEPATE project improving teacher trainers’ pedagogical skills at the secondary education level is financed through the **Higher Education Institutional Cooperation (HEI ICI)** instrument administered by the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI). It is coordinated by JAMK and implemented with the University of Lapland, Pedagogical University of Maputo and Instituto Superior de Educação e Tecnologia - One World.

Accredited business partner for service business in Mozambique, implemented by Soprano Oyj and financed by **Business Partnership Support** through **Finnpartnership**, has aimed at finding local partners that can be accredited (trained to market and sell the joint offer of Soprano and its partners to produce locally educational content, including digital content for the Soprano’s learning environment).

Improving Teaching Quality and Inclusion in Primary Schools in Zame Improving Teaching Quality and Inclusion in Zambézia Province 2019-2022 by UFF Finland has received Civil Society Organisations (CSO) **project support**²⁶ from MFA’s Unit for Civil Society (KEO-30) for improving the equity and educational attainment of pupils in 24 primary schools in the second-most-populous province of Mozambique.

26 'Valtionavustus' in Finnish



4 Findings

4.1 Response (EQ1): measures taken by development partners in responding to the learning crisis and improving the quality of education (relevance, efficiency, coherence)

4.1.1 Relevance of development partners' efforts in terms of addressing the learning crisis and improving the quality of education in Mozambique

Support for Mozambique's education sector development is crucial overall, but only part of the contributions to the common fund address teacher education. Mozambique still largely depends on external donors' comprehensive support of education sector development. Most of Finland's financial support is provided to the FASE, which supports the implementation of the ESP 2020-2029 and guides the interventions of the government of Mozambique in the education sector. It continues the efforts made by various actors to grow the education system, expanding quality services and ensuring transparent, participatory, and effective management. Further support is much needed and hence strongly relevant. However, teacher education is only one of many other vital programmes for basic education financed by FASE. Despite solid relevance against the country's needs, sector financing heavily depending on external income has also been criticised by analysis of education sector financing in Mozambique (e.g. Bonde, RA., 2022), suggesting the need to support the development of stronger state-ownership and establishment of more sustainable mechanisms for sector financing.

Teacher education is among Mozambique's least addressed areas of education sector reform, and dedicated efforts have been required. Against the country's needs, investing in strengthening teachers' knowledge and skills is crucial and, hence, strongly relevant. Many international donors are involved in education sector development in Mozambique, but teacher education has remained less addressed than many other aspects of the required sector improvements (KIIs). Considering that contributions to FASE form general support to the implementation of the ESP with no earmarked shares to teacher education (MFA, 2019a), addressing teachers through the Coach pilot complements Finland's overall support to education sector development and comes with more potential to improve the learning results in Mozambique by directly capacitating teachers (MFA 2021b).

HEI ICI is a new opening that aligns well with the local needs and Finland's priorities in Mozambique. HEI ICI project launched in the country is well grounded and in line with the teacher education challenges outlined in the ESP 2020-2029, acknowledging that the teacher training curriculum in the country remains very theoretical and the teaching practise component is under-developed and new teachers as lacking monitoring in the classroom (JAMK et al., 2020; KII: EDUFI). In general, the project has addressed the recognised gaps in teacher education in Mozambique and builds upon many of Finland's strengths (as elaborated below). It has aimed at enhancing the capacities of teacher educators at Mozambique partner HEIs to provide learner-centred teacher



education to new generations of teaching professionals. The project has recognised effective school leadership as essential to improving the efficiency and equity of schooling and reforming teaching and learning practises sustainably (JAMK et al 2020; JAMK 2023).

Other interventions complement the efforts in the area of teacher education. UFF Finland's project aligns well with Finland's overall education sector development cooperation in Mozambique (MFA, 2020d). It has addressed many of the core issues affecting the quality of education delivery in Mozambique and worked in improving the school governance and leadership to monitor better and hold accountable teachers and school directors for their absenteeism effect, as well as directly with teachers' pedagogical abilities and practices (UFF, 2020).

4.1.2 Views on Finland's strengths and added value of collaborating with Finland in the education sector

Finland is known for its high-quality education system and highly educated, professional teachers. Finland is a welcomed partner for developing the education sector in Mozambique. Both national counterparts and international development partners are willing to cooperate with Finland and learn from its policies and practices of preparing, recruiting, managing, and motivating teachers. High-level requests for Finnish inputs (e.g., Finland's language education policy) have been made by Mozambique authorities, suggesting its contributions are valued, but also being invited to the World Bank's Coach programme is proving Finland is a valued partner in teacher education development (KII: EDUFI; MFA, 2021e) The same applies to higher education cooperation, where the local partners have shown notable interest towards cooperation with Finland through the HEI ICI project (KIIs).

The Finnish education system is leading by example in theory-practice balanced teacher education. In Mozambique, teacher education is regarded as excessively theoretical, not providing graduating teachers with sufficient pedagogical skills to apply learner-centred pedagogy in practice. Also, the practical training element needs to be more present (KIIs). This is contrary to Finland, where a close relationship between theory and practice forms the basis of the entire concept of teacher education, and teaching in the Teacher Training Schools allows student teachers to apply in practice the theoretical knowledge they have gained right from the early stages of their studies. With experience from its system, Finland's support and policy dialogue promotes the development of a theory-practice balanced teacher education model in Mozambique.

Learning results in Finland demonstrate success reached through highly educated teachers' commitment to the learning of their students. Teacher absenteeism and low capacity are other significant obstacles to achieving education outcomes in Mozambique. Teachers' commitment is a crucial factor that has led to Finland's success in international learning assessments but remains an area that must be further addressed in Mozambique.

4.1.3 Timely implementation of planned interventions

Despite all interventions facing delays, implementation has progressed. Among natural disasters and regional conflicts impacting Mozambique, the COVID-19 pandemic has strongly impacted education in the country. The same factors have more or less hampered the implementation of all interventions. Reviewed documentation suggests that while the FASE-supported education sector development has achieved steady progress in many areas, teacher education and particularly



training teachers on inclusive education are among those that still need to meet the desired performance targets (MFA, 2021b). Complementary efforts planned within the Coach pilot have also faced delays (MFA, 2021a; MFA, 2021d; World Bank, 2021). While preparations for the pilot implementation were made, including continued progress to improve training materials and initiating the design and development of a communications strategy for the pilot programme, the actual start of the pilot did not kick off as initially planned (World Bank 2020a, World Bank, 2021). The same factors have significantly affected the delivery of the TEPATE project activities. Due to the global health situation and the related travel restrictions, until 2022, all activities planned to take place in Mozambique have been implemented remotely (JAMK, 2022). Based on project reporting, the UFF's project has reached most of its goals, at least at a satisfactory level, but has faced delays in improving school management practices and empowering pupils (MFA, 2022a). The global health pandemic partially explains the delays and challenges in, e.g., school management structures and teachers' transfer to other areas (UFF, 2023, MFA, 2023; MFA, 2021b).

4.1.4 Mainstreaming of cross-cutting objectives in planned interventions

Finland's support to the education sector in Mozambique has been in line with Finland's development policy priorities of mainstreaming equal and inclusive access to education. The ESP 2020-2029, of which implementation has been supported with FASE, intends to address education inequalities in gender, disability, and geographical differences (Embassy of Finland 2020; MINEDH 2020). Although Mozambique has a strategic framework in place for promoting gender-equal access to human capital development, as well as a relatively recent Inclusive Education Strategy (2020-2029) adopted in all provinces, available reporting indicates that the implementation of these have lagged, and most key indicators show stagnation. Regarding teacher education, lack of progress concerns teachers' training on inclusiveness (Embassy of Finland in Maputo, 2021).

Coach Mozambique has built in the principles of gender, non-discrimination and inclusive education and considers climate change aspects. Still, it has not fully met Finland's expectations regarding mainstreaming cross-cutting objectives. The Coach pilot in Mozambique is built upon the four main goals of the World Bank's Gender Strategy 2016-2023, which include (i) improving human endowments in health, education, and social protection (e.g. closing the gender gap in education), (ii) removing constraints for more and better jobs by increasing women's participation in the labour force, their income-earning opportunities, and their access to productive assets, (iii) removing barriers to women's ownership and control of assets, and (iv) enhancing women's voice and agency, and engaging men and boys by enhancing women's participating and decision-making in service delivery and support the reduction of gender-based violence, mitigating its impact in conflict situations (World Bank, 2016). The project documentation communicates a commitment to high standards for non-discriminatory and equity practices, emphasising the inclusion and learning of all students in general education settings and will follow the guidance of the Environmental and Social Framework (ESF) of the World Bank (World Bank, 2017; World Bank, 2020b). The action also addresses climate change by including, e.g., material on how students can help mitigate climate change and appreciation for natural resources in the learning material (WB 2020b). Reviewed documentation dating prior to the funding decision, however, shows that MFA has not been delighted with the level of integration of Finland's cross-cutting development policy and cooperation objectives, and on top of improving the plans, it has been considered essential to ensure Finnish presence in the Local Advisory Board as well as at the World Bank headquarters (MFA, 2020f), including that the latter has materialised in 2022, but the documentation available for this thematic case study did not provide further detail.



HEI ICI planning demonstrates an understanding of Finland's development policy and country strategy goals in Mozambique. It pays good attention to principles of equal and inclusive education but less to environmental aspects. The TEPATE project has aimed at increasing gender equality and inclusion in primary education. By improving teacher educators' competencies to train teachers capable and willing to reinforce every child's right to learn regardless of gender, origin, financial status, and physical and mental condition, it intends to tackle the discrimination that persists in the Mozambican society and educational ecosystem. While project planning reasonably considers gender equality and non-discrimination aspects, less evidence is available related to climate sustainability other than implementing activities in a digital format that saves natural resources (EDUFI, 2023; JAMK, 2020).

CSO intervention in Mozambique shows relatively advanced mainstreaming of cross-cutting objectives. UFF Finland's project has a strong gender component, underlining education as a fundamental right and obligation of all citizens and views equal access to education as a vehicle for socio-cultural and economic transformation. This project is designed to address equal opportunities and access to education. It strives to enhance (i) discrimination-free right of access to education, ii) access to child-centred quality education and appropriately monitored learning process, (iii) meaningful participation and right to respect within the learning environment, and (iv) freedom from all forms of violence, and respect for language, culture and religion. The project planning also shows well-thought-out measures for adaptation to climate change and or mitigation of the effects of climate change. These include developing disaster preparedness plans and promoting early warning systems, conducting climate change dialogues to raise awareness and equip project participants with skills and information on climate-smart agricultural practices, mobilising community members for tree planting, and adopting ecologically friendly techniques (UFF, 2020).

Finnpartnership's Business Partnership Support intervention contributes the least to mainstream cross-cutting objectives. While limited evidence is available, documentation related to the planning and implementation of the Finnpartnership-financed project indicates that the intervention has not actively aimed at impacting gender equality or environmental aspects (Finnpartnership, 2019; Soprano Oyj, 2019).

Climate sustainability comes across as the least considered cross-cutting objective. While a self-assessment of the 2016-2019 Country Strategy has noted that climate change resilience has maintained a weak status in most programmes and its strengthening should be recalled in the future (current) programming (Embassy of Finland in Maputo, 2018), the interventions now reviewed still suggest less attention to climate aspects than gender and disability.

4.2 Result (EQ2): effectiveness of the measures taken by Finland

4.2.1 Views on the effectiveness of development partners' efforts in priority thematic areas

Finland has been an active actor with notable intangible contributions. As a donor country, Finland has taken an active role in the education sector development in Mozambique. On top of its financial contributions to the overall education sector development, it has taken a leading role



and brought a consultative approach and driven multi-actor agenda. Influencing and impacting have occurred at multiple levels, including placements in multiple sectoral working groups (such as co-chair position in the teacher-training working group), FASE troika and taking the full sector lead position in 2020. Furthermore, a Senior Specialist for education has been placed at the Embassy (Embassy of Finland in Maputo, 2018; MFA, 2020g; MFA, 2022b; KIIs).

Influencing efforts have contributed to keeping teacher training one of the priority reform efforts. An ambitious national teacher policy in Mozambique is progressing under solid local ownership (MFA, 2021d). Multiple sources suggest that there is a will to improve teachers' and principals' performance to enhance learning, which also reflects that teacher training is a high priority. The new reforms in teacher training are approved, but the guiding documents are not ready to guide the needed changes required by the reform. Policy dialogue and engagement from partners, including Finland, have helped keep teacher training one of the high-priority reforms on the Ministry's political agenda (MFA, 2022b; KIIs).

Despite challenges, promising results are generated with FASE and COACH support. As of 2021 data, the total number of teachers was 147,577, constituting a 5.8% annual increase from the 2020 baseline (143,508). During 2021, 3,722 teachers completed a teacher training programme, including 50.4% (1,877) of female teachers, which exceeded the gender-balance target (3,450) set for the year. Also, in-service training for school principals exceeded the established annual target, with 1,863 school principals trained, including 720 women. Two thousand modules on pedagogical, financial, administrative and legislative management and IT, as well as a support manual for principals of primary education, were printed and distributed to support this training. 521 of 1,050 teacher trainers used IT in their teaching, which also exceeded the yearly goal (100). According to 2021 statistics, in-service training for 811 teachers (with around 11% of them women) in teacher training colleges exceeded targets for trainers to respond to the emerging needs from school closure. The national teacher policy, covering the whole sector, including vocational education and training and higher education, was in progress. Its indicative structure and contents were produced, and stakeholders were consulted in 2021. During the year, 8,768 teachers were recruited, of whom 3,859 were female. Despite some delays, the COACH programme contributed to building up the tailored, practical and continuous in-service teacher education-coaching model by developing and pre-testing the materials. The teacher training institutions experienced many challenges related to COVID-19 restrictions, but as per results, they managed well. The number of newly graduated teachers and school managers who benefitted from school management courses surpassed the targets (MFA, 2022b). While official figures have shown improvements in teachers' commitment, other sources indicate somewhat contradicting and even a growing trend in teacher absenteeism. With high pupil absenteeism, teachers' commitment to attend work remains a challenge and a factor compromising the quality of education in Mozambique (e.g. UNICEF, 2022).

4.2.2 Main change regarding inclusive and quality education for girls, children with disabilities and other vulnerable children

Gender inequality in Mozambique is acute, ranking 127 out of 162 countries in the Gender Inequality Index (World Bank, 2021c). Results reporting on the Country Strategy cycle 2016-2020 communicate positive education statistics in terms of annually growing trend of participation in education, increasing literacy rate and the length of the school career (MFA, 2021c). However, according to the World Bank, Mozambiquan women have achieved only 1.4 years (average) of schooling, two years below men's average education of 3.4 years. Also, girls' enrolment in upper



grades remains a challenge. There are high levels of school dropout, primarily concentrated in the early grades (all children) or after Grade 5 (mostly girls). (World Bank, 2021a)

Reviewed documentation suggests that FASE support has positively impacted access to school, especially girls' education, as well as reduced class size and regional disparities (MFA, 2019). The MINEHD is slowly increasing the number of secondary schools in rural areas. In 2020, about 137 600 more students entered secondary education than in 2016 (MFA, 2021c). However, data from 2021 suggests a sharp decrease in gross enrolment rates in the transition from primary to secondary school, with only about 39,6 out of 100 pupils (out of them 39 girls) continuing to secondary education (MFA, 2022b).

Despite progress, girls' retention and school completion improvements remain unsatisfactory, and in general, the combined effects of COVID-19 and other recent events in Mozambique have decreased school completion rates in the country (MFA, 2021d; MFA, 2022b).

Teachers' and duty bearers' skills gaps constitute one reason for the goal of inclusive education remaining unreachd. Children with disabilities tend to experience the challenges of exclusion due to discrimination, community perceptions and beliefs and inaccessible environments. Girls and, especially, children with disabilities do not have the knowledge, life skills and confidence to claim their rights, and insufficient protection and reporting systems leave them vulnerable to abuse (UFF, 2020). While no complete data is available and the Country Programme's outcome level indicators support the assumption that the progress in teachers' and principals' performance contributes to better learning (MFA, 2022b), inclusive education in Mozambique is yet to be achieved.

4.2.3 Contribution of Finnish technical expertise to improved results in inclusive and quality education for girls, children with disabilities and other vulnerable children

Finland has made a clear commitment to advancing equal access to education. Finland has actively contributed to education sector development through policy dialogue, equity and inclusion being the most commonly highlighted aspects. Some concrete results of policy influencing include decisions to integrate bilingual education, girls' access to education and improving learning outcomes in the ESP for 2020-2029 (MFA, 2020b; MFA, 2021f). Also, Finland has led the policy dialogue emphasising the need for investing more in central and northern regions where girls' retention is lower. (MFA, 2021d) While Finland has been overall actively engaged in the World Bank's Coach pilot in Mozambique and is present in the Local Advisory Board, plans to deploy Finnish expertise to the World Bank Headquarters, considered crucial to ensuring, e.g. the programme mainstreaming Finland's cross-cutting objectives, have not materialised sooner than in 2022 due to the World Bank's internal staffing cuts, somewhat limiting Finland's opportunities to drive its desired agenda (MFA, 2020f; KIIs).

With potentially less muscle for overall change and impact, smaller and targeted projects have provided new avenues to bring in Finnish expertise. HEI ICI project has contributed to capacitating duty bearers and new teacher generations, responsible for providing quality education for all children, following a student-centred approach considering inclusiveness and non-discrimination in education. In its implementation, the project has integrated the principles of inclusion and participation and aimed at locally owned developed models and solutions to facilitate better access to education (e.g., digital learning relevant in the local context). On bilingualism questions



pertinent to the Mozambique context and inclusive, equitable quality education, the project has shared experiences and introduced solutions from Finland regarding teaching the Sami-speaking population. (JAMK, 2022) Then again, CSO intervention has done important grassroots-level work on inclusivity. UFF Finland's project has directly contributed to inclusiveness, participation and a child-centred approach to education. Bringing in more Finnish expertise, Disability Partnership Finland (Vammaiskumppanuus) has provided trainers to strengthen the education of local teachers in these matters (UFF, 2022).

4.2.4 Example of synergies between the government actors, CSOs, HEIs and the private sector (multi-actor set-up)

Mozambique is an example of a country where multiple instruments have been used in the same sector and/or thematic area. Available information suggests linkages between the projects and initiatives falling under the different instruments. While the document review provides little evidence on how they have planned cooperation or generated synergies, it is evident that at least HEI ICI, CSO, and Finnpartnership interventions have established linkages through, e.g., joint partners. For example, UFF Finland has partnered with JAMK in their TEPATE project. Soprano Oyj's initiative has cooperated with the Pedagogical University of Maputo, one of the project partners of TEPATE. While in the planning of the Finnpartnership intervention, the World Bank has also been recognised as a potential link, progress reporting does not indicate much cooperation being built or synergies gained during its implementation (Soprano Oyj, 2019). Otherwise, available reporting suggests that the project has been well-networked with other Finnish education export and Education Technology (EdTech) actors (Soprano Oyj, 2019).

The newly established HEI ICI indicates good results in establishing cooperation in the country. Despite being a new project and its kick-off challenged by COVID-19, HEI ICI cooperation in Mozambique has taken a promising start. While all partners have been new to each other, their cooperation was somewhat impacted by language barriers and required the Finnish coordinator to ensure the establishment of a partnership (including, e.g. local counterparts' professional project management practices meeting with the donor requirements), the experiences gained this far indicates good potential for the Finnish Higher Education Institutes (HEI) to continue and expand their work in Mozambique (JAMK, 2022; KII: EDUFI). Information accessed during the review suggests that HEI ICI and Finnpartnership interventions have looked for avenues of cooperation, but there is no evidence of concrete results yet (KII; Soprano Oyj, 2019).

CSO intervention is grounded on a solid partnership base. While UFF Finland's project has been partnering with some of Mozambique's best-known associations working with persons with disabilities, it has also utilised the other Finnish CSO's expertise in supporting the work in Mozambique (UFF, 2022, MFA, 2023).

4.2.5 Results of the multi-actor approach/set-up

Finland has gained an influential position in the donor community and kept teacher education high on the Mozambiquan education sector development agenda. Through sectoral support, Finland and other partners have supported Mozambique's governmental education sector programme covering multiple areas of education, teacher training as one of them. Finland's policy dialogue and engagement have played a role in keeping teacher training as one of the high-priority reforms



on the Ministry's political agenda (MFA, 2021d). Well-functioning sector and technical working groups have also provided a platform for Finland's policy dialogue, strengthening the country's strategy results (MFA, 2021e). Finland has gained an influential role in the donor community. Still, the same level of policy and strategy influence would not have been possible as a single donor or through a standalone project.

FASE-supported education sector development suggests slow but steady results overall.

Goals within the ESP 2020-2029 sectoral programmes related to teacher education are yet to be achieved. While the role of such sectoral support mechanism as FASE is crucial for Mozambique and pooled funding is generally an efficient way for the donors to contribute to the country's development plans and provides avenues for gaining influential donor positions, on the other hand, it weakens the abilities to control and monitor the investment (e.g. the degree to which the sectoral support budget has directly impacted the area of teacher education). The first results of implementing the new ESP 2020-2029 suggest that goals have been met in terms of initial teacher training and training of trainers (sectoral programmes 5.1 and 5.3). Still, in-service training of teachers and school managers (5.2) remains behind targets (Embassy of Finland in Maputo, 2021).

Joining the Coach pilot has provided more avenues for targeted addressing teachers. Finland was invited to join the World Bank's country-specific Coach pilot, which has provided another opportunity to strengthen teachers' professional development model in Mozambique. The pilot being part of the World Bank's broader education sector development programme in Mozambique and the global Coach product establishes high expectations regarding quality implementation. It hence suggests valuable investment to impacting teachers directly. Similar to sectoral support, recognised challenge and/or risks in this multilateral partnership relates to contractual modalities and the lack of partners' abilities to monitor and control funds (MFA, 2020h).

A combination of modalities has generally strengthened Finland's engagement in teacher education. While Mozambique has been for a long time an area of interest for Finnish development actors, and many projects have been implemented by financing TEPATE, Finland has made the first HEI ICI opening (dedicated to teacher education) in Mozambique (KII: EDUFI). Through this project, Finland has contributed to increasing the institutional and individual capacity of two Mozambican HEIs to deliver effective teacher education (EDUFI, 2022a).

4.3 Future (EQ3): outlooks for better results

4.3.1 Future measures to strengthen the multi-actor approach and set up

Consider the balance of the sector support and other interventions. Balancing and/or sharing of investment between the different instruments might be worth considering if teacher education is prioritised. While supporting the overall reform programmes, financing smaller initiatives, particularly focusing on teacher education, would also aim to increase the Finnish knowledge base and experience in global education sector development cooperation (MFA, 2019c; KIIs).

Further synergies could be built by identifying suitable cooperation models. Considering the recognised need to complement the general sector support with thematically targeted projects,



planning how to scale up project-based or product-specific collaboration might be required to reach a wider impact at the education system level. Despite limited experience and evidence on the success of business partnership intervention and the relevance of Education Export (EE) or EdTech solutions to Mozambique, the review suggests the potential for more HEI-Private Sector cooperation, e.g. related to the development of context-relevant digital solutions (KIIs).

Maintain Embassy's active role. Experiences from Mozambique suggest that the Embassy has played an active and important role as a driver of the Finnish development efforts. The Embassy has developed a dedicated strategy for advocating the development in the education sector (MFA, 2014), but in general, paid specific attention to monitoring and sharing information regarding the sector developments, needs and opportunities. This is strongly supported to be continued, and if possible, the country programming modality to better enable the effective utilisation of the multi-actor setups (KIIs).

Ensure adequate resources for planning and design of multi-actor initiatives. Experience has shown that planning multi-actor projects and initiatives can be time- and resource-consuming. The plans regarding the Coach have not fully materialised in getting Finnish expertise involved in the project due to the World Bank's internal staffing plans and limitations, leaving in-country consultancies as the only option but out of reach from Finnish experts due to limited knowledge of Portuguese (KIIs).

Strengthen coordination and dialogue between the instruments. While it is important to support the development and maintenance of links between the different implementing actors in the field, the need for stronger cooperation and coordination also remains between the government actors involved in and channelling Official Development Assistance (ODA) funds for education sector development cooperation through the different instruments. The pool of actively involved actors is relatively small. Still, they, e.g., apply funds for their projects from the available sources administered by different authorities, establishing a coordination challenge and making it difficult to ensure complementarity of the planned actions. Further strategic clarity regarding responsibilities and further development of practical-level coordination mechanisms between MFA and the Ministry of Education and Culture would support the generation of better value for the money (KIIs).

Support the continuation of research-informed development. Experiences gained from the first HEI ICI opening in Mozambique have been mostly positive, and the project has had a strong start, suggesting good grounds to continue higher education cooperation in the country (KII: EDUFI). Despite the promising start of HEI ICI cooperation in Mozambique, continued efforts will be required to deliver more tangible results and ensure sustainability. HEIs have demonstrated good networking potential at the country level, and some of Finland's best research, development and innovation expertise relevant to education sector development cooperation is located in its HEIs, including the science universities and universities of applied sciences (KIIs).

Commit to a long-visioned approach and in-country networking. Education sector development in Mozambique is steady but slow. Effective engagement requires the development partners to establish a long-term vision and commitment and develop strong relations with their local counterparts. The same applies to donors and development partners implementing projects. Effective development in Mozambique requires developing strong partnerships and trust with the local counterparts. Despite the high potential, some initiatives, e.g. related to education export, have yet to reach a long lifespan due to time-consuming partnership building (KIIs).



4.3.2 Emerging needs and future thematic areas requiring Finland's support (financial and expertise)

Overall, improving the quality of teaching in Mozambique recalls for continued support. In addition to increasing the number of teachers, a remarkable need remains to invest in increasing the quality and efficiency of education by improving teachers' qualifications, accountability (internal control – better supervision), and ensuring better geographical teacher distribution. Until now, accountability aspects have been challenging to address within the existing Country Programmes but would require alternative programming/instruments (KIIs).

Strengthening in-service teacher professional development should continue. The Coach pilot has kicked off relatively recently, so while progress and concrete results achieved by now are limited, continued support to efforts dedicated to teacher education is required. Addressing teacher educators and practical training of future teachers should continue (KII: EDUFI). In general, the co-development of teaching methods and practices should continue within projects and initiatives dedicated to this purpose (KIIs).

The development of locally adaptable pedagogy for blended teaching and learning should be supported. Over the world, the prolonged COVID-19 pandemic forced the closures of educational establishments and has led the education sector to the intensive use of technology. Hybrid models of teaching and learning are there to stay, but the need for further capacitating teachers and developing solutions suitable for the local context (including recognising infrastructural limitations) remains. In Mozambique, teachers involved in the TEPATE have shown initiative to overcome the lack of computers or access to high-speed internet by using mobile phones to facilitate distance learning (KII: EDUFI). Limitations related to both the existing Information Technology (IT) infrastructure and current local preparedness to introduce online learning have been recognised during the Finnpartnership-financed initiative as well, indicating that Mozambique is not yet a soil for introducing advanced e-learning solutions but rather recalls for co-developing light hybrid learning models that can support and build the resilience of the current education infrastructure (Soprano Oyj, 2019).

Mainstreaming inclusiveness, accessibility and equality at all levels of education remains crucial. Inclusive education in Mozambique is not yet at the desired level, and equipping teachers with the skillset required for the educational process, considering the needs of learners with disabilities or special needs, represents an area with much work ahead (KIIs). Since there are indications that female teachers contribute to girls' retention but no notable increase in the share of female teachers or school directors²⁷ (MFA, 2022b), gender balance in the teaching profession must be continuously addressed.

²⁷ Based on 2021 data, half of the graduated teachers and 39% of the school directors were female, which is the same as the baseline. 44% of the recruited new teachers were female, which was below the baseline (46.5%)



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THEMATIC CASE STUDY: VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN UKRAINE

DESK-BASED MINI CASE

MERVI KUVAJA



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Acronyms and abbreviations

CoE	Centre of Excellence
EDUFI	Finnish National Agency for Education
EdTech	Education Technology
EIB	European Investment Bank
EU	European Union
ETF	European Training Foundation
EQAVET	European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIZ	German Agency for Development Cooperation
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IT	Information Technology
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NUS	New Ukrainian School
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OEP	Omnia Education Partnerships
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
ToT	Training of Trainers
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WB	World Bank



1 Introduction

1.1 Objective and contribution of the thematic case study to the evaluation

This case study is part of the evaluation “Right to education, right to learn” – Finland’s development cooperation in the education sector. It concerns the period of 2019-2022 and focuses on the Vocational Education and Training (VET) reform in Ukraine.

Education as one of Finland’s Development Policy priorities includes VET, and strengthening the VET profile and sharing of Finnish experiences in education reform was among the recommended Stepping Up measures by Reinikka et al. (2018). However, little is known about how and where innovative VET and continuous learning solutions have been piloted.

Ukraine is among those countries where Finland’s development cooperation has included major result areas focused on education. On top of supporting the overall school reform in Ukraine, the current Country Programme (2021-2024) pays particular attention to enhancing the relevance and attractiveness of VET. Since 2020, Finland has participated in a multi-actor project supporting VET reform efforts in Ukraine. For all these reasons, Ukraine – with a particular focus on VET - was selected as a country for a supplementary thematic case study.

1.2 Methods of data collection and scope

This thematic case study has been produced primarily as a desk review of a comprehensive set of open-source and non-public project documentation relevant to the Ukrainian VET reform and Finland’s contributions. Desk review and document-based analysis have been complemented with one interview, and participation in a Final Seminar on Finland’s education sector projects in VET in Ukraine²⁸ has been used as an opportunity to collect supportive data, complementing and further triangulating the desk review findings. While the review of Finland’s and its development partners’ efforts in the thematic area concerns the period of 2019-2022, it considers the recent developments and continuously evolving situation in Ukraine and, hence, also utilises information produced outside the scope of this evaluation. Due to their desk-based nature and particular thematic focus, the thematic case study is conducted in a lighter format and hence does not present all elements included in the full-scale country case studies.

28 Suomen koulutusalan Ukrainan ”Learning Together” ja ”EU4Skills” -hankkeiden päätösseminaari, organised on Friday 21 April 2023



2 Country and sector context

2.1 Brief overview of country context

Ukraine is the second largest country in Europe, with a population of 41 million inhabitants and a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita of 4,082 EUR in 2021 (European Commission, 2023). Ukraine ranks among the top 30 countries of the world by share of the population aged 60 years and above, while the cohort aged 15-24 accounts for only 16.4%. Life expectancy at birth is around 70 years, among the lowest in Europe, and the working-age population is expected to decline further. Severe deterioration of the economic situation and devaluation in real income has led to increased labour migration from Ukraine, resulting in a lack of qualified workforce, particularly young people (18-29 years old) in the national labour market. Due to the socio-economic situation, many employees continue working after retirement, reducing the pressure upon employers to recruit staff among new graduates (European Commission, 2018; MFA, 2019b).

Ukraine became a battleground in 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea, representing the first time since World War II that a European state annexed the territory of another. More than 14,000 people lost their lives in the fighting in the Donbas during 2014-2021, the bloodiest conflict in Europe since the Balkan Wars of the 1990s (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023).

In February 2022, Russia embarked on a full-scale invasion of Ukraine to topple the government of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Since the start of the war, nearly 5 million jobs have been lost in Ukraine. 5-6 million persons have fled from war and estimated more than 7-8 million are internally displaced within Ukraine (UNHRC, 2022). Approximately 1.2 million of the total refugee population were working before the aggression. Two-thirds of those have an advanced (tertiary) level of education, and 49 per cent were employed in high-skilled occupations. Most of the refugee population are women and children (ILO, 2022; World Bank, 2022).

2.2 Education sector achievements and challenges related to vocational education and training

According to official data, the population of Ukraine is relatively well-educated (UNESCO, 2023). In 2020, 44% of the active population had completed secondary education, and 54% had completed or were enrolled in tertiary education (ETF, 2021a). VET is an essential part of the educational system (UNICEF, 2020), and PISA 2018 results show that around 15% of Ukrainian youth expect to be working in jobs which are typically entered through VET programmes by the time of age 30 (OECD, 2018). According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) World Indicators of Skills for Employment, about a third of upper-secondary students in Ukraine are in vocationally oriented programmes. In 2019, 253 900 students were enrolled in upper-secondary



VET schools²⁹ (ETF, 2021a)³⁰. While industry has been the most popular sector for VET, many VET students were also found in agriculture and construction. Compared to the OECD average, Ukrainians are clearer at age 15 about their ambitions for working life, and occupations commonly entered through VET programmes are high on the list (OECD, 2022). The effects of the demographic change in population in Ukraine, combined with the changes in the share of young people enrolled in upper-secondary education and the decrease in enrolment in VET, are putting significant pressure on skills availability in the country. The nature of global and regional economies and the new types of jobs becoming available as part of the evolving knowledge-based economy increase the demand for new skills. (European Commission, 2018).

However, the school-based VET system inherited from the Soviet Union has no longer met individual and social needs, nor is it prepared to face the economic challenges or world trends (Government of Ukraine, 2023; ETF, 2017b; MFA, 2019a). According to the World Bank, over 60% of Ukrainian firms contributing to the Ukraine STEP Employer Survey in 2014 thought the education system did not equip students with the skills the labour market needs. The surveyed firms covered four sectors: agriculture, food processing, renewable energy and information technology. According to the surveyed firms, the education system did not produce enough people with the practical skills and up-to-date knowledge that firms needed. Also, the level and nature of skills and the student's attitude and self-discipline were considered insufficient. (World Bank, 2017).

While the VET system has pressures to provide more qualified graduates, the number of students has been shrinking, the content is outdated, and the quality of education is low (MFA, 2019b). Infrastructure in most VET institutions is outdated, the quality assurance system is weak, and the skills acquired through VET do not meet the labour market requirements. The fragmentation of the VET system, ineffective governance and management organisation, outdated pedagogical methods, and technical infrastructure not meeting the needs of technological advancement and the evolving knowledge-based economy have hampered the quality delivery of VET. This has resulted in a stable decrease in the VET students' population (and enrolment) due to the low attractiveness of VET. Moreover, the VET system needs to manage and implement life-long learning for adults properly (European Commission, 2018).

Since Ukraine began to reform its education system at all levels in 2014, VET has been under considerable transformation. The new Concept for Modern VET adopted in June 2019 includes the main strategic elements of VET reform, establishing one of the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science's (MoES) priorities and strategic directions for 2019–2024 (MoES, 2016). Efforts included several major reforms, such as the 2020–2027 National VET Action Plan, to modernise the VET system and decentralise its governance. Moreover, the National Council for VET Development was established in 2021 in addition to existing Regional VET Councils (ETF, 2021a).

The war has again placed education in a new reality: destructing educational institutions no longer offering safe places to learn and forcing a large part of the young population to go to other parts of Ukraine or to leave their homes. The war has disrupted education for over five million children and youth (UNICEF, 2023). It is estimated that close to 700,000 students (16 % of the total number of

29 62% young men and 38% young women

30 Upper secondary VET programmes include: Level 1 programmes (one year or less), which are mostly delivered as online and parttime programmes and focus on on-the-job learning, and Level 2 VET programmes (1.5–3 years), which grant access to tertiary education. At the short-cycle tertiary level, Level 3 VET programmes (2–4 years) lead to a junior bachelor or specialist diploma, which may be recognised towards academic bachelor's programmes.



enrolled students) and over 25,000 educators (6% of total educators in the country) have fled to neighbouring countries (World Bank, 2022).

According to the MoES of Ukraine, over 3,000 (as of 6 April 2023) education institutions, including VET schools, have been damaged or destroyed completely since the beginning of the war. VET schools, among other public spaces, are used as shelters for Internally Displaced Persons (IDP), and due to damaged infrastructure and the ongoing threats of attacks, VET has been delivered via remote training or organised in a blended format (MoES, 2023a; ILO, 2023). The MoES has been working to maintain and rebuild VET by resuming VET programmes and by working on projects to update VET institutions with modern machinery and equipment that will contribute to the training of skilled workers to meet the needs of the national economy both in wartime and later in the post-war period of rebuilding (OECD, 2022). According to the Kyiv School of Economics, by the end of February 2023, losses from destroyed or damaged educational institutions have reached USD 8.9 billion (KSE, 2023).

2.3 Key donors in the education sector

The key donor support to education and VET for young people and adults is provided through the 'EU4Skills: Better Skills for a Modern Ukraine' programme, with 58 MEUR from the European Union (EU), Finland, Germany, and Poland. In addition, the European Investment Bank (EIB) has financed a project implemented in parallel to the EU4Skills in areas not benefitting from the EU4Skills and contributed to the modernisation of the Ukrainian VET system by establishing VET Centres of Excellences (CoE) in ten selected administrative regions (oblasts)³¹ (EIB, 2021). The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has supported the MoES in developing digital VET curricula, online simulators and teacher training in e-learning didactics and implemented a project for an inclusive labour market for job creation (ILO, 2023a; EU4Skills, 2022).

Multiple individual donors, such as the Swiss Development Cooperation, the German-Ukrainian Chamber of Industry and Commerce, the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation and Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW), are involved in specific areas of VET and skills development in Ukraine. (EU4Skills, 2022) The European Training Foundation (ETF) supports the VET reform in Ukraine by conducting a yearly content monitoring of the reform (ETF, 2023).

31 Chernihiv, Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk, Ivano-Frankivsk, Kharkiv, Kyiv City, Odesa, Sumy, Ternopil and Volyn



3 Finland's country programme

3.1 Country strategy/overall country programme

Two Country Strategies and Programmes fall under the scope of this evaluation, 2018-2022 and 2021-2024, the latter being continuing the countries' bilateral development cooperation but introducing the necessary updates, reformulations and a widening of cooperation.

Diplomatic relations between Finland and Ukraine, established in 1992, have further intensified and diversified since 2014. Finland has provided regular assistance to Ukraine in the forms of development cooperation, civilian crisis management and expert secondments, humanitarian aid, humanitarian mine action, and support through non-governmental organisations (NGO), the Council of Europe and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)–Ukraine Trust Funds (MFA, 2021a).

Within the Country Strategy 2018-2022, Finland's development cooperation priorities in Ukraine are built around education and energy efficiency and continued support to structural reform processes as well as strengthening human rights and the rule of law. During the strategy period, Finland was also seeking new areas of cooperation, especially in education (MFA, 2018a).

The goals of Finland's current Country Strategy for the years 2021-2024 are to restore the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine and to guarantee respect for international law; to end the conflict in eastern Ukraine; to strengthen bilateral relations between Finland and Ukraine and to widen the scope of cooperation; to enhance the resilience of society and to improve the living conditions of citizens; as well as to strengthen the relations between the European Union and Ukraine. (MFA, 2023). In development cooperation, Finland focuses on education, energy and the rule of law (MFA, 2021a).

Country Programme aligned with the new Ukraine Country Strategy 2021–2024 has two impact areas: **Successful reforms in the quality of education and the rule of law** and **Improved energy security and climate resilience of Ukraine**.

3.2 Education sector focus of the country programme

Education was established as one of the main priorities already in the previous programming cycle (2018-2022) in Ukraine. In the Country Strategy for years 2018-2022, support for the overall school and VET reform established the first impact area for Finland's cooperation in Ukraine, with particular emphasis under this impact area placed on reforming and modernising VET so that it can better contribute to the sustainable and inclusive socio-economic development of the country (MFA, 2018a).

In the current Country Programme for 2021-2024, impact area one contains two outcomes related to education sector development. Outcome one focuses on **Improved teaching practices and educational environments in primary and secondary education**, and outcome two **Enhanced relevance and attractiveness of VET for female and male learners** (MFA, 2021b). Outcome two translates into two expected outputs: 1.2.1: **Revised and up-to-date system of professional**



and educational qualifications and curricula and 1.2.2: **Trained teachers and school managers who put the VET reform into practice.** Finland's support for the New Ukrainian School (NUS) reform enhances the upgrading of primary and secondary school teachers' teaching practices and modernising VET. The strategy also expresses an interest in considering possibilities to widen cooperation on digital education (MFA, 2021a). The VET reform aims to modernise the VET system, create the conditions for modern teaching and learning, and improve the quality and attractiveness of VET and its relevance to the labour market (MFA, 2021b).

3.3 Funding for education sector

In 2021–2024, Finland's planned support for the 2021–2024 development cooperation country programme period was 29 MEUR, with planned appropriations dedicated to education and the rule of law being 15 MEUR. Two main education projects are the following:

- **Finland's support for the Ukrainian school reform ("Learning Together"):** The project's budget is 8 MEUR, of which Finland's share is 6 MEUR and that of the EU is 2 MEUR.
- **Promoting Ukraine's VET reform ("EU4Skills"):** Finland's contribution to the joint project is 3.5 MEUR in 2020–2023. Following Russia's illegal invasion in February 2022, Finland's support has been increased and adapted to respond to acute needs and strengthen society during the war.
- **Support for the World Bank's joint funds** for the financing needs of the Ukrainian public administration and school employees and to support the public sector's capacity to maintain public and basic services. Finland's contribution to the joint funds total 21 MEUR in 2022.

3.4 Instruments/channels used and Finland's key partners

Finland's key instrument to support Ukraine's VET reform is its contributions to the **EU4Skills, a multilateral project** with the main objective of supporting the reform and modernisation of VET in Ukraine in close cooperation with the Ukrainian MoES. It aims to enhance the effectiveness of VET reform in Ukraine, improve the quality and attractiveness of VET, increase its relevance to the labour market, and modernise the infrastructure and equipment of selected VET schools. EU-4Skills supports the reform implementation on the national level in seven focus regions and 21 pilot schools³². The goal is to create an effective system of VET to contribute to the economic prosperity of the country and the self-realisation of young people and adults. The funding is channelled through the German Agency for Development Cooperation (GIZ), responsible for implementing the project. Estonia is also involved in the project but channels its contribution directly to the Education and Youth Board (HarNo), which brings Estonian expertise to the project. In addition to HarNo and GIZ, the project is implemented by the Polish Solidarity Fund and Finland's National Board of Education (EDUFI). In addition, the project is closely linked to a separate programme to finance the reform of VET infrastructure implemented by the KfW with EU funding (EU4Skills, 2020; MFA, 2021d).

32 Chernivtsi, Lviv, Mykolaiv, Poltava, Rivne, Vinnitsya and Zaporizhja



4 Findings

4.1 Response (EQ1): measures taken by development partners in responding to the learning crisis and improving quality of education (relevance, efficiency, coherence)

4.1.1 Relevance of development partners' efforts in terms of addressing the learning crisis and improving the quality of education in Ukraine

The action's original objectives have aligned with the national policy and supported the local VET reform efforts. Ukraine's Sustainable Development Strategy 2020, adopted in January 2015, sets important targets and reform priorities with relevance for VET, being the decentralisation and public administration reform as well as the deregulation and development of entrepreneurship (ETF, 2018). The National Education Development Strategy 2012-2021 and the Medium-Term Plan of the Government Priority Actions for the period till 2020 had already set the main objectives of VET development, touching on many matters that the multi-actor initiative has been programmed to support (EU4Skills, 2018). It is in line with the goals of the National Baseline Report on Sustainable Development Goals of the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade of Ukraine (2017), targeting to reduce the share of households whose members suffer from a lack of income opportunities to enable any member of the household to receive VET, to increase the enrolment rate of adults and youth in formal and informal forms of education and professional training.

The concept of NUS has been calling for a "radical reform" of the Ukrainian education systems since 2016. NUS aims to change the culture of schools, of teaching and learning to be one of partnership and using learner-centred approaches. It has envisioned VET as an equal path to complete 12 years of education, allowing graduates to enrol at a university after sitting for a national final attestation. Within the framework of the NUS, the reform concept for vocational education in Ukraine, "Modern VET", describes the modernisation of the VET sector to contribute to the country's socioeconomic development. The reform concept is aligned with decentralising administrative structures (with a new financing model, network optimisation, and effective management and autonomy of schools). Furthermore, it envisages strengthening the social partnership and linking training provision to the needs of the labour market. This is envisioned to be done with the use of professional standards in training and assessment, effective professional orientation and career planning and a framework for life-long learning, taking into account the talents of both females and males in all areas of the labour market and by improving the quality of VET (through innovative teachers, a better learning environment, and competence-based learning and assessment) (MoES, 2016; 2023). The new law on education (2017) provides the legal basis for implementing the reform. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the reform efforts has remained unclear (World Bank, 2017).



The adjusted programme has responded to the deepening learning crisis but partially lost the focus on the reform support. As a response to the MoES emergency plan highlighting the requirement to mitigate the immediate effects of war and to increase the resilience of the education sector, the EU4Skills has adjusted and repurposed its objectives and activities better addressing the current conditions, including support to shelters for IDPs in VET schools in Western Ukraine, assistance to the continuation of learning through online courses and support VET schools, further training institutes and other training providers in contributing to the rebuilding of the country³³. (GIZ, 2022a, GIZ, 2022b). While the action has been aligned with the new needs, partially as a result of Finland's negotiation efforts and readiness for flexibility, the repurposing process resulted in a work programme that has not only provided emergency assistance but also addresses the continuity of learning, particularly in occupations related to the construction industry and support the educational programs preparing for post-war rapid quality training. It has also become evident that the Ukrainian authorities want and are committed to continuing the reform as the current conditions allow. (MoES, 2022; KII; Autere & Jansson, 2023).

4.1.2 Views on Finland's strengths and added value of collaborating with Finland in the education sector

Finland has built a strong global reputation for providing high-quality education. The review process confirmed the findings of the Finnish Development Policy Influencing in the European Union (MFA, 2022b), concluding that Finland's globally recognised reputation as a country with a quality education system, together with its well-established relations with the Ukrainian MoES, were already seen as strengths and entry points in getting involved in the EU4Skills. (MFA, 2022b). However, despite Finland's generally known reputation, entry into the VET sector initiative would not have necessarily happened without successful influencing efforts within the EU structures (KII).

Contributing to EU4Skills shows systematic support for education sector reform and utilises Finland's strengths in VET. Finland's contribution to the desired reform efforts has focused on revising and updating the professional and educational qualifications and curricula system and training teachers and school managers who put the VET reform into practice (MFA, 2021b). Focus on these areas is relevant to the needs of Ukraine and Finland's policy priorities and is also in line with Finland's strengths in the VET field, as described below. Investing in VET is also a natural continuation of support to the system reform already provided to the NUS in basic education.

Finland catalyses fostering lifelong learning pathways. VET in Finland is based on the principle of continuous learning, which promotes the acquisition and renewal of knowledge, skills and competencies throughout individuals' whole careers and lives, which has been one of the recognised weaknesses in the Ukrainian VET system (EQAVET, 2021; European commission, 2018).

Finland actively promotes entrepreneurship within its education system at all levels. Entrepreneurship skills are high on the Finnish VET agenda. Considering the Ukraine context, before the full-scale conflict broke out, conflict-affected regions in Eastern Ukraine had been facing high unemployment rates among young people, with very limited employment opportunities available.

33 Result 3.1: Educational institutions have strengthened capacity to provide shelter for internally displaced persons in Ukraine; Result 3.2: Continuation of learning in the VET system is supported through the provision of online courses and learning material, and Result 3.3: Educational authorities and institutions have strengthened capacity to address skill needs in the context of Ukraine's rebuilding process.



At the same time, young people show less entrepreneurial attitude and preparedness. Including entrepreneurial competencies in its programmes is a recognised strength of Finnish VET and an area where Finland has much to give as a part of, e.g. teacher training (KII).

Finland demonstrates exceptional expertise in ensuring the quality aspects of VET. Finnish strength and added value to implementing its dedicated work packages as a part of the EU4Skills has been decades-long experience in competence-based vocational qualifications and comprehensive expertise in VET quality aspects, as well as writing learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Finland has a long tradition of a tripartite working approach in anticipation and development of VET, and Finland itself, with EDUFI support, has recently implemented a fundamental VET reform in close collaboration with relevant stakeholders and education providers (EU4Skills, 2020).

4.1.3 Timely implementation of planned interventions

Despite the delayed start, the intervention has largely progressed in line with its goals at the outcome level until the repurposing. Launching of the project was delayed from planned, but reviewed documentation suggests that before the repurposing of the action³⁴, nearly 50 % of the project milestones were achieved, and the remaining on track with no major negative implications foreseen for supporting the VET reform through the multi-actor initiative (E4Skills, 2022). However, the available timeframe and the planned activities have not been fully aligned, suggesting ambitious goal-setting against the available implementation period (Autere & Jansson, 2023). Information accessed indicates that the early phases of the initiative were generally unclear for the parties of the multi-actor initiative, partly explained by the completely new working modality (KII; Emails from Embassy).

Local and contextual factors have delayed the implementation. While the project performance against the set targets and indicators seems relatively good at the outcome level, delays have occurred in the timely implementation of planned interventions due to multiple factors (EU4Skills, 2021 & 2022; EDUFI, 2021a, 2021b & 2022). The key challenges include the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, requiring fundamental reorientation of the action, but also because of national counterparts' limited resources, complex regulatory framework and lack of inter-institutional cooperation. This has not only resulted in a lengthy approval process of developed standards, slowing their introduction to the education system, but hampered the progress of VET reform in general. Also, the lack of trust between national and regional actors in the public and private sectors has required more time spent identifying the common interest, national buy-in and local ownership for the agenda that Finland has been driving. For example, while in demand, the idea of a modular and flexible VET qualifications learning system supporting the upskilling needs of individuals and industry and facilitating continuous learning has been somewhat challenging to introduce, as well as digitalisation (KII; MFA, 2022c). While there is slight evidence of these aspects advancing during the project, this has been recognised as a donor risk before the funding decision (MFA, 2019), which has at least partially materialised and hampered the implementation. A comprehensive risk analysis has been done in the project planning, and mitigation measures have been identified and reported. However, some risks requiring, e.g. engagement at high political levels have remained out of the project actors' reach. Despite recognising and acknowledging the risks, available documentation does not provide information on what measures Finland as a donor has identified and/or used to mitigate the risks.

³⁴ By the end of December 2021



The administration of the multi-actor initiative has contributed to delays in its implementation. The initiative has faced delays due to internal factors, including lengthy and heavy administrative processes at all levels: between the project partners and at the national level between the different governmental bodies involved. It shows that these challenges can also be partially explained by the unique first-time financing model and relatively heavy administrative practices related to project management. While certain approval processes (e.g. reports, disbursements) have been lengthy, the project partners have at the same time had to maintain readiness to facilitate ad hoc assignments and respond to short notice requests (Email from Embassy; EDUFI; KII). On top of gaining more experience from effective management of similar initiatives, these experiences suggest favouring simpler financial models, including, i.e. avoiding MFA's funding travelling to a Finnish government as an implementing agency via another country's authority.

Repurposing of the programme was done swiftly, and new goals were met within the set timeframe. After Russia started its aggression in Ukraine, the EU4Skills reprogramming has demonstrated flexibility and swift response to the changed development landscape. Finland's repurposed support has balanced between the response to the acute crisis, continued VET reform and system reconstruction, and all deliverables defined for the repurposed year of implementation have been produced (Autere & Jansson, 2023).

4.1.4 Mainstreaming of cross-cutting objectives in planned interventions

The Ukrainian labour market suffers from vertical and horizontal gender segregation. Many (notably technical) professions became legally accessible to women only recently after occupational bans inherited from the Soviet era were lifted (European Commission, 2018). Lifting such limitations on women's employment creates an opportunity for development actors to promote gender equality through their projects in Ukraine, particularly in sectors with the highest number of bans, such as transportation and logistics.

Among other cross-cutting objectives, Finland's Country Strategy emphasises enhancing gender equality and empowering women, promoting human rights and the rights of all minorities, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people, strengthening the cohesion of the society further and reducing discrimination. (MFA, 2021a). Outcome area 1.2³⁵ of the Country Programme recalls paying **specific attention to women's and girls' participation in VET and addressing gendered norms and practices that negatively affect girls' educational and work-life choices and opportunities** (MFA, 2021b). These align with the education reforms contributing indirectly to achieving the 5th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Across its planning of activities, the EU4Skills has addressed its intentions to address gendered labour market segregation.

Gender equality in VET has been promoted at different levels throughout the project implementation. The project has conducted gender assessments and analysis, contributing to drafting VET legislation and, in general, embedding a gender-sensitive approach in the MoES VET strategy and strengthening gender mainstreaming on the national level. National surveys of gender equality promotion activities in VET schools have been conducted in the seven focus regions, and strategic

35 Enhanced relevance and attractiveness of vocational education and training (VET) for female and male learners



sessions have been held with VET teachers, managers and students, regional methodological centres, and departments of education on the development of a roadmap of gender equality promotion activities in the VET sector. Gender aspects have been incorporated in the support of the development of teaching practices and learning materials (EU4Skills, 2022).

Repurposed action places more emphasis on diversity and inclusion. While the project has not addressed inclusivity aspects in a targeted manner, the repurposed action considers that women and children form the majority (approximately 70%) of the internally displaced persons and refugees, adding to the gender imbalances in the labour market and VET. It also makes stronger reference to inclusion, diversity and the system's need to serve the needs of vulnerable groups (GIZ, 2022c). Still, no documentation is available enabling the review of the implementation of these aspects.

Cross-cutting aspects could have been mainstreamed more comprehensively. While the programming documents indicate risks and impacts related to the environment, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and human rights have been assessed (GIZ, 2021), it has not particularly mainstreamed those aspects. The repurposed programme suggests further initiatives regarding accessibility for persons with disabilities, security and energy efficiency (EU4Skills, 2023).

4.2 Result (EQ2): effectiveness of the measures taken by Finland

4.2.1 Views on the effectiveness of development partners' efforts in priority thematic areas

Through its participation in the multi-actor initiative, Finland has contributed to the increase of relevance of VET in terms of labour market needs. The number of VET institutions and enrolled students has increased; in 2020, there were 235 VET institutions and 11,118 students; in 2021, the number of institutions was 240 and students 12,380. Also, the number of companies taking part in VET has risen from 710 to 1,376 in 2021, which significantly increases the relevance of VET in terms of labour market needs (MFA, 2022c).

Finland's specific efforts have supported the VET educators' competencies to provide quality learning and professional management of VET institutions, indirectly contributing to the youth acquiring relevant skills for jobs and life. Finland's role has particularly focused on developing qualifications and curriculum and training teachers and school managers. Goals have been ambitious, including 100 skills-centred qualifications and another 100 modular curriculums, the development approach for both areas being that the first 20 were to be drafted Finland-led. Still, the development is done under local ownership after shifting to coaching. Ukrainian standards-based qualifications system differs greatly from, e.g. the one used in Finland, and finding a consensus on suitable models for supporting the development of a mainstreamed qualifications framework has been time-taking, similar to the organisation of VET teachers' qualifications, working practices and limited linkages between the different profiles (Autere & Jansson, 2023). A baseline study conducted as a part of the project, as well as knowledge and understanding now gained, would likely enable Finnish actors to continue delivering even better effective support in these areas.



Despite a strong political commitment to education sector development, limited local ownership and national capacity have impacted the effectiveness of supported VET reform. Along with changes in ministerial appointments, the MoES focus has shifted from primary and secondary education to the development of higher education, resulting in less emphasis and resources placed on VET reform. The national capacity to implement and coordinate interventions was weakened due to structural and personnel changes during 2021, resulting in less emphasis and resources placed on VET reform, impacting the project implementation (MFA, 2022c).

Limited evidence is available for reviewing the effects of the repurposed action. Despite the full-scale Russian invasion, the EU4Skills has continued supporting Ukraine in building a modern VET infrastructure; however, with some temporary adjustments, including that work has been suspended in those educational institutions close to the front line. In December 2022, the Finnish-made EU4Skills training platform with the first short courses and modules was launched, providing free resources for competence development training in various fields, for example, social and health-care work, construction, Information Technology (IT), and entrepreneurship, and focus on skills for which there is currently a pressing need in Ukraine (OEP, 2022). By March 2023, these online learning resources had reached more than 20,000 Ukrainians, which, together with the general growth of the audience of online platforms in Ukraine, indicates that online education is becoming increasingly popular and that adults are eager to develop and learn (KII).

4.2.2 Main change regarding inclusive and quality education for girls, children with disabilities and other vulnerable children

While Finland's country goals emphasise enhancing the relevance and attractiveness of VET regardless of gender, limited evidence is available concerning results regarding girls' attendance in VET. Since the beginning, Finnish actors have highlighted Finland's strength in considering the different cross-cutting objectives such as gender equality, reduction of inequality, climate sustainability, social partnership and life-long learning. Specific attention to the participation of women and girls in VET and addressing gendered norms and practices that negatively affect girls' educational and work-life choices and opportunities have been emphasised as particular policy dialogue topics (EU4Skills, 2020). As a result of Finland's strong initiative (EDUFI 2021), gender aspects have been integrated into the action planning. Particularly, two out of four of Finland's result areas, namely training of teachers (2.5) and school managers (2.6), have placed focus on reducing gender stereotypes in education and on enabling females and males to find an appropriate learning and career pathway for them, as well as promoting gender sensitivity in their schools (GIZ, 2021).

Available documentation suggests limited attention to disability inclusion and addressing the needs of vulnerable groups. While the initial work programme emphasises paying attention to aspects of inclusive education (social background, special needs, etc.), including accessibility to VET training buildings for persons with disabilities (European Commission, 2018), limited data concerning integrating these aspects and the results generated are available.



4.2.3 Contribution of Finnish technical expertise to improved results in inclusive and quality education for girls, children with disabilities and other vulnerable children

Limited documentary evidence is available on Finland's direct contributions to inclusive education. While available documentation suggests overall good effort dedicated to gender-equal VET, Finland's particular contributions do not become particularly visible. Gender mainstreaming in the educational process has focused on developing teaching, training, and learning materials that consider a balance of genders. The development of all training materials for curricula development, teachers training and training of VET school managers (Results 2.4, 2.5, and 2.6) has followed a gender-sensitive approach (EU4Skills, 2022). While available information suggests that Finland has integrated the gender aspect into its action, no data is available concerning results supporting equal participation in VET. The same applies to inclusiveness. While the multi-actor initiative has supported the development of inclusive and gender-sensitive VET, very little documentary evidence is available regarding Finland's particular contributions in this area. However, the development of e-learning for priority occupations has considered these aspects, making VET accessible also for persons with disabilities.

4.2.4 Example of synergies between the government actors, CSOs, HEIs and the private sector (multi-actor set-up)

Finland's involvement in EU4Skills exemplifies a successful model of effective public-private collaboration, showcasing the seamless cooperation among Finnish stakeholders engaged in project implementation. Findings of the review process suggest that Finland's Country Programme (MFA, 2022b) goal of exploring synergies with related education export and private sector financing instruments has materialised well through EDUFI - Omnia Education Partnerships (OEP) cooperation. EDUFI's cooperation with OEP, which is a private consulting and training arm of four Finnish non-profit organisations³⁶ focusing on quality education and humanitarian assistance (OEP, 2023), has been functional and flexible (KII). Also, other Finnish actors, namely Haa-ga-Helia University of Applied Sciences and Tampere Vocational College, have contributed to the project as subcontractors (EDUFI, 2022). While Finland's experiences are positive, the reviewed documentation (email from Embassy 2019) indicates that outsourcing from implementing agencies has not necessarily been the desired option for all partners. However, insufficient information is available to analyse why or what the alternative option would be to bring in the required technical expertise, which cannot be solely provided by the implementing agencies (e.g. in Finland's case, a national authority). On the other hand, further extending multi-actor consortiums can alternatively add complexity and administrative burden to such large-scale initiatives.

The diverse actor set-up in the EU4Skills project has presented certain challenges during its implementation. While the intention of capacity-building efforts has not been to transport developing partners' VET models to Ukraine but to support the local reform efforts in establishing their system based on good practices, a multi-actor initiative with differing national systems has potentially interrupted the coordinated approach among the project partners. While having many similarities

³⁶ OEP is owned by Finnish Institute for Enterprise Management, Finnish Church Aid, Savo Consortium for Education and Omnia, the Joint Authority of Education in the Espoo region.



and common grounds, for example, today's skills-orientated VET system in Finland differs from Germany, where VET is strongly industry-driven. Finding internal consensus on benchmarking models and best practices to be mainstreamed in the local development context is important (KII).

4.2.5 Results of the multi-actor approach/set-up

EU4Skills has supported Ukrainian VET reform on national and regional levels. Despite the short and challenging implementation period, the multi-actor approach has supported the reform and improved the quality and attractiveness of VET and its relevance to labour market needs, trained management and teachers at VET schools, and contributed to modernising VET institutions. Seven focus regions, namely Chernivtsi, Lviv, Mykolaiv, Poltava, Rivne, Vinnytsia, and Zaporizhia, have been involved in the project, and elements of the reform are tested in 21 focus VET schools (EU4Skills, 2022).

Repurposed action has provided crucial material assistance and ensured VET's continuation. During the war, the multi-actor initiative continued supporting Ukrainian VET in three areas: assisting in providing shelters for IDPs, supporting continued learning in the VET system and supporting the educational authorities in strengthening their capacity to address skill needs in Ukraine's rebuilding process. On top of the material assistance provided, continued VET provision has been complemented by the delivery of vocational courses and e-learning modules. Support to the authorities has materialised in many forms, including e.g. nationwide communications campaigns promoting the role of VET in rebuilding Ukraine, delivery of learning materials, strategic sessions, conferences and study visits contributing to the continuation of the reform efforts and preparedness for post-war reconstruction (EU4Skills, 2023).

Finland's contributions have resulted in revised qualifications and curriculums and supported the training of teachers and school managers. Within Finland's focus areas, namely, qualifications, curriculums, teacher education and school management training, 20 qualifications (occupational and educational standards) have been revised, and 100 prioritised occupations have been proposed for renewal. Twenty curricula have been delivered, and a plan for the remaining 80 has been established, including a proposed common template for further curricula design. A situation analysis has been conducted in terms of teacher education, and a knowledge framework has been produced. The training of 40 cook teachers at pilot VET schools was finalised, and the first part of the Training of Trainers (ToT) programme for 50 teacher trainers was conducted. ToT training was extended at the request of the MoES to all regions. In addition, a plan for continued training of another 250 teachers has been established. Situation analysis has also been conducted for the school managers' training, followed by a needs-based training plan. Within the project, 63 managers were trained, including an online self-study module. In addition, the project provided expertise in drafting the law "On Professional (Vocational) Education" under the Parliamentary Committee on Education, Science and Innovation. The project has also supported the launch of 21 innovation projects (EDUFI, 2021a & 2021b; MFA, 2022c; Autere & Jansson, 2023).

While simultaneously responding to the acute crisis, the repurposed action has continued supporting the ongoing VET reform and preparing grounds for the post-war reconstruction of VET in Ukraine. Despite the war, Ukraine has shown a strong willingness to continue the reform in close collaboration with its European partners, building even stronger ties with the EU (KII; Event inputs). War-forced repurposing has not allowed the programme to generate all initially desired results, but it has continued steady progress. During the year of repurposed action, Finland's efforts have resulted in different kinds of online learning and teaching solutions (e.g. short



courses, self-study programmes and learning café events), psycho-social support tools, and study visits for VET policymakers and teachers. Only online learning designed and delivered by Finland reached 19100 enrolments in the first three months, and 12,589 certificates were issued by the end of March 2023 (Autere & Jansson, 2023).

4.3 Future (EQ3): outlooks for better results

4.3.1 Future measures to strengthen the multi-actor approach and set up

Reflecting the lessons learned from the EU4Skills project is crucial for strengthening the multi-actor approach and its establishment. Finland's experiences from support to Ukrainian VET reform through the multi-actor project indicate that with limited previous experience from such working modality, particularly the launching phase of the initiative, it has been found complex and lacking clarity in terms of process, roles, and responsibilities. Also, limited knowledge of the Ukrainian education system has hampered the creation of a common understanding between the partners and potentially delayed results generation. The lack of early diagnostics has been brought up by some partners at the early stages of the project. For example, while situational analyses on the state of different aspects of Ukrainian VET (e.g. teachers) have been now produced as a part of the project, in the future, it would be beneficial to invest more in baseline studies and contextual understanding during the identification and formulation of projects (Emails from Embassy 2019; Email from MFA 2021).

Ensuring early and equitable participation in planning actions is central to the success of multi-actor initiatives. VET reform support channelled through the multi-actor project shows a generally strong and well-aligned response to the beneficiary country's needs. However, it has also been complex and, at times, challenging in terms of, e.g. partnerships and multi-layered administration and management. To ensure equal participation of donor countries and their implementing agencies and potential subcontractors, early involvement in planning and negotiations and a clear division of responsibilities have been found crucial from Finland's perspective (KII; Email from Embassy 2019).

In multi-actor setups, the significance of effective coordination across all levels of actors cannot be overstated. Like an inclusive and comprehensive approach to cooperation throughout the project cycle is important between the international partners, the same requirement also applies nationally. In setups similar to EU4Skills, it is crucial to maintain seamless dialogue between the donor and implementor, ensure common objectives, and further between the implementor and its subcontractor(s).

Finland should continue to enhance the promotion of Finnish VET exports and bolster the readiness of practitioners to export their expertise. While the EU4Skills establishes a good example of Finnish public-private partnership in education sector cooperation, there could be room for more. In terms of expertise, Finland certainly has what it takes to succeed in exporting VET. Still, while the opportunity for exporting such expertise has been recognised, relatively few Finnish actors are actively involved. Finnish resources could be utilised more comprehensively, e.g., by



engaging Finnish VET Teacher Education Colleges more in such projects. Considering Ukrainian VET, the desire for (Finnish) education expertise and/or EdTech solutions remains.

The expansion of VET export initiatives must be coupled with comprehensive capacity building for Finnish VET educators, specifically targeting knowledge relevant to development cooperation. One lesson from Finnish participation in the EU4Skills is the limited availability of Finnish VET experts with skillsets transferable to developing contexts. Finnish VET teachers maintain a global image of highly competent educators capable of applying a competence-based approach and learners' individualised study paths, focusing on guiding and coaching learners and cooperating closely with labour market actors (Cedefop, 2019). At the same time, arising from the review process, a very limited pool of experts with relevant experience in education sector development cooperation, let alone with knowledge concerning the operating context, has been a key challenge in utilising Finnish expertise in Ukrainian VET reform (KII).

The role of the Embassy is critical in supporting the materialisation of results. Initiatives similar to EU4Skills have limited access to high political levels and advisory efforts, resulting in concrete reform progress, recalls high-level support and policy dialogue.

4.3.2 Emerging needs and future thematic areas requiring Finland's support (financial and expertise)

The current and anticipated war-affected situation in Ukraine necessitates a balanced approach that addresses immediate emergency and relief requirements and the long-term needs of recovery, reconstruction, and ongoing VET reform. Finland's current Country Programme was developed, assuming that Ukraine will continue implementing the reforms in line with the EU Association Agreement (MFA, 2022). However, after Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, the context significantly changed, and the implementation of activities had to be repurposed drastically. The focus has shifted to emergency and relief activities, and in the long term, it will shift to recovery and reconstruction. While education as a thematic support area remains strongly relevant and an area where intentional support is required despite the war, to ensure full flexibility due to the major change in context, country programming needs to maintain flexibility to enable conflict response and a comprehensive approach. Ukraine is committed to continuing the reform and building a successful, high-quality education system, and support for this work should not be forgotten while channelling aid to acute needs. The war has also notably increased the buy-in for skills-oriented and modular VET, suggesting momentum to continue developing these areas. (KII; Autere & Jansson, 2023)

It is imperative to ensure the continuity of VET programmes during wartime. The rebuilding of Ukraine will depend on the practical skills of millions of people in areas such as construction, industrial production, transportation, agriculture, and health and social care. Many of these skills are developed through VET programmes; hence, while not forgetting the general skills and labour market shortages, it is important to ensure that learning these skills is central to restoring Ukraine's society and economy. Apart from its contribution to a functioning labour market and the development of the national economy, VET can also play a role in reducing social tensions resulting from the conflict, enhancing the employability and access to education of IDPs and other conflict-affected populations, thus improving social cohesion. The EU4Skills has identified four core profiles consisting of (i) reconstruction of buildings, (ii) repair of infrastructure, (iii) revitalisation of



the environment and (iv) assisting persons with war traumas (Autere & Jansson, 2023), which can also pave the way for the design of future VET interventions in Ukraine.

Continued support for the digitalisation of VET is essential. Particularly, the war-impacted education landscape indicates growing user demand and increased buy-in for digital learning solutions enabling remote learning. While international organisations and global technology companies have started the emergency supply of equipment and training in digital tools helping Ukrainian teachers to deliver distance learning and multiple initiatives have been taken to launch online learning resources (UNESCO, 2022), demand for further digitalisation remains, and this could open avenues for the export of Finnish education expertise and solutions (e.g. EdTech). Among many other things, the war has disrupted the MoES efforts in developing digital VET curricula, online simulators and teacher training in e-learning didactics (ILO, 2023a). Also, while some policies, such as the Digital Agenda for Ukraine, highlight actions towards the digitalisation of education and using digital and online learning in education and training (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine 2023), neither the concept nor practice has been sufficiently developed in VET. Very few VET teachers are capable of introducing such a form of training. The same applies to continuing VET and adult learning, a relatively new field in Ukraine's national education policies and strategies (ETF, 2019). Experiences from COVID-19, followed by the war, have resulted in notable changes in demand and local buy-in for advancing the digital transformation of education in Ukraine (KII).

The conflict in Ukraine has underscored the heightened significance of adult education and lifelong learning, emphasising the need for donors to prioritise support for empowering individuals to adapt and thrive in the face of ongoing challenges. Like digitalisation, the review suggests that the idea of lifelong and continuous learning paths has leapt due to the war. The initial assessments concerning the impact of the Ukraine crisis on the world of work have noted that around 5 million jobs have been lost in Ukraine since the start of the Russian aggression (ILO, 2022). Before the war, the Ukrainian VET system struggled to manage and implement lifelong learning for adults properly (MFA, 2019b). So, while it is essential to ensure learning continuity for children and students, including in VET, the situation at hand has resulted in the need for up- and re-skilling of those adults who have lost their professions due to the war. Modular, flexible and short-term solutions are needed more than before, but also capacitating the Ukrainian VET and educators in the adult learning sector.



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