Evaluation of the Swiss-Ukrainian Project “Decentralisation for Improved Democratic Education” (DECIDE) Phase 1”

including

a rapid education sector appraisal of Ukraine

Final report

09.012.2025

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Acknowledgement

The evaluation and sector appraisal team extends its sincere appreciation and gratitude to the SDC office and the DECIDE project team for their continued support in enabling the team to fulfil this mandate, particularly in view of the challenging context of the ongoing war in Ukraine. From logistical and content preparation for the mission, security briefings to providing essential documents and resources, facilitating connections with key stakeholders, and addressing practical challenges such as travel arrangements, interpretation services, local transportation and access to workspaces. Without this dedicated assistance, the successful execution of the project evaluation and rapid sector appraisal would not have been possible.

The evaluation and sector appraisal team

The mandate was implemented by a team of four external experts. The tasks were attributed among the team as follows: Dieter Zürcher, team leader and evaluation methodology expert, and Iryna Kravchuk, expert in evaluation and monitoring, oversaw the implementation of the DECIDE project evaluation. Karen Roberts, an education policy expert, led the strategic review. Alevtyna Sedochenko, an education expert from Ukraine, contributed substantially as a resource person for education reform and sector analysis, working under the direction of the team leader. All team members contributed to interviews and Focus Group Discussions for the project evaluation and sector appraisal, working collaboratively and interchangeably during the mission in Ukraine. Martina Ramming, SDC Senior Education Policy Advisor, joined the mission to Ukraine.

List of Abbreviations

AIKOM	Automated Information Complex of Educational Management
BIZ	Swiss Career Guidance Centers
bn	billion
DECIDE	Decentralization for Improved Democratic Education
DOCCU	Development of Citizenship Competences in Ukraine
CSPM	Conflict Sensitive Programme Management
ECW	Education Cannot Wait (UN fund for education in emergencies)
ECWG	Education Cluster Working Group
EDC/HRE	Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights
EORE	Explosive Ordnance Risk Education
EdUP	Public Private Partnership to Improved Professional Education in Ukraine
EGAP	Swiss-Ukrainian Programme “E-Governance for Accountability and Participation”
EHB	Swiss Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training
EIB	European Investment Bank
EiE	Education in Emergencies
EUR	Euro
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GoUA	Government of Ukraine
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
LEARN	Lifting Education Access and Resilience in times of Need in Ukraine Program (WB)
m	million
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Services
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NUS	New Ukrainian School
PHZH	Zurich University of Teacher Education
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEL	Social-Emotional Learning
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
TA	Technical assistance
ToT	Training of trainers
ToR	Terms of reference
UAH	Ukrainian Hryvna: 1m Hryvna (20.11.24) = EUR 22,700
U-LEAD	Ukraine – Local Empowerment, Accountability and Development Programme
UEC	Ukraine Education Cluster
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund

USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WB	The World Bank

Summary

Background: The Russian invasion in 2022 led to a 29% contraction in Ukraine's GDP, driven by infrastructure destruction and labour shortages, but modest growth of 4.8% was achieved in 2023. To date, the war has caused over 35,000 civilian casualties, a surge in poverty from 5.5% to 22%. Ukraine's EU accession process progressed with candidate status in 2022 and membership talks beginning in 2023, aiming to align recovery with EU standards. Switzerland has supported Ukraine's decentralisation reforms for a long time and in 2019 decided to continue to support the decentralisation in the education sector. To strengthen education governance and decentralisation, SDC has designed the Decentralization for Improved Democratic Education (DECIDE) project, 2020-2025, implemented by the DOCCU NGO and the Pedagogical University of Zurich. The scope of the project and the budget, CHF 15.05m, was amended three times to adapt to the contextual changes as a result of COVID-19 and the war.

Purpose: As Phase 1 of DECIDE concludes in May 2025, an evaluation assessing its achievements should provide guidance for the Phase 2 planning in alignment with Ukraine's education priorities and Switzerland's potential future role. The assignment includes evaluating the project against OECD-DAC evaluation criteria. The second task was to conduct a rapid appraisal of the education sector with a particular focus on Switzerland's possible expansion of education activities and of vocational education and training (VET).

Methodology: The team of four consultants and an SDC peer (for the appraisal) implemented a mixed-method approach (desk review and a mission with field visits). The mission to Ukraine took place between 4-14 November 2024 and included 46 interviews and 9 focus groups discussions (101 people) with all major stakeholders. The mission also included brief field visits to Poltava and Chernihiv Oblasts visiting education management institutions, secondary schools plus a visit to Brovary VET school.

Findings:
A) DECIDE evaluation

Relevance: The DECIDE project has significantly supported decentralisation in the education sector in Ukraine by addressing governance challenges, needs of the stakeholders, fostering democratic principles in education management and teaching, and by bridging communication gaps between the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES), regional and local administrations as well as schools. It also created additional safe educational spaces during wartime through renovating schools and refurbishing shelters. The scope of activities was expanded over time (e.g. adding vocational education) and their pilot character limits the relevance of certain initiatives (e.g. the creation of pilot career orientation hubs appear to lack a proper evaluation before scaling-up).

Coherence: The project demonstrates strong internal coherence by aligning infrastructure improvements and educational reforms while collaborating effectively with other SDC projects to use synergies and enhance digital and vocational education governance. The duplication with other donor projects was avoided by close coordination with MoES, and other education stakeholders. However, the risk of overlapping efforts in VET is high due to the many projects operating in this sub-sector.

Effectiveness: The project excels in its multi-level approach to education governance, achieving systemic reforms, impressive capacity building, and community engagement while addressing urgent needs like shelter construction and psycho-social aid during crises. It has provided valuable support to school network transformation and initiating participatory decision-making processes at local level. It has cooperated with numerous strategic partners and reached an impressive number of actors at all levels through webinars, trainings and shelter construction benefitting 17,000 students. A challenge is the organisational distinction between DECIDE as a project and DOCCU as implementing NGO.

Efficiency: The efficiency of DECIDE's numerous activities is challenging to assess due to limited comparability and data. Overall, the scope of activities is very impressive given the small size of project team. The beneficiaries and activities were chosen through transparent selection processes, by dedicated management and motivated staff. However, overlapping donor efforts, lack of portfolio focus, and duplicative reporting processes indicate areas for improvement in coordination and resource utilisation.

Impact: DECIDE has provided systemic support to the MoES, particularly in politically sensitive areas like school network transformation and education decentralisation, while addressing emerging needs such as shelter refurbishment and VET reforms. The project has fostered alignment between local needs and educational goals. However, many pilots still lack critical mass and attributing impacts is challenging due to simultaneous projects implemented in the schools, as well as due to COVID-19 and war effects. There is also a risk of centralisation in education through temporary military administrations and top-down standard setting and reporting requirements.

Sustainability: The DECIDE project has fostered communication and collaboration among the stakeholders and thus has strengthened institutionalising and documenting governance procedures, participatory education governance and strategic planning across local, regional, and national levels. The lately added VET component was very ambitious especially given the planned period of 14 months and raise sustainability concerns. The financial dependency of the DOCCU NGO from SDC is still significant as DECIDE represents 80% of DOCCU's portfolio. This highlights the need for robust exit strategies for DECIDE activities and further diversification of DOCCU's portfolio to ensure scaling of the project's initiatives continuity of the NGO.

B) Rapid education sector appraisal

The key policy priorities of Ukraine's education reform agenda are enshrined in the "New Ukrainian School" (NUS) initiative, which seeks to modernize the education system by promoting competency-based learning, democratic values, civic education, and integration of digital and STEM skills. The Ukrainian school network (for basic education and VET) is undergoing a major optimisation process to improve efficiency and to better reflect present and future demographic and economic realities. The process includes large scale consultations with regional and local stakeholders. Further priorities include a comprehensive modernisation of VET programmes and qualifications to better align with labour market demands and to boost enrolment.

While the legislative framework, standards and governance mechanisms for the new system are developed at national level, NUS transfers a wide range of educational governance competencies to local authorities fostering localised solutions.

The reform components receive substantial international support. Key donors for NUS reforms include the EU, Germany, Finland, Poland, Denmark, Luxembourg, UNICEF, USAID, the World Bank, Education Cannot Wait (ECW) and Global Education Partnership (GPE), alongside Switzerland, UK and many others. International support encompasses financial aid through grants and loans and technical assistance in curriculum and policy development, infrastructure rebuilding and digitalization, as well as emergency measures like temporary learning spaces, psychosocial support, and ensuring the continued access to education for all. VET modernisation benefits from programs like EU4Skills and contributions from Luxembourg, Denmark, and Switzerland (via EdUP, a public private partnership for professional education). Donors further prioritize governance, digitalisation, teacher training, and emergency education responses.

Ukraine's education reform aims to address challenges amid armed conflict, displacement, and EU integration efforts. Key goals include ensuring safe, quality, and equitable education and aligning vocational education and training (VET) with reconstruction and socio-economic recovery needs.

While international financial and technical assistance has surged since 2022, its coherence, scope, and alignment require improvement, among others through greater stakeholder alignment, improved coordination and strategic focus.

Some priorities under the NUS reform and humanitarian support remain insufficiently addressed geographically and across subsectors. Donor support to VET programs could benefit from broader strategies to meet both short-term labour demands and long-term national development goals. Specific areas for focus include career orientation systems and tailored VET programs for veterans and vulnerable groups. A more cohesive humanitarian and development approach could ensure a more balanced geographical support, address gaps in underserved regions and populations and ensure more equitable approach across the sector and country.

Further, strategic roll out of established good practice in certain regions or institutions, not only for VET, could strengthen sustained impact of interventions.

Recommendations:
A) DECIDE Phase 2

- Continue with a Phase 2 of DECIDE as it provides systemic support to the education reforms, supports both capacity development and provision of equipment and refurbishment of schools, but sharpen the thematic focus of support.
- Prioritize interventions that leverage DECIDE's unique strengths in decentralization in education, dealing with cross-cutting issues, and full policy cycle capacity at central, regional, and local levels.
- Scale up the pilot experiences conducted in the targeted hromadas and oblasts
- Develop shared leadership (within DOCCU) based on a strategic vision and business model to ensure that an effective management structure enhances DOCCU's resilience.
- Elaborate a concept for the deployment of experts and review their profile.
- Develop exit strategies that enable authorities and institutions to continue independently the tools and processes initiated by DECIDE, ensuring long-term sustainability.
- Give more space for local ownership and branding in product and process development.
- Consider streamlining the reporting into one set of documents.

B) Education sector programming

Switzerland should build on its existing portfolio by expanding and diversifying its initiatives in education governance, basic education and VET. Key strategies include forming new partnerships, leveraging global partnerships (ECW, GPE et al.) for the cooperation programme in Ukraine, and connecting the education portfolio with other critical sectors of the programme, such as urban development, energy, water, and health. This integrated approach addresses immediate crises and supports long-term resilience. The focus should adopt an inclusive understanding of basic education and vocational training, ensuring that both immediate crisis responses and long-term strategies contribute to a resilient education system. Entry points for impactful programming include:

- Broaden Swiss involvement in VET by addressing non-reconstruction-related industries like IT, renewable energy, and logistics, while promoting gender equality in traditionally male-dominated sectors.
- Support upskilling for adults and vulnerable groups.
- Strengthen Ukraine's VET system through support for the national career orientation strategy and for existing or future career orientation services.

- Ensure equitable integration of IDP children in school age and of struggling learners into the education system, including targeted catch-up and inclusion initiatives.
- Maintain SDC's geographic and thematic approaches for education programming which address multiple regions in a demand-driven, thematic manner and allow to adapt to shifting needs and contexts.
- Enhance Switzerland's visibility and role in education sector coordination to strengthen its contributions and avoid overlaps with other donors.
- Regularly assess new areas for inclusion in Switzerland's portfolio, such as for example non-formal learning and post-secondary VET
- Validate the potential to establish applied research and innovation partnerships between Switzerland and Ukraine.

1 Background

1.1 Context in Ukraine

Economic challenges: In 2022 the GDP contracted massively by 29% due to the Russian invasion and driven by infrastructure destruction and labour shortages. In 2023 a modest growth of 4.8% started the recovery due to defence-related activities and higher public spending. The tax revenues collapsed due to frontline disruptions and territorial losses. However, the GDP per capita is less gloomy: it increased from USD 3'662 in 2020 to USD 5'181 (WB, 2024) mainly due to the demographic change as a result of refugees leaving Ukraine. Fiscal financing gap for 2023 is USD 41.9bn, with long-term needs from 2023-2027 estimated at US$123.5bn. Thus, this puts a heavy reliance on external loans and international assistance contributing to increase external debt.

Impact of the war: The number of civilian casualties over two and half years is over 35,000 recorded, with actual numbers likely higher. This does not include tens of thousands of fallen soldiers. The poverty rate surged from 5.5% in 2021 to 22.0% in 2023, pushing 6.9 million additional people into poverty, reversing 15 years of progress (World Bank, 2024). In November 2024 nearly 4m people are internally displaced and 6.8m refugees from Ukraine have been recorded globally in November 2024 (UNHCR 2024). An increasing number of returnees show interest to rebuild Ukraine.

The reconstruction Costs are estimated at USD 486 billion, 2.8 times the 2023 nominal GDP (World Bank 2024). This will require contributions from public and private sectors over a decade and municipal and hromada-led initiatives are helping restore key infrastructure and services.

EU accession and institutional modernisation: The access toward EU membership has been started with granting the candidate status in 2022 and accession talks began in December 2023. The recovery plans aim to align reconstruction with EU best practices and modernise Ukraine's institutions and infrastructure.

Environment: Already before the war, Ukraine was facing environmental challenges, climate change and biodiversity loss being the major ones. The country has already warmed over the last 30 years and these changes are increasingly evident, for example in decreased harvest yields. The increase in annual mean temperatures could reach 3°C by the middle of the century. The war is preventing efforts to improve the situation as investments to restore habitats, conserve species, improve protected area management as well as mitigate and adapt to climate change have been disrupted (WWF, 2024).

1.2 Education sector context

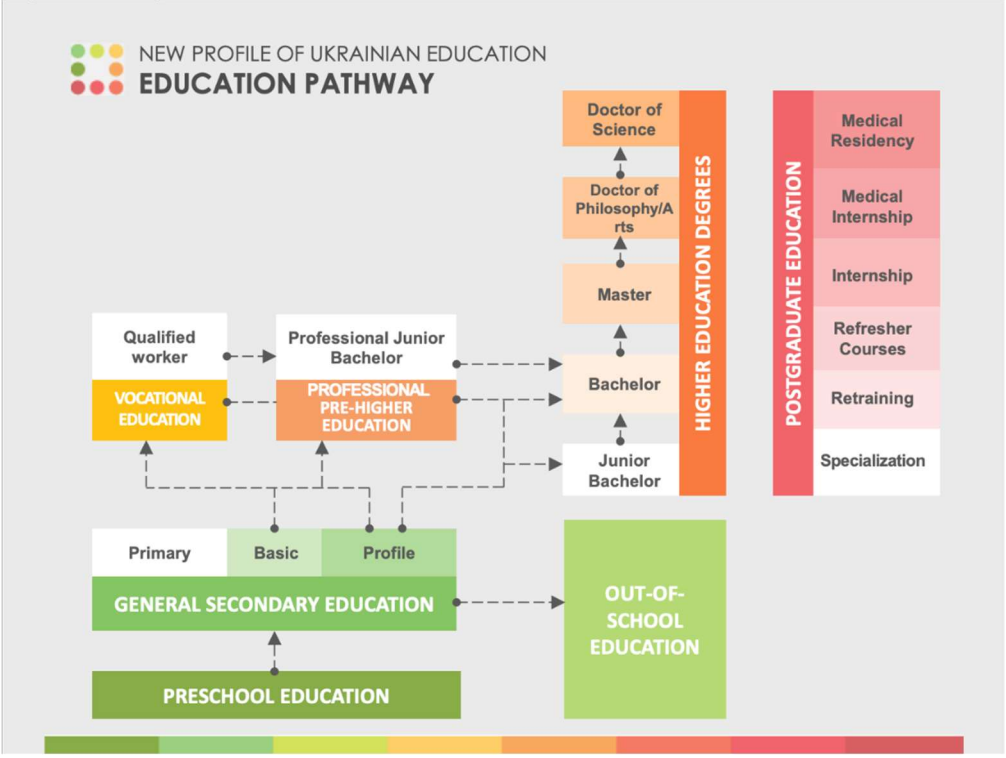
Background: Over the past decade, Ukraine's education sector has undergone significant transformations, driven by ambitious reforms (including decentralisation and educational initiatives), systemic challenges, and crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing war which affected the education system since. These factors have reshaped priorities and underscored the need for adaptability, resilience, and effective governance at all levels.

Education reform: The "New Ukrainian School" (NUS) reform, launched in 2017 and set to conclude by 2030, focuses on modernising education governance, curriculum, delivery (including e-learning), teacher development, and modernised learning environments. It also emphasizes competency-based learning and democratic values, rule of law and civic education. The

reform's first phase, targeting primary education, concluded in 2022. The second phase currently focuses on secondary education, though progress is hindered by the war. Despite the challenges, notable achievements include establishing professional teaching standards, enhancing inclusive education, and integrating digital tools (Hrynevych et al., 2023). The third phase of the reform aims to optimise the network of the existing institutions and to establish an effective network of upper secondary institutions, including academic lyceums, vocational colleges and schools as well as further developing infrastructure and innovating content and methodologies and implementing a career counselling system starting in secondary school grades (grade 5-9). Pilot implementation for grade 10 begins in 2025-2026, with a full rollout by 2027-2028.

The modernisation of vocational education (VET) is closely linked to the NUS reform, focusing on aligning curricula with labour market demands and increasing enrolment in VET institutions from currently 35% of graduates to 50% according to the MoES.[1] Additionally, preschool and extracurricular education also require aligning to NUS and modernisation, focusing on new educational content and effective local management. Higher education has been undergoing transformation since the mid-2000s, aiming to align with European standards, strengthen academic integrity and enhance the quality of research and teaching.

Figure 1: Simplified overview of the educational structure in Ukraine



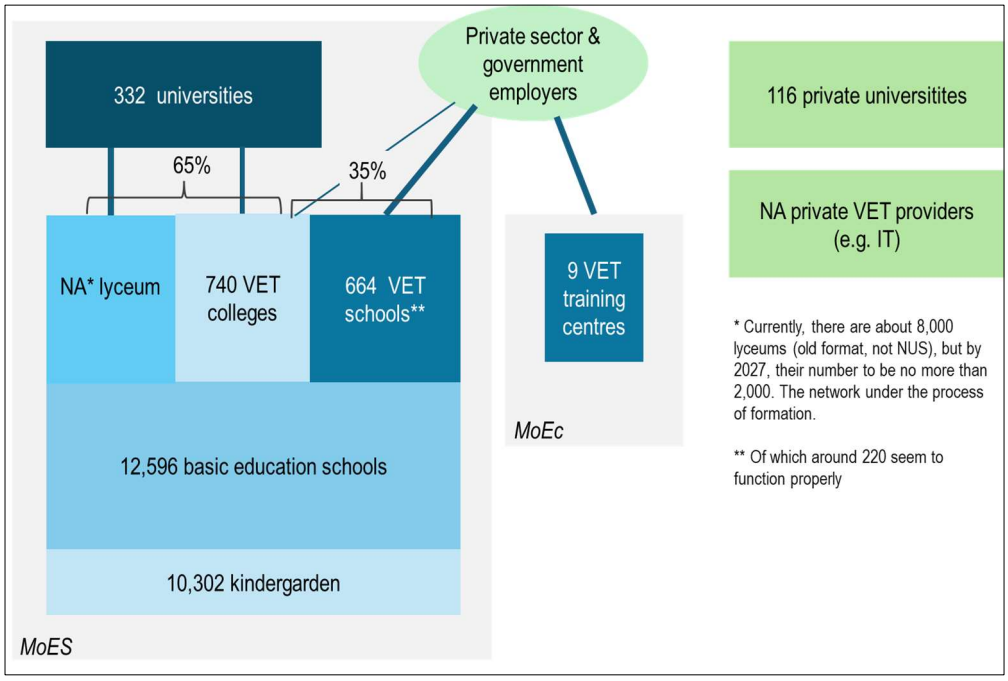
Source: https://www.enic-naric.net/page-Ukraine

Decentralisation reform: Decentralisation has transferred decision-making powers and resources from central authorities to local governments, fostering localised solutions and community engagement. The largest share (43%) of average hromada expenditures is allocated to education (Decentralisation, 2024) while in rural hromadas this rate is often around 70%. This highlights the sector's significance in local budgets and underscores the need for its effective management. However, disparities in capacity and resource allocation among regions and hromadas persist, exacerbated by the centralization of power under martial law. Overlapping responsibilities, inconsistent policies, and insufficient coordination have slowed reforms

[1] In the academic year 2022/23 there were roughly 230,000 students in vocational schools, 331'000 in professional colleges and 1.1m students in higher education institutions (see Table 6 in Annex 6).

and highlighted the need for clearer roles, better capacity and stronger intergovernmental collaboration.

Figure 2: Overview about schools, colleges and universities in Ukraine in 2023



Source: Own compilation and https://iea.gov.ua/diyalnist/naukovo-analitichna-diyalnist/osnovni-czyfry-osvity/

Impact of the war: The ongoing fighting has devastated Ukraine's education sector. Almost 4,000 educational institutions have been damaged by bombings and shelling, 365 of which have been completely destroyed (MoES, 2024a). Learning losses intensified by unstable education processes, safety concerns and limited funding have further disrupted reforms and deepened regional disparities, especially in conflict-affected areas. Ukraine's education sector stands at a pivotal moment. Despite immense challenges, it has demonstrated resilience, driven by reforms and international support. Continued international assistance remains crucial in advancing educational recovery and ensuring an inclusive, high-quality system that supports Ukraine's development.

1.3 The Swiss (education) portfolio in Ukraine

The ongoing Swiss Cooperation Programme Ukraine 2020-2023 (Swiss Confederation, 2019) was extended until the end of 2024 and will be succeeded by a new country programme 2025-2028 that is currently under approval. The programme involves various Swiss actors, such as the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) which includes the humanitarian aid activities, the State Secretariat for Economic Development (SECO), the Peace and Human Rights Division of the Foreign Ministry and Swiss NGOs and service providers.

While the expiring cooperation programme had no explicit education domain, various education-related projects and activities appear under other domains. The "Peace, Protection and Democratic Institutions" domain includes the DECIDE project (Decentralization for Improved Democratic Education) while the "SME and competitiveness" domain includes the EdUP (Public Private Partnership to Improved Professional Education in Ukraine) – a VET project implemented by Swisscontact (2024). Education components for health workers were part of the health domain. Livelihood related VET activities as well as other education related support, were under the Humanitarian Aid portfolio. Thus, a number of Swiss projects were not explicitly categorised as education initiatives but rather as contributions to governance, economic

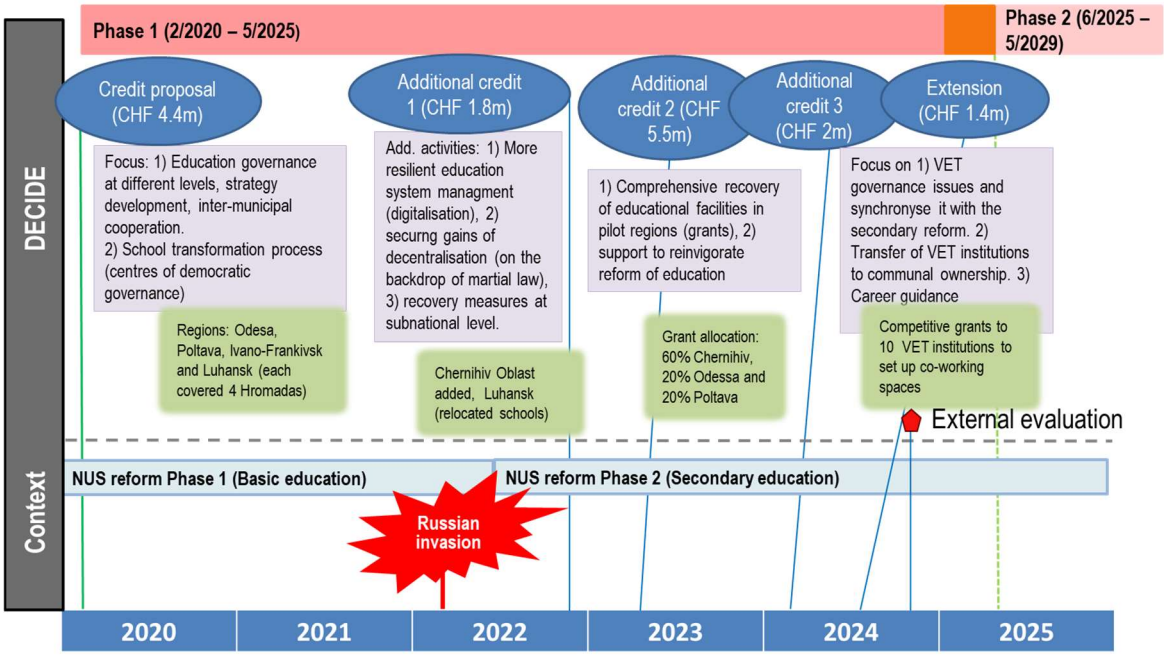
development and recovery. In addition to the bilateral engagement of Switzerland in education, SDC contributes to several multilateral mechanisms dedicated to SDG 4 and education in emergencies, most prominently to the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and Education Cannot Wait (ECW). The involvement of both in Ukraine has intensified significantly since 2022 with the escalation of the conflict.

1.4 The DECIDE project

Decentralisation, civic education and support to vocational training was a major thrust of the Swiss Cooperation Programmes in Ukraine for some time, including the most recent programme 2020-2023, which was extended until 2024. In 2019, after more than a decade of supporting decentralisation, SDC decided to prioritise decentralisation in education management. This was due to results of earlier reforms, which enabled communities to retain 60% of personal income tax, enhancing local revenues and service provision.

A stronger involvement of parents and students in school management was seen as important factors by SDC to support the societal transformation in Ukraine. As a result of the decentralisation the number of amalgamated communities (referred to as hromadas hereafter) increased from 700 in 2019 to 1,469 communes today which are primarily responsible for the provision of education services. To address this, the DECIDE project with a duration from February 2020 until January 2025 (extended until May 2025) was launched. Its goal is to ensure that citizens of hromadas, including vulnerable groups, benefit from democratic governance and high-quality education. DECIDE is implemented by a consortium consisting of the Ukrainian NGO DOCCU, which has the lead, and the Pedagogical University of Zurich (PHZH), which provides technical assistance. The project operates in five regions and works closely with local communities. Originally budgeted at CHF 4.43m, the project's scope expanded to CHF 15.05m due to the changed context and challenges. The following graph illustrates the amendments.

Figure 3: Overview the DECIDE timing and additional credits



Source: Own compilation based on project documents (DECIDE 2023a, 2023c and 2022a)

1.5 Objectives of the mandate

DECIDE Phase 1 ends in May 2025. This external evaluation shall assess its achievements and guide the planning of Phase 2, considering strategic priorities in Ukraine's education sector and Switzerland's potential future role. The assignment aims to achieve two key objectives:

(1) The evaluation shall be based on the six OECD-DAC evaluation criteria, with a focus on effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. It shall also assess how well conflict-sensitive programme management, gender equality, and good governance were integrated into the project. Recommendations for Phase 2 of DECIDE shall be provided, suggesting organisational, thematic, and geographic adjustments to enhance decentralisation and democratic governance in education amid the on-going conflict.

(2) The rapid appraisal of Ukraine's education sector and Switzerland's potential future involvement is a complementary task within the overall mandate. It shall be carried out in parallel to the DECIDE project review, while integrating and mutually informing DECIDE related data and insight. This appraisal will take a broader macro perspective with a particular focus on the question of whether Switzerland should consider expanding its commitment to vocational education and training (VET), building on relevant interventions such as the VET component already integrated with the third amendment to DECIDE's credit proposal (DECIDE 2023a) and other SDC projects (for example EdUP).

2 Methodology

2.1 Evaluation approach

The external review of DECIDE uses a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods to answer the 16 evaluation questions for the six OECD/DAC evaluation criteria and for the education sector appraisal (see chapter 5 Conclusions). These were marginally adjusted from the original ToR. More detailed information about the methodology can be found in Annex 3. The field mission was conducted between 4 November and 14 November 2024. Besides the authors of this report Ms. Martina Ramming, Senior Policy Adviser Education of SDC, participated as a peer in interviews related to the rapid education sector appraisal.

Document review: The team analysed relevant strategic documents at national, regional and local level (incl. laws, decentralisation strategies, to mention a few) and reviewed the DECIDE project documents (credit proposals, logframes, progress reports, elaborated documents) as well as relevant websites. The team also considered research studies and evaluations conducted by other donors or academic institutions. The strategic review was mainly based on documents issued by donors, websites and sectoral analysis of other projects in the education sector (see Annex 8 for a list of sources).

Interviews and Focus Groups Discussions (FGD): The team conducted a total of 46 interviews (partly online) consisting of 1-2 persons per interview with various stakeholders of the MoES, Ministry of Economy, the DECIDE implementers and partners, education authorities at national, oblast and hromada level. Interviews also covered SDC supported education projects and other donors. A list of interlocutors is included in Annex 2. A total of 9 FGDs (partly online) were conducted mainly with DECIDE experts, teachers and students during the field visits. Discussions (4-6 persons) were based on a discussion guideline. Altogether the opinion of 101 people could be gathered through the interviews and FGDs.

Field visits: The three locations visited based on purposeful sampling outside of Kyiv were: The VET school in Brovary which has interventions from DECIDE and EdUP, Chernihiv and Poltava Oblasts. These visits included the validation of selected accomplished activities/results in targeted areas and included various data collection methods, such as document review (regional decentralisation strategies, governance rules), school management and FGDs with teachers and children.

Secondary data: Relevant statistical data from the MoES was analysed to the extent possible. Unfortunately, the "matrix of priorities for education reforms in Ukraine" was not available on the MoES website regarding international cooperation, MoES, 2024a). The existing donor mapping of the ministry was consulted which basically consisted of two Excel sheets (MoES, 2024b and 2024c).

Review theory of change: The evaluation team briefly reviewed the theory of change of DECIDE as outlined in the initial and amended logframes and Project Document.

Triangulation: The evidence collected from the various sources mentioned above were cross-checked with other sources and within the team to enhance consistency of the findings. Additionally, the views of the mixed team also offer researcher triangulation.

Workshop with the Embassy and the project team: At the end of the mission, the preliminary findings were presented and discussed to validate the findings before writing the report.

2.2 Approach for the rapid education sector appraisal

The rapid sector appraisal included a series of specific work steps, wherever possible in alignment with the approach chosen for the DECIDE evaluation: (1) desk review including secondary data to the extent available, (2) on-site visits and in-person interviews and FGDs in Ukraine and interviews online, (3) triangulation of data, (4) identification of gaps or inconsistencies and strategic opportunities for SDC to add further value.

Given the breadth and complexity of the ongoing education reform in Ukraine and the multi-faceted donor support, a comprehensive analysis of reform priorities and progress, and of international actors and their interventions was not possible in the scope of this mandate. For the rapid appraisal, the team focused on the three areas in education, where SDC is already engaged (decentralised governance, VET and humanitarian assistance) and some other aspects which reoccurred during the mission to Ukraine (sector coordination and alignment, inclusion, gender).

2.3 Challenges and limitations

The scope of the mandate was limited by time, especially the possibility to visit the activities outside of Kyiv, but to some extent also by the security situation with frequent air alerts hindering movements. Thanks to the splitting of the team for certain interviews and the field visits, the scope could be enlarged. However, the presence of multiple donors in the education sector, their activities at oblast, hromada and school levels either sequentially or in parallel makes the attribution of outcomes and impact assessment impossible with this type of evaluation approach. Interviews and focus group discussions with DECIDE beneficiaries in the field occasionally might have been biased because in some instances superiors attended the discussions. See more explanations in Annex 3.

3 Findings from the DECIDE external evaluation

3.1 Relevance

The DECIDE project has been highly relevant in advancing decentralisation in the education sector in Ukraine. It addresses relevant governance challenges at national, regional and local levels. Recognised as a backbone to support the education reform (World Bank), DECIDE fills in critical human resource gaps by providing expertise in decentralisation, education, governance and reconstruction. Its extensive network with regional and local authorities facilitates communication of reforms and legislative changes, acting as a broker between the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) and local administrations. Additionally, the later added recovery component[2] has created safe education spaces that is an essential feature in the current phase of the war.

Alignment with national and NUS reform priorities: At the national level, DECIDE has supported the MoES in eight reform areas by developing capacities for strategic planning, advancing automated education management systems, as well as VET and school nutrition reforms (see Table 5 in Annex 5 for more details). DECIDE also strengthened stakeholder collaboration through public dialogues and vertical education governance alignment.

With the additional credits in 2023, DECIDE's work has been widened in thematic scope and budgetary scale. While the shelter refurbishment became very urgent after the start of the war in 2022, in 2023 the support to the VET reform was added and included support for property transfer of up to 50 VET institutions from MoES to oblasts/municipalities, development of a career guidance system (incl. career orientation hubs in 10 VET schools), which address critical gaps in aligning education with labour market needs. However, the current absence of a national concept for career orientation by the MoES has limited the systemic integration of these initiatives. This gap has led to fragmented contributions by various donors, such as EU4Skills (where among others Poland and Estonia have made substantial investment in the past years) and other international partners, each focusing on localised efforts in the career orientation field lacking a unified framework. A cohesive strategy would enhance the alignment of donor initiatives, optimise resource allocation, and ensure that career orientation programmes effectively prepare students for the dynamic labour market demands before they enter a VET school.

Democratic and civic engagement: DECIDE's participatory governance initiatives have empowered students, parents, and communities, exemplified by the "Public Budget for Kids' Dreams," which allowed teachers, parents and kids to engage directly in decision-making and development and implementation of mini-grants in the schools. For example, Poltava schools used participatory budgeting to fund projects like lounge zones and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) classrooms. The project has prioritised the inclusion of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in education systems, creating offline learning spaces like summer camps and providing catch-up programs to ensure continuity and integration and also addressed gender and inclusivity issues.

Adaptability and approach: DECIDE has demonstrated exceptional adaptation capabilities during war time. It ensured education continuity during the COVID-19 pandemic by transitioning to digital platforms, providing psychological support to partners and creating multipurpose shelters in schools. For example, damaged and inadequate infrastructure in a safe environment was considered the biggest barrier for attending schools during the school year 2023/24 (REACH 2024). These initiatives supported both immediate needs and long-term resilience.

[2] Відбудова means Reconstruction in Ukrainian und included the refurbishment of 24 shelters in schools (mostly in Chernihiv and Poltava Oblasts) and the reconstruction of three schools.

The DECIDE approach to work with 5 selected oblasts and 20 hromadas at local/regional level as well as national level was positively mentioned in several interviews. The focus approach used for example by Luxembourg for VET in Kryvyi Rih and Denmark in the city of Mykolaiv allows for tangible results and visibility but creates island of progress. While purely national level approaches lack anchorage and feedback from local level to make support relevant at that level.

Challenges: The expansion in so many education reform areas – though relevant – have led to a very broad portfolio of activities scattering the efforts. The lack of a cohesive national strategy for career orientation has limited the effectiveness of initiatives in this area. Resistance to structural reforms at the local level has also posed significant challenges. Misconceptions about school network transformation and decentralisation reforms led to apprehension among local stakeholders. Furthermore, the stigma surrounding VET related careers has deterred broader acceptance.

3.2 Coherence

Project internal coherence: The project addressed eight key reform areas in education, with a primary focus on upper secondary education. Additionally, DECIDE supported safety and shelter measures, drawing on DOCCU's vast experience and commitment to ensure educational continuity during crises. The internal coherence was good because all activities were aligned to the education reform at upper secondary level. The combination of capacity development, provision of equipment and infrastructure support was coherent.

Portfolio Coherence: DECIDE exemplifies good coordination within SDC's project portfolio, working closely with the "E-Governance for Accountability and Participation" (EGAP) project and the EdUP project. EGAP and DECIDE jointly developed a digital governance tool and continue to work on educational platforms, while the collaboration with EdUP enhances links with vocational education. In one such case (Brovary VET school) the interfaces been VET governance and operational aspects (e.g. establishment of pilot career orientation hub) have created some grey space and risk of overlapping and differing procurement schemes by different projects.

DECIDE's alignment with the Swiss Embassy's strategic vision ensures a cohesive Swiss contribution to Ukraine's education reform. For instance, DECIDE's work on democratic school governance complements the governance and economic focus of SECO-funded projects.

External Coherence: DECIDE's activities align closely with MoES reform priorities. It is highly responsive to newly emerging needs to strengthen the education reforms. DECIDE, and especially its director, is well known also among the donors. It collaborates with several donor funded projects while being loyal to the needs and wishes of the MoES. It has especially strong cooperation with the World Bank's financed LEARN project (which is implemented by the MoES) on school network transformation and infrastructure improvements. DECIDE is strongly committed to support national standards (e.g. supporting the creation of an Automated Information Complex of Educational Management (AIKOM), standards for shelter construction or using the public procurement system. A noteworthy strength of DECIDE is also its use and adaptation of teaching aids/materials with the support of the PHZH based on international best practice, for example the Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights (EDC/HRE) material was based on Council of Europe documents and developing career counselling and job orientation material was based on PHZH international expertise (JOBS).

The donor coordination situation is described in more details in Chapter 4 Findings from the rapid education sector appraisal. DECIDE participated regularly in the Education Cluster coordination for better coordination with other projects in humanitarian field. Stakeholders in the education sector recognise DECIDE as a trusted and credible partner, praised for its flexibility and responsiveness. DECIDE is mainly known though its programme manager participating in the events and meetings.

Despite its achievements, the DECIDE project faces several gaps in coherence. Risk of overlaps in VET interventions vis-à-vis other Swiss-funded initiatives have created occasional inefficiencies as the differentiation of VET governance and operational aspects is not always clear (e.g. the establishment of career orientation hubs by DECIDE), private sector engagement and procurement. There is ad-hoc coordination between decentralisation projects but this sector coordination was beyond the scope of this evaluation. MoES' limited capacity for managing coordination at project level has resulted in fragmented efforts, particularly in areas like school network transformation and digital infrastructure (Annex 4 provides an overview about the most important decentralisation and education projects). Some regions and subsectors like Chernihiv region and the VET reform in general appear rather overcrowded with many donor's support. Experts emphasize the need for enhanced co-financing mechanisms, stronger private sector partnerships, and more robust donor collaboration to sustain and expand DECIDE's successes.

DECIDE's diversification into areas like shelter refurbishment and VET governance has raised concerns about overstretching its resources and diluting its primary focus on decentralisation and education governance. A few representatives from among the donors suggested that DECIDE should prioritise its core competencies to avoid potential inefficiencies.

3.3 Effectiveness

One of the strong assets of DECIDE was its approach to work at central, regional and local level with educational authorities and schools. Therefore, the findings are clustered around these levels. It is expected that DECIDE will achieve the targeted indicators at outcome and output level and in several instances overachieve the targets at output level (i.e. the number of participants in capacity development activities, webinars etc.). Because the project has covered numerous governance aspects in education decentralisation the focus is here on major achievements at outcome level.

Outcome 1: "National, regional and local authorities effectively implement sectoral decentralization with a focus on deregulated and digitalized databased[3] education governance".

National level: DECIDE engaged in eight reform areas related to education decentralisation: (1) Transfer of education responsibilities through capacity development of education staff at regional and hromada level (see below), (2) creation of a pilot for an automated system for education management (AIKOM), (3) support of a national strategy for the upper secondary profile school till 2033 (incl. Geographic Information System based mapping of school networks), (4) recovery of 10 VET institutions and establishment of career guidance centers (incl. training of career guidance counsellors of 9 hromadas, (5) recovery: establishing 24 bomb shelters in the basement of schools in 20 hromadas to provide safe access to education for 17'000 students, plus the reconstruction of School No. 13 in Chernihiv and of an inclusive resource centre in Kyiv Oblast, (6) development of a strategy for the school nutrition reform until 2027 and provision of expert support for training (incl. video material) of mayors and education managers, (7) provision of expert support to the MoES for out-of school activities, and (8) support of the MoES for maintaining six educational platforms, i.e the VET platform (website).

That DECIDE played an effective and systemic role in those areas could be confirmed by the interviews. Three voices heard might be illustrative: "If all projects would be as effective as DECIDE it would turn me crazy", "DECIDE is a crucial backbone of the effectiveness of the MoES" and "DECIDE is everywhere and it is difficult to understand what they actually do".

[3] These aspects were amended with the second additional credit proposal (DECIDE, 2023c). The terms seem to be misleading as rather administrative procedures were digitalized but overall rather more regulations were introduced by the MoES (e.g. for subventions) and evidenced based education governance would be a better term than digitalized databased.

DECIDE has played a crucial role in supporting the NUS reform's ongoing school network transformation. The MoES stated that DECIDE was the only and crucial support by modelling school networks based on analytical tools and indicators. It established excellent linkages to the regions and hromadas/schools to support the MoES in this difficult transformation and to explain national policy issues on the local level. On the other side, its excellent network and linkages have allowed to conduct effective ("the best") public hearings on school reform issues and to obtain the opinion of the local stakeholders to improve acceptance and decision-making for new policies at national level.

Regional and local level: DECIDE has supported the transfer of education responsibilities by applying a variety of (digital) tools, trainings and awareness raising for local education staff, teachers, parents and students. For the national campaign "Education in New Communities from A to Z" numerous webinars involving participants from 1,411 hromadas, providing training for 385 mayors and education managers in 257 hromadas, were delivered in cooperation with the Association of hromadas, the National Agency of Ukraine on Civil Service and other partners. In this context also question&answer sessions were provided for thousands of educational staff and these were several times mentioned in the field visits of having provided urgent and relevant clarifications about governance issues for education staff.

DECIDE also prepared 13 manuals (website), infographics, expert comments and 165 videos to explain the tasks for education managers (website). Users in the field found those materials useful for their day-to-day challenges and mentioned that they could call a DECIDE expert anytime they come across a problem.

DECIDE supported the elaboration of 87 strategic documents, which included 3 national, 5 regional strategies, 9 hromadas and 16 educational strategies in target hromadas, 37 at school level and 10 for VET schools. The positive effect of some of those strategies could be seen during the field visit. The elaboration of those products required the participation of many different stakeholders during complex processes and has improved the understanding of education challenges and solutions. The development of regional and educational strategies brought all stakeholders together on prioritizing education needs and how the school networks should be developed. All those strategies are followed up by action plans (e.g. Poltava education strategy 2023-27) but the omnipresence of donor logos on the hardcopies raised the issue about the ownership of the product.

DECIDE also supported the promotion of inter-municipal cooperation to share education services through small grants. Overall this appears to be a difficult area as it is legally complicated. In one case in Poltava a cooperation for an intermunicipal inclusive resource center was completed after one year when the other hromada also got an inclusive resource center. The two study tours to Switzerland in 2023 and 2024 exposed important stakeholders to the Swiss educational system and was considered as an eye opener by the participants.

Outcome 2: "Schoolboys/girls and their parents benefit from inclusive democratic school governance and active civic engagement in amalgamated territorial communities".

In the targeted oblasts and hromadas DECIDE has initiated various educational programmes at local level. The short-term courses "Learning to live in the Community" for 8th graders to explain local governance functioning recorded 4,731 students and 150 teachers participating, the initiative "Getting Stronger Together" supports children and teachers affected by the war and involves teachers, school principals, community education managers, school psychologists, and parents. It reached more than 500,000 students in non-violent communication and teachers in Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights (EDC/HRE) aspects according to project M&E data. Additionally, 20,000 pedagogues and 95 master trainers and more than 7,000 teachers of inclusive resource centres were trained on EDC/HRE. The project also supported psycho-social aid by producing webinars for pedagogical institutes (with 35,000 users).

Another initiative was the “Public Budget for Kids’ Dreams” providing students the opportunity to learn how to participate in the life of their hromada and create a feeling of ownership and ability to influence. In 16 hromadas a total of 272 mini projects (e.g. establishing a lounge zone in the school or a gym in a shelter) were developed of which 108 were selected for implementation based on public voting (with a software that was developed by EGAP). Annex 7 illustrates a few of these achievements.

Under component 2, DECIDE implemented a whole range of additional activities: The summer clubs for more than 30,000 students (which were very well appreciated during the school visit in Reshitilivska Hromada), the establishment of Board of Trustees in 16 hromadas (these are foreseen in the law but have usually not been established) and training for educational specialists. From the interviews in the hromadas and schools it can be concluded that the activities under outcome 2 have contributed to raise awareness for civic engagement and the role of the community, project development and to instil some sort of hope in the schools during truly difficult times.

Project adjustments: Throughout Phase 1, DECIDE has received three additional credits to cope with the challenges due to COVID-19 and the war. It has reacted in a timely manner and utilised the additional resources to address urgent needs and concerns of the MoES and the local education stakeholders. With the start of the war the project could immediately allocate 25% of its budget for imminent needs. On the other side, this has vastly broadened not only the scope of activities but also the type of support (e.g. construction issues from planning to supervision becoming a prominent project activity). It was also positively mentioned that DECIDE stayed operational even at the start of the war when most donors left the country.

Logframe: In line with the additional credits, the original logframe was adjusted to reflect each expansion (DECIDE 2019b and 2023b). Yet, some activities (e.g. pertaining to the school nutrition reform) are neither reflected in the logframe nor the reporting. Given the project amendments and the systemic nature of activities at the three levels of intervention (but mainly catering to the emerging needs of the MoES), accurately representing them in the logframe poses a formidable challenge. Furthermore, the logframe contains ambitious indicators at goal and outcome levels that will be difficult to measure due to many confounding factors. On the other hand, substantial expert and support activities for the school nutrition reform which are not reflected the logframe. The linkages between M&E data, the activity mapping, the logframe and the reporting are not easy to follow and can be improved for clarity.

Organisational set-up: The organisational structure is lean with currently 17 staff for management and coordination (of which some are working part-time and it has 10 regional coordinators in the 5 target oblasts with part-time contracts. The organisational set-up was difficult to grasp because the DOCCU NGO often coincides with the DECIDE project. Furthermore, DOCCU’s dependence on SDC funding has been very high. DOCCU NGO has recently obtained funding for two humanitarian aid projects from other donors with a volume of CHF 3m until 2026, thus reducing the dependency somewhat. The organisational structure, procedures, allocation of tasks in DOCCU is not easy to grasp for outsiders. Two issues caught the attention of the evaluators: (1) The distinction between DOCCU NGO and DECIDE project is blurred and sometimes both terms are used as synonyms. There should be a strict separation between the organisation and the project(s) it implements, (2) The DECIDE team has shown a very high dedication to deliver results and to remain operational during multiple crises. The internal decision-making appears to be highly centralised and poses risks that the organisation comes under stress if this is disrupted. A more balanced management structure and further diversifying the DOCCU portfolio might be beneficial for the future.

3.4 Efficiency

Due to the limited data available, it is challenging to assess the efficiency of policy-level and awareness-raising activities aimed at enhancing decentralised governance in the education

sector, as specific costing is difficult to calculate, and the benefits are methodologically difficult to delineate.

The field visits have furthermore revealed that at the school level, especially in the VET schools, numerous donor projects support the schools either sequentially or in parallel in policy issues, improvement of curricula and teaching capacities as well as equipment and infrastructure.

However, some qualitative efficiency statements can be derived from the interviews and field visits:

- Almost half of the overall budget (CHF 5.5m) was allocated to the refurbishment of 24 shelters and the reconstruction of one heavily damaged school in Chernihiv Oblast and an inclusive resource center near Kyiv. Thus, 60% of the infrastructure budget went to this oblast. This was well balanced given the different needs in the 5 targeted oblasts.
- The costs for the refurbishment of basements into bomb shelters for school classes varies enormously, depending on the local situation and the status of the basement While the average costs is UAH 15m per shelter according to the public procurement system the average shelter costs in this case was UAH 6.2m and the average DECIDE co-financing was 51% but differed substantially from case to case (32%-100% when also considering the reconstruction case). Possibly the application of a generic co-financing rate would have been more transparent.
- The construction activities were transparently selected by a committee consisting of MoES, Ministry of Development of Communities and Territories, the oblast education managers and the project committee. This allowed alignment with state construction standards and avoided duplications with other donors. The procurement was done with the public procurement system (Prozorro) and the projects were entered on the State Digital Recovery Management Ecosystem (DREAM). This approach has enabled very good efficiency and transparency.
- The delivery of so many diverse webinars, trainings, strategy development processes and digital tools as well as managing a pool of 215 short term and 40 long-term experts used for the DECIDE activities must require an efficient management with only 10 core staff at DECIDE. The optimal selection and allocation of such a big pool of experts could not be explored in detail but raises concern about the value-added in a context of many experts providing advice to the MoES.

Beneficiaries: The diversity and amount of DECIDE activities is very impressive but also gives the impression that the portfolio lacks focus. This resulted from newly emerging needs that had to be addressed without ending or phasing out older ones. Calculating all beneficiaries is difficult but goes up to more than 10m people. Table 4 in Annex 5 provides a rough compilation from M&E data. This figure includes multiple counting as the users of webinars, participants in training, users of shelters and others might in fact be the same. Therefore, the number of direct and indirect beneficiaries is high but a realistic figure is difficult to gauge.

The intention to support VET centres from two Swiss projects has made communication and coordination challenging. Theoretically, the inputs between EdUP and DECIDE are complementary but in reality, there are sensitive interfaces as observed in the case of Brovary VET school (e.g. the two projects operate different procurement schemes).

Leveraging finances: The project has tried to leverage co-financing to the extent possible, especially contributions from local budgets. However, there are no actual figures on education financing available but the contributions from parents and the private sector already showed a declining trend before the war (see Table 3 in Annex 4) and the war has rather exacerbated the financial constraints of parents and companies.

Organisational management: DOCCU has around 17 staff in Kyiv of which some are working part time, as do the 10 regional coordinators in the 5 oblasts (DECIDE, 2024f). This would indicate a rather efficient project management given the scope of partnerships and activities at all levels. It appears as if the staff has dedicated extra time to the activities to make them a success under the difficult circumstances in the country.

DECIDE has also regional experts and coordinators and cooperates with 215 part-time experts and 40 long term experts in 2024. The remuneration of these experts is based on contractual arrangements and payments are only released provided the defined deliverables were achieved. However, the management of short-term experts (81 listed for 2023) have used less than the foreseen 447 working days. This gives an average of less than 5 days per expert this raises the issue of how efficient and effective the contracting is at the end.

DECIDE prepares two reports (half-yearly). One is for the partner ministries (MoES and Ministry of Communities and Territories Development) as well as other partners (territorial associations, oblasts, etc.) and the other one for SDC (DECIDE, 2024a and b). This detailed yet different reporting does not look efficient because of duplicating reporting work.

3.5 Impact

DECIDE has provided systemic support to the MoES in various areas of the NUS reform. However, to gauge the contribution is difficult and not realistic in this type of evaluation. Therefore, impact statements at the various levels are difficult due to the methodological challenges and attribution problems: there are several big donor projects operating in decentralisation (which includes the education sector) and specific education projects which include VET projects. The donor landscape is discussed in Section 4.2 Actor landscape in the education sector. The interplay of all these projects and GoUA subventions in education, the distortions created due to the war (population movements have resulted in depopulated schools in the East and near frontlines and partly overcrowded schools in the Western part is dynamic and complex. Furthermore, DECIDE has taken up new activities only in late 2023 (shelter refurbishment and school reconstruction as well as VET support) thus the time lag to assess impacts is too close.

DECIDE triggered important changes, such as the awareness raising campaign “Education in New Communities from A to Z”, fostering school democratisation through councils) or strategic development plans for oblasts and hromadas with significant potential to impact at national level. Specific highlights are the contributions that DECIDE is making for the school network transformation as part of the upper secondary reform of the NUS. The number of around 12,000 schools should be restructured into primary schools (grade 1-4), gymnasiums (5-9) and around 2,000 lyceums (10-12). The total number of schools will reduce by around 10-15% The number of VET institutions (colleges and schools) should be reduced from 1,300 to around 800 as per the MoES plans. This optimisation is politically sensitive because closing of schools means a loss for the concerned region. Therefore, analytical tools and data were required as a basis for public hearings and legal support for property transfers in the case of VET schools in which DECIDE played an important role for the MoES as well as the local education administrations.

The decentralisation reform and the amalgamation of villages, towns and cities into bigger hromadas has brought new responsibilities and questions for education staff how to adjust. DECIDE has provided relevant support to clarify responsibilities and management at regional and local level (hromadas and schools) in the targeted areas but also beyond through webinars.

The contribution to shelter refurbishment has benefitted around 17,000 students in 24 schools, in Chernihiv, Odesa and Poltava Oblasts. This brings a direct benefit for the teachers and students as it allows to continue teaching during the time of air alerts (which have become more frequent as of late).

DECIDE reports the support to AIKOM and the new law on VET as highlights of achievements. As the contribution through expert inputs has undoubtedly been important and appreciated (by the MoES) these activities have seen major inputs by others as well. For example, the AIKOM platform was originally developed under a previous World Bank project by the MoES and the Institute for Educational Analytics. The new version supported by DECIDE experts will offer considerable potential to streamline and simplify documentation and reporting procedures for schools.

DECIDE wanted to contribute to improved learning outcomes at local level as a result of improved education governance. COVID-19 and the war have massively disrupted safe access to schools and learning outcomes, as it is also reflected in the deteriorating PISA results (see Annex 6), especially lower income population segments and rural areas being among the losers. The GoUA introduced systematic testing after 4th grade in 2018, 2021 and 2024 (and for grades 9 and 12 recently) to track progress in education quality. As the latest results are not yet published and due to the two disruptions mentioned before it is difficult to make final statements. The Ukrainian Center for Educational Quality Assessment is responsible for the surveys observes a dramatic loss in learning outcomes but this cannot be attributed to decentralisation but to COVID-19 and the war (displacement of people and continued online teaching in many parts of Ukraine). On the contrary, it is widely believed that the decentralisation of education institutions has enhanced the pride of education managers and teachers and helped to better align local needs with educational aspirations, an impact which is seen as highly positive.

An unintended positive effect mentioned during the field visit in Poltava by education managers and teachers was that DECIDE activities instilled hope for the future during a dark and difficult period after the invasion. An unintended effect (or risk) of DECIDE is that in combination with the martial law, the setting-up of military administrations at Oblast level and the various education reform initiatives from the MoES decision-making is being centralised. As DECIDE is an important link for the MoES to regional/local levels, it could contribute to centralisation tendencies (standard setting, monitoring, policy decisions from Kyiv, etc.).

3.6 Sustainability

The DECIDE project has made notable strides in institutionalising and anchoring its results across local, regional, and national levels. At the local level, the project has developed materials, manuals and documented approaches so that they can be taken up by others. The introduced school governance mechanisms, public budgeting for children's projects, and capacity-building programs have established a participatory culture, where parents, students, and educators actively shape democratic education governance. Regional education strategies, for example those in Poltava and Chernihiv, reflect DECIDE's contributions to fostering a strategic approach and inter-municipal cooperation and aligning local plans with national priorities. Nationally, the project's work on modelling of upper-secondary school networks enable to make education delivery more sustainable and effective, although the closure or amalgamation of school networks faces opposition.

However, the project faces several challenges in ensuring the sustainability of its results. A significant challenge is the financial dependency of DOCCU on SDC, which creates risks on two sides: (1) DOCCU is highly dependent from a single project (DECIDE), and (2) the continuity of initiatives like school councils and community-driven projects require further anchoring at local level. The retention of trained personnel of partners at central and local level is another pressing concern, with limited financial incentives and institutional instability potentially leading to a loss of trained human resources. Additionally, setting-up temporary structures created during the war, such as the Military Local Administration, into established institutions at oblast and community level poses challenges in delineation of roles and coordination. Political

resistance and economic challenges in establishing co-funding mechanisms during the current dire economic situation, especially for smaller and rural communities, add further complexity.

A lot of pilots have been introduced by DECIDE but the scaling up – despite efforts at national level through training and webinars – remains a challenge. There is also a risk that disparities within the 5 target oblasts are increasing as DECIDE focuses to 20 hromadas and dozens are not covered at the same depth. The “Public Budget for Kids’ Dreams” initiative appears to lack a sustainable funding scheme for continuation and scaling up, although oblasts may finance some projects. The establishment of school councils in the targeted hromadas is a step forward but it is hard to predict how these will function independently without DECIDE support. There is a risk that such participatory decision-making/voting will erode. Similarly, the addition of the VET component in late 2023 was very ambitious, especially considering the scope of activities and the originally rather short duration of only 14 months (2023a and e). Thus, the proper evaluation of these pilot experiences might be at risk.

Despite these challenges, the DECIDE project offers key lessons for ensuring sustainability. First, its emphasis on capacity building has created a robust network of empowered local actors who can independently sustain reforms. Training on strategic planning, participatory governance, and education management has strengthened institutional and individual capacities. Second, localisation and ownership have been central to the project’s approach, with initiatives designed to be context-specific and community-driven. This has built a strong sense of local commitment to maintaining the project’s outcomes. A third important lesson is DECIDE's focus on anchoring tools and practices. The development of replicable models, such as strategic planning frameworks, public budgeting tools, and school governance mechanisms, has ensured that these practices are integrated into formal governance and education policies. Another success factor is the strong alignment with national policies and frameworks. DECIDE’s close collaboration with ministries and alignment with the NUS reform have increased the likelihood of sustained impact.

The mainstreaming of gender equality, good governance, and conflict-sensitive programming has also contributed to lasting results. By addressing the needs of vulnerable groups, such as internally displaced persons (IDPs) and children with disabilities as well as promoting inclusive decision-making, DECIDE has enhanced the societal relevance and acceptance of its initiatives.

DECIDE tools, mechanisms and methodologies have been well documented. Thus, the achievements are well institutionalised within governance frameworks at national, regional and hromada levels. As many initiatives have been started and piloted by now it is the right time to develop exit strategies that will enable DECIDE partners to continue independently. This should include anchoring knowledge, digital tools, and practices with local authorities and educational institutions. The collaboration with the MoES, Ministry of Communities and Territories Development, the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Digital Transformation will facilitate the integration of project outputs into national policies. Additionally, partnerships with the Association of Amalgamated Territorial Communities can ensure continuous guidance and dissemination of good practices. The original aim of finally handing over the DECIDE activities to this association (DECIDE, 2019a) appears unrealistically given the limited resources of the association and the voluntary membership (currently 800 hromadas).

4 Findings from the rapid education sector appraisal

4.1 Education reform: achievements and challenges

This section provides additional information to Section 1.2 Education sector context. Table 6 in Annex 6 provides an overview about important education sector indicators (institutions, enrolments, etc.)

In 2017, the country launched a major education reform with the "New Ukrainian School" initiative (NUS). With its completion, now planned for 2033, the reform process is still in progress, amid armed conflict and population displacements, and earlier the COVID-19 pandemic. NUS aims to modernize and decentralise the education system, improve quality, and seeks alignment with European standards. Despite the truly challenging circumstances in Ukraine, significant progress has been made in advancing education reforms. After completing reforms at primary education level (grades 1-4), lower secondary reform (grades 5-9) is ongoing. The reformed 7th grade is implemented in the academic year 2024/2025, with grades 8 and 9 to follow in the two years to follow. The focus is now shifting towards upper secondary reform. At present, this comprises grades 10-11 and will be expanded to grade 12 for regular schooling, starting 2027. Further progress was made notably with introducing professional standards for teachers, strengthening inclusive education and the promotion of digital technologies in school management and teaching (Hrynevych et al. 2023).

The reform is and has been comprising a comprehensive revision of curricula and educational standards with a stronger focus on digital literacy, STEM subjects, languages and civic education, a shift to competency-based and student-centred learning; the use of Ukrainian as the primary language of education; the implementation of inclusive education policies; the digitalisation of education delivery as well as of education management; teacher training, professional development and certification processes.

An important NUS component is the modernisation of the VET system, which seeks to align qualifications and curricula with labour market demands, to increase enrolment in VET programmes from currently 35% of lower secondary school graduates to 50%, and to incentivise close consultation and collaboration between VET schools and the private sector.

Decentralisation and increased autonomy for schools is an integral part of the NUS reform (in line with Ukraine's wider political and administrative decentralisation reforms), including the transfer of school property from central government to local governance bodies. General secondary school property has been transferred to hromadas in 2020. The transfer of property of VET schools to regional level is yet under way. Thus, local authorities obtain more control over funding, school management, and curriculum implementation, and schools have more autonomy and flexibility to reflect local needs. At the same time, the MoES has initiated a process to optimise and downsize a partially oversized and inefficient school network throughout Ukraine to adapt it to the changing demographic and socio-economic conditions. The school network transformation implies the restructuring the network and gradual but substantial reduction of the number of schools across the country. Through closures and mergers, a total network of approx. 12,000 schools is to result in 1,500 "amalgamated school networks", while the total number of schools will be reduced by 10-15%. In parallel with the above-mentioned reforms to improve educational quality and ensure continued and equitable access for learners from all parts of the country. (Leu-Severynenko 2022). Within the same process, the reduction of some 1,200 vocational schools (lyceums and colleges) to 800 (or less) needs to reflect the socio-economic environment and labour market needs, to ensure each school offers relevant qualifications.

These processes are not without challenges and setbacks: The ongoing conflict with Russia has disrupted the whole education system in Ukraine, not only in frontline zones. Thousands of educational institutions have been damaged or destroyed, teachers displaced, and many children have been forced to flee and/or attend schools online over long periods of time. Amid demographic and socio-economic shifts, employers note a dramatic shortage of skilled workers in trade, crafts and industry.

While Ukraine's government spending on education (5.9% of GDP in 2023) (GEM Report 2024) is within the regional average and higher than the global average (World Bank/GEM/UIS 2024, see also Annex 6), and aid for education in Ukraine increased significantly (from USD 187m in 2021 to USD 2.1bn in 2022). Yet, certain areas are underfunded: Teacher salaries are low, and the remuneration system with bonus payments is unnecessarily complicated. There is a shortage of qualified teachers in certain regions, and the needs for reconstruction and/or upgrading outdated school infrastructure and learning materials are high. Likewise, and despite significant progress, bridging the digital gap continues to be a challenge for some regions. This prevents or complicates equitable access to quality education.

Further, in the overall context of decentralisation of education governance certain draw backs are noticeable in some regions (not only close to the front line), where martial law has led to the handover of competences at regional level and below from locally elected authorities to appointed oblast governors and military local administrations. The criteria and processes for setting up and reversing such structures are still under development (EU 2024). Further noteworthy are challenges as well as positive developments related to corruption and favouritism in the education system. Reports indicate both: (1) Malpractice in admission, grading, supplementary tutoring, in resource management (procurement tendering) and human resource processes (e.g. the appointment of education institution managers; and (2) recent positive developments addressing corruption in the education sector, such as the adoption of risk management approaches, enhanced transparency measures, the national standardised test upon completion of secondary education which now serves as a high school graduation exam and a university entrance exam (U4 CMI 2023; Bergin/TI 2024).

4.2 Actor landscape in the education sector

National actors

- The Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (MoES)
- The Ukrainian Institute of Education Development (UIED
- The State Service of Education Quality of Ukraine (SQE) - the central executive body, coordinated by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine through the MoES
- The Ukrainian Center for Educational Quality Assessment (UCEQA) - a state institution responsible for conducting external independent evaluations of students' learning outcomes at various educational levels and monitoring the quality of education in Ukraine
- Institutes of In-service Teacher Training of Academies of Life-Long Learning (IPPO) Regional institutions of Pedagogical Education and Adult Education
- The National Academy of Educational Sciences (NAES)
- The Institute of Education Content Modernisation (IECM) - supports the modernisation of educational content and processes through fundamental and applied research, scientific and technical developments, and their practical implementation[4]
- Institute of Educational Analytics (IEA) - the leading scientific institution in Ukraine for the development of educational statistics and analytics.[5]

[4] Is part of MoES and should be soon optimised and merged with the Ukrainian Institute of Education Developmen.

[5] An institute of the MoES.

- Ukrainian Institute of Education Development (UIED) a non-profit, independent organization in a field of governance of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine.

In the context of a decentralisation reform which had its culmination with the territorial reform between 2015 and 2020 and the voluntary and later decreed formation of the hromadas, the team did not succeed to obtain clarity on the present and concrete attribution of competences at the various lower governance levels in education, i.e. at regional (oblast), hromada, city and school level.

Beside the MoES, a variety of other ministries and agencies are actively involved and/or consulted in relation to formal VET and corresponding reforms, as well as skills development for adults and the recognition of prior non-formal or informal learning. For example, the Ministry of Economy focuses on the alignment of VET programs with labour market needs and economic priorities, is involved in the development and review of educational and occupational standards. It also supports VET courses for adults (unemployed, IDPs, veterans) in coordination with the Ministry of Social Policy; sector-specific ministries support VET and skills development in specific fields related to their industry (e.g., energy, healthcare, agriculture). A notable partner in VET reforms and development is the Federation of Employers of Ukraine advocacy, policy input, curriculum development, and work-based learning with the declared goal to strengthen the link between education and the word of work. There is also a network of Ukrainian NGOs active in the education sector (See Table 10 in Annex 6).

Important international actors

Ukraine has been receiving extensive international financial and technical assistance in the education sector since the NUS was launched in 2017. While the NUS and the impact of war on access to, and the quality of education have been setting the support agenda, Ukraine's EU candidate status since June 2022 has further informed the education reform agenda and priorities, also for international assistance.

The list of donors supporting education projects comprise around 100 projects (MoES, 2024b and Annex 6 provide more details). The below listed funders are key, whereas a number of bilateral funders (Germany, Norway, Finland, Poland, Denmark, Luxembourg, Switzerland) and multilateral funds and organisations, UNHCR, WFP, UNESCO to name a few, also contribute substantially in the area of education.

UNICEF is one of the main organisations working to support education in Ukraine, with a focus on vulnerable children, including displaced children and those living in conflict zones. UNICEF is co-chair in the two main coordination bodies for the education sector in Ukraine, the Ukraine Education Cluster (addressing specifically the humanitarian needs) and the Education Sector Working Group (addressing also the long-term reform). UNICEF provides direct funding, technical assistance, and emergency response for education. This includes distributing educational materials, setting up temporary learning spaces, and supporting teacher training. UNICEF also advocates for the integration of education in humanitarian assistance and recovery (i.e. development cooperation) programs. Amongst others, UNICEF manages and implements ECW-funded programs in Ukraine.

Save the Children offers emergency education services, including temporary learning spaces, teacher training, the provision of learning materials and the integration of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) in educational interventions. Save the Children is primarily an implementing partner in the education sector in Ukraine, rather than a direct funding partner. It is mentioned here due to its role as co-chair in the Ukraine Education Cluster.

The **World Bank** provides financial and technical support to Ukraine's education sector, especially for medium to long-term recovery and reform efforts. It finances large-scale education projects, including infrastructure rebuilding, curriculum development, and strengthening governance and management systems. It also supports education reform and policy development.

ECW (Education Cannot Wait)[6] works through partnerships with UNICEF, local authorities, and other stakeholders to support emergency education interventions, school reconstruction, psychosocial support, and strengthening the resilience of the education system.

GPE (Global Partnership for Education)[7] also established a partnership with UNICEF and the Ukrainian government to provide targeted funding for education in emergencies, particularly to support the education of children in conflict-affected areas. In Ukraine, it was agreed GPE would follow the same framework as ECW. Through the so-called "GPE-multiplier" modality, grants are provided to the government and implementing partners to improve access to education, enhance learning outcomes, and strengthen the system, with a focus both on emergency responses and long-term education reform.

The **EU, and** its member states and institutions support Ukraine's education sector through humanitarian and development aid and provides policy advice to the government in line with the EU integration agenda, through grants, technical assistance, and bilateral agreements. The programmatic focus is on reconstruction, building resilience in the education system, and integrating displaced children into schools, and maintains a strong VET focus.

USAID focusses its support on the quality of and access to education, particularly for children affected by the conflict. Funding goes to educational programmes, including the construction of temporary classrooms, distribution of learning materials, and psychosocial support for students and teachers; as well as to policy reform and institutional capacity building.

Donor support to key policy priorities of the current education reform agenda

General: Donor support for Ukraine's key policy priorities within the ongoing education reform agenda is extensive and multifaceted. Given the breadth and complexity of this support, a detailed analysis of actors and their interventions was not possible in the scope of this mandate. Table 8-10 9 in Annex 6 provide an overview of sub-sector interventions in support of decentralisation and the education reforms. In addition to VET and decentralisation reform support, they range from humanitarian assistance, recovery to development cooperation, in the form of concrete projects and programs, technical assistance and policy dialogue. It must be noted that the classification is not always clear as decentralisation projects have interfaces to education, especially at hromada level, and other projects have educational aspects but might be classified under different sectors.

For the rapid appraisal, the team therefore focused on three areas in education, in which SDC is already engaged in education.

Donor support to education governance and decentralisation: The area of education governance and decentralisation is amply covered by the evaluation of DECIDE in this report. In addition, a notable finding is that many international actors and projects support the NUS reform agenda through an extensive network of sub-contracted and seconded national experts, advising on and drafting and developing legislation, by-laws, regulations and procedures, developing digital tools and other mechanisms for data collection and analysis as a basis for decision-making, advising on the design of quality, managerial, educational and occupational standards, the certification of educational institutions, teachers, procedures for the recognition of qualifications and many more.

[6] Education Cannot Wait (ECW) is a global funding mechanism for the education of children and youth affected by crises. It was established by the United Nations and operates under the umbrella of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). In the frame of a strategic partnership, Switzerland supports ECW with a Core Contribution of 33.3m CHF for 2025-28.

[7] GPE is a global fund hosted by the World Bank. It is dedicated to supporting the education sector in low- and middle-income countries. GPE works to improve access to quality education, strengthen education systems, and ensure learning outcomes, particularly for the most vulnerable children, such as those affected by poverty, conflict, or disability. In the frame of a strategic partnership, Switzerland supports GPE with a Core Contribution of CHF 47.01m CHF for 2021-25.

Within the scope of this mandate, it was not possible to assess the extent to which the provided expertise aligns with international standards, and to which extent the contractors are able to ensure the technical quality and sustainability of the delivered inputs within the education sector's reforms. It must be assumed that engagements of this kind are coordinated by the MoES to ensure complementarity and added value.

Support to VET sector reforms

In the VET sector, the MoES lists 26 projects and initiatives (in September 2024) of varying size, scope, focus and geographic reach.

The EU, in a joint action with EIB and EU member states (Germany, Poland, Estonia and Finland) have been implementing the large scale "EU4Skills: Modernisation of Vocational Education and Training Infrastructure in Ukraine" programme since 2019. The successor, Skills4Recovery has been launched recently in 2024 with the same partners (except Finland). These programmes consist of a diverse mix of interventions from EU member states and institutions collaborating on VET reform at all levels (strategy, frameworks, technical assistance, development of analytical and implementing tools, instruments and capacities). EU4Skills further supported 9 VET Centres of Excellence in 9 oblasts of Ukraine[8]. Skills4Recovery will collaborate with 6 regional administrations[9]. The authors of this report haven't gained sufficient insight allowing an informed judgement on these initiatives. However, there have been indications by several interlocutors that the programmes are very extensive and slow in their delivery, and that concrete results might not always be obvious. One donor welcomed, that the EU is preparing the grounds for a clearer framing of a concerted action of such scope: a Team Europe Initiative which operates under a shared results framework.

Locally focussed projects are those of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and Denmark. Luxembourg has recently launched a EUR 50m programme for the reconstruction Kryvyi Rih in Dnipropetrovsk region, which incorporates an EUR 8m component for developing the VET sector. Based on a labour market analysis, schools have been refurbished and equipped, teacher training on curricular development and the development of entrepreneurial skills has just been launched. A similar approach has been taken by Denmark in the city of Mykolaiv which also includes efforts related to VET. While MoES interlocutors clearly appreciated these initiatives, they also expressed concerns about fairness vis-a-vis other regions that are left empty handed.

USAID has a focus on skills development beyond formal VET schools. With its funds, IREX (International Research & Exchanges Board) is implementing the projects "Ukraine National Identity Through Youth (UNITY)" and "Mriemo ta Diemo". Among other not VET related components, these projects offer skills development for youth (age 10-35) in entrepreneurship and career preparedness for the youth aged 10-35. 20 modular Transitional Learning Centers (TLCs) in communities most devastated by the war were set up and digital solutions for formal and non-formal learning opportunities are developed and delivered. Helvetas is presently identifying needs for skills, and for re- or upskilling based on a recently completed labour market study conducted with the State Employment Service of Ukraine and the Federation of Employers of Ukraine (Sudakov, 2024).

An important Swiss engagement in VET is the EdUp project, a public private partnership project implemented by Swisscontact. The project supports 29 local VET schools in six regions[10] towards active skills development in six professions in the construction sector, by improving their education and training programs, establishing sustainable practices for better school management and building long-term partnerships with private sector companies. Since 2024

[8] Chernihiv, Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk, Ivano-Frankivsk, City of Kyiv, Odesa, Ternopil, Volyn and Zakarpattia

[9] Chernihiv, Dnipro, Kyiv, Lviv, Poltava and Vinnytsia

[10] Chernihiv, Dnipro, Kharkiv, Kyiv, Lviv and Odesa

an infrastructure component was added to rehabilitate VET schools in the frontline regions of Ukraine. EdUp fosters partnerships between the VET schools and a growing number of private companies, (15 in 2023, 24 in 2024), including Swiss companies. Companies invest in the project to a differing extent, according to their capacities: be it through human resources for training, or with equipment donations for training (e.g. Viessmann), and for some, through project co-funding such as with Sika, Geberit and potentially other companies (Glas Trösch and UBS in the pipeline).

In an interview, the MoES has expressed its high appreciation of the project and the Swiss approach: establishing centres of excellence in several targeted regions across the country as opposed to focussing on one exclusive location or spreading resources too widely geographically and strategically; EdUP – so the MoES – is facilitating the development of good practice which may serve other schools in the region as well as interregional cooperation as examples

From the information gathered during this mandate, the international assistance in the revision and design of formal and non-formal VET programmes and courses mainly focus on qualifications in the (re-)construction sector, since these are pivotal for Ukraine's immediate recovery.

Humanitarian assistance in the education sector

Since the onset of the full-scale war, aid to the education sector has surged, with important engagement by major multilateral funding mechanisms and actors. Besides its role as coordinator in partnership with the MoES, UNICEF both implements and channels funds for a large-scale humanitarian intervention in child protection and education. The MoES's project list mentions a total of 9 projects funded by, and partially also implemented by UNICEF, supporting education and learners in preschool and school, and through catch up learning, Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and life skills, school nutrition, infrastructure and equipment including shelters, transportation, referral mechanisms (MoES 2024b). Support focuses on conflict regions and IDPs. While there is widespread appreciation for the effectiveness of these interventions, interviewees also highlighted that assistance is concentrated in certain regions, leaving others underserved, specifically in Central and Western Ukraine where large numbers of IDPs are located. Another observation interviewees raised was that a gap in services often occurs when a crisis region stabilizes, humanitarian assistance withdraws, but development partners have not yet stepped in.

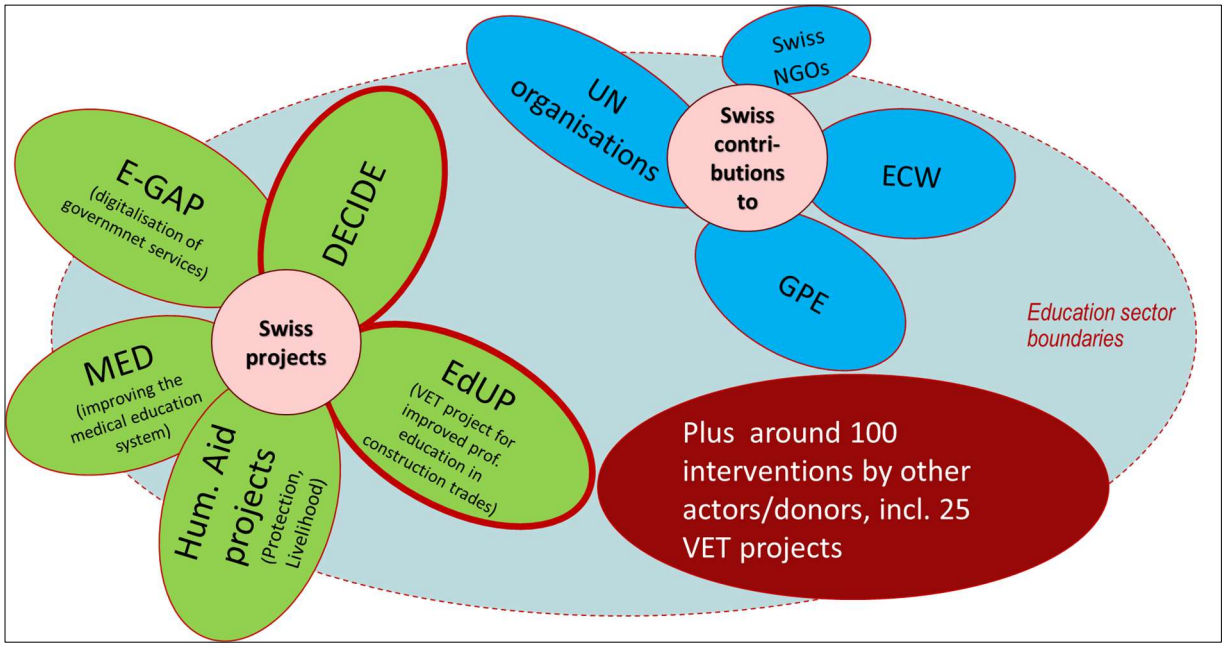
Another finding is that a number of interventions in the humanitarian context (and beyond) address education but are not always recognized as such (not even by the implementers), nor are they integrated into the strategic planning of humanitarian or development responses in the education sector. This may concern reconstruction and infrastructure support including schools and shelters (bomb shelters as well as schools temporarily accommodating displaced persons), skills development in the context of economic recovery and livelihood opportunities for vulnerable groups, cash assistance to families with school aged children, MHPSS initiatives and others to name a few.

For example, the following SDC projects from the humanitarian aid portfolio offer potential for synergies with related interventions in the education sector. The Partnership Fund for a Resilient Ukraine 2 (PFRU-2) is a multi-donor programme with the UK, the US, Canada, Sweden, Switzerland, Finland, Estonia and the Netherlands. Within a much broader frame of support, the PFRU restored a school in the Ivanivka Hromada of Chernihiv. It also facilitates the provision of MHPSS to adults and children The SDC financed protection project Improving access to protection for vulnerable conflict-affected persons in Ukraine provides support in Education in Emergencies (EiE), including child protection, access to basic services, and skills development to enhance livelihood opportunities for vulnerable groups. REMARKET - Recovery and Empowerment through Market Access and Resilient Economic Transformation in Ukraine offers a variety of skills development opportunities in the context pf economic recovery.

Further Switzerland-based organisations in this area include the Swiss Red Cross, whose engagement includes psychosocial support for (adults and) children, and the International

Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which is also active in the facilitation of access to education, and with Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE).

Figure 4: Overview about Swiss and other donors initiatives in the education sector of Ukraine in 2024



Source: Own compilation from SDC and MoES data. Note: only DECIDE and EdUP projects have an SDC education marker

4.3 Education sector coordination

Two primary coordination mechanisms are in place for a coordinated response by national and international actors in the context of education system reform and development as well as the humanitarian challenges in the education sector.

While the MoES is the primary focal point and point of contact for donors and implementers, the MoES channels relevant information through its **Education Sector Working Group** (ESWG). This focuses on the longer-term education reform and development, and related international donor support, including humanitarian components. This ESWG is a platform for Ukrainian government ministries, multilateral agencies, bilateral donors, and international organisations to coordinate and collaborate on education policy and programme implementation. The ESWG is chaired by the First Deputy Minister of the MoES, and co-chaired by the Embassy of Finland in Ukraine and UNICEF Ukraine. The ESWG has further set up thematic subgroups for “Digital Transformation”, “VET” and “EiE”. The participation in ESWG meetings and subgroups is determined by the chair and varies depending on the respective meeting agenda and topics. The ESWG focusses on the government’s reform agenda rather than individual programmes and projects. From the side of the international community, it therefore mainly involves donor representatives. While the group has been inactive in 2024 due to changes in its chairmanship and format, its re-launch is planned in early 2025.As part of the broader humanitarian coordination mechanism, the **Ukraine Education Cluster** (UEC) coordinates emergency response activities. It operates under the Humanitarian Response Plan (OCHA 2023) and is chaired by UNICEF and Save the Children and consults closely with the MoES. The UEC is structured around a national cluster and four subclusters in Ukraine’s West (Uzhhorod and Lviv), North (Kyiv), South (Odesa) and East (Dnipro). The cluster has some 80 partners, mainly implementing agencies including international and national NGOs and four working groups dedicated to Digital Transformation, MHPSS, Early Childhood Care and

Development and Catch-up Learning. To our understanding, the UEC's coverage of VET is marginal, and mainly concerns the facilitation of access to education and the development of teacher skills.

Within the limited time frame, and due to the ESWG's pausing, the team couldn't gain sufficient insight into the work and efficiency of these coordinating mechanisms and their interaction. Positive indications are that UNICEF is a co-chair in both and that the ECWG covers crisis-related aspects in education from the perspective of MoES and donors. Switzerland is not actively involved in either group. Two donors indicated that in the ESWG meetings, there is at times no clear differentiation between DECIDE and Switzerland.

4.4 Education sector priorities and gaps

As outlined earlier, a comprehensive education reform in Ukraine is in full swing amid armed conflict and displacement of millions of people. The main axes of action are defined by the NUS, EU integration, the provision of safe, quality and equitable education across a war-ridden country, and the large demand for skilled specialists to enable reconstruction and socio-economic recovery and development.

The national and international response to the complexity of challenges has been and remains impressive in its scope, commitment and pace. This observation is underpinned by an offline donor mapping of the MoES from September 2024 (MoES, 2024b and 2024c). (The link on the MoES website which navigates to "Projects supported by Governmental donors and Development Agencies" could not be reached during the period of this mandate.) But while the education sector response in Ukraine demonstrates a strong engagement from a wide variety of international actors, the complexity of interventions and actors makes it challenging to understand the scope, coherence and complementarity of initiatives, as well as tracing impacts. There appear to be many initiatives, pilot activities and localised but fragmented approaches. This was confirmed even by insiders.

Since February 2022, there was urgency as well as pressure to invest significant amounts of money quickly. While financial support remains high, there is already a considerable decline[11] and further decline is expected. This presents an opportunity for reflexion and re-orientation for the sector as well as for individual donors and partners. Greater alignment and communication among stakeholders could help to sharpen strategic focus and purpose of engagement, streamline efforts and ensure more cohesive and effective support for Ukraine's education system.

Geographical focus, balance and approaches

Humanitarian interventions in education and child protection concentrate on more acute contexts within the country, while development cooperation in Central and Western Ukraine has a different focus.

According to education cluster members, the cluster statistics show certain regions are supported much more than others, even disregarding the frontline which has gaps due to the specific challenges. Some regions even receive more support than initially targeted by the cluster. This would imply that some organisations do not necessarily factor in the sector response when programming. Donor representatives involved both in humanitarian assistance and in development cooperation repeatedly pointed out that support is accumulating in certain geographical areas and topics. Chernihiv was repeatedly mentioned as a turntable for humanitarian and development actors in education, whereas Western and Central Ukraine, as well as regions in the North (Sumska Oblast) are apparently underserved.

[11] https://fts.unocha.org/countries/234/summary/2024

Another finding refers to the question on modalities for the choice of geographical approaches where development projects support at regional or local level. MoES representatives shared a clear preference towards more balanced approaches for the sector's development: involving regions across Ukraine in a focused and coherent manner, for example by establishing centres of excellence (for VET, for teacher training, etc.), demonstrating good practice and serving as pilot examples in the region and for interregional cooperation and scaling-up. While the MoES highly appreciates interventions such as Luxembourg's focussed partnership with Kryvyi Ryh, it recognises this will remain the exception to the rule. On the other hand, their experience is that very comprehensive programmes may become hard to coordinate and concrete results might not always be obvious.

Interlinkage between humanitarian and development approaches

The interlinkage between humanitarian and development approaches often appears weak, especially in view of shifting frontlines, populations and needs, and the need for an equitable and resilient education system. This can be illustrated with three examples:

(1) Humanitarian interventions in education and child protection offer catch-up programmes and MHPSS for learners whose education was disrupted or who have learning gaps for other reasons. Are there sufficient opportunities on offer across the country, to bridge the consequences of prolonged virtual learning and learning disruptions as well as stress-induced learning difficulties?

(2) In Western Ukraine, the Education Cluster estimates 100,000 school aged IDP children, out of which 80,000 learn online, are enrolled in virtual schools of their community of origin. These children appear underserved. In addition, the online schooling modality for IDP students deprives them of vital social interaction, and child protection mechanisms cannot take effect to the same extent as for offline learners, where schools have the capacity to detect and refer cases.

The successful integration of large numbers of IDP learners in host community schools is a complex task, particularly in urban areas where the majority of IDPs are located. It might require a joint and considerate effort by development and humanitarian actors to support the communities to avoid an overload of the system, and cause additional distress to learners, teachers and their wider environment.

(3) Several interlocutors observed a disconnect related to rehabilitation, reconstruction and "small repairs" of education infrastructure with differing approaches e.g. grants or tenders, complete or partial reconstruction. There is support for school nutrition, shelters, reconstruction and repair of war-damages, improvement of classrooms, staffrooms, school yards, sports facilities, laboratories, workshops etc.. While humanitarian interventions respond to war-related destruction, others are related to modernisation and the NUS agenda. How coherent are such programmes and priorities across the sector? How coherent are they with the ongoing process of streamlining of the country's school network?

To address the observed disconnect, sector coordination across the nexus is needed to ensure these efforts are aligned with the ongoing process of streamlining the country's school network. Just as essential is the commitment of implementers and their donors to a more coordinated and cohesive approach and better aligned funding mechanisms.

VET focus

While the team was not able to obtain an overview of all VET programmes presently under revision or on offer with international support, it seems that the focus of international assistance is on VET programmes and courses mainly relevant for the construction sector, for agrobusiness and energy efficiency. For a longer-term perspective, such a focus should expand to a wider range of qualifications to support socio-economic recovery and development, as is framed by Ukraine's National Qualification Framework and development of educational and occupational standards in process.

In this context, a recurring concern is the low female participation in VET schools. Employers are actively seeking female workers in light of the war-related lack of male workers (at present, army conscription age for young men is 25). The labour market also recognises the need to re-train women for the same reason. Take for example Volvo's "Iron Women Programme" which trains female machine operators (a branding not without irony considering the underlying gender stereotypes).

Such efforts deserve support, through a better understanding of the barriers for female participation, and proactive and strategic approaches to remove them. However, it must be kept in mind that such processes are – at least for now - driven by necessity rather than by a genuine commitment to advancing gender equality. It will be important to mitigate the threats to the sustainability of enhanced female participation in programmes and professions, once enough male workers are again available on the labour market.

Another question is, how VET measures may assist war veterans (with and without invalidity) after army discharge. There are certain measures in place, such as a voucher system for veterans, contributing to costs for upskilling programmes. However, this support will require complementary measures that are ready for scale, once the war comes to an end and big numbers of veterans will require tailored support to develop a robust perspective for their further life.

In the light of the low enrolment rates in vocational schools and the high demand for skilled workers across Ukraine, the VET reform also engages in the development of a strategy for career guidance and the coherent set-up of career counselling and guidance services for lower secondary students as well as corresponding counselling on qualification opportunities for adults. While a variety of donors provide support and second experts in this area (i.a. in the frame of the EU4Skills Programme), there is also a high interest noticeable among public servants at all levels, to acquaint with good practice in other countries which go beyond the promotion of specific VET programmes or VET schools to students in grades 5 to 9 and/or to adults.

Trainings for educational and administrative staff

Several interlocutors from donor and from beneficiary side observe an abundance of trainings on offer for education managers, teachers and school staff. Beneficiaries widely recognise the usefulness of trainings, where these support the adherence to new standards as per the NUS reform, for example with the standards and procedures for teacher certification or the accreditation of local education authorities' activities. However, courses on the same topic seem to follow different organisations' manuals, and the selection of the most appropriate or useful training programme is challenging for beneficiaries. International projects often require attendance, while there seem to be cases where too many absences negatively affect the delivery of education and psycho-social support in the school. As stated by an ESWG representative: "There is endless teacher training. But what about school management, how are they supported to deliver? Instead of a lot of MHPSS trainings, how do we ensure a conducive school environment? There are too many cooks …".

Inclusion

In the limited scope of this mandate, the team was not able to focus on aspects of inclusion for persons with disabilities in the education sector. It is clearly part of the NUS priorities, and inclusion is addressed in certain interventions in the MoES project list (MoES, 2024b). Certain efforts facilitating physical access to/in schools and washrooms were observed during school visits but remain challenging. While we are not able to assess the extent to which inclusion is mainstreamed in donor supported action, future programming must take inclusive education into account.

5 Conclusions

5.1 DECIDE evaluation questions

To what extent are the project approaches and modalities appropriate for the advancement of the decentralisation and education reforms?

The project has proven to be highly relevant for advancing Ukraine's decentralisation and education reforms by addressing systemic governance gaps, promoting inclusive decision-making, and adapting effectively to multiple crises. The project's initiatives, such as supporting the MoES with education management tools, digital and analytical tools and strategies and promoting local education management capacities are well aligned with national priorities. Also, the inclusion of shelter refurbishment and VET governance reflect national needs. A core strength was DECIDE's network at regional and local level to bridge communication gaps between the various stakeholders and levels of education governance. However, the lack of a cohesive national strategy for career orientation, fragmented donor efforts, resistance to school network transformation, and stigma around VET education are areas requiring greater coordination and systemic support, especially given the high number of players in the VET sector. DECIDE's role needs sharpening to really add value.

How are the project activities and deliverables aligned with the Ukrainian regulatory framework and coordinated with other donor funded initiatives?

The project aligns closely with Ukraine's New Ukrainian School (NUS) reform and decentralisation policies. It addresses both national priorities and local needs. DECIDE collaborates closely with the MoES in the eight supported reform areas and participates in education sector events and the humanitarian Education Cluster. While the MoES-led education sector working group works relatively smoothly, the high number of donors and the difficulty to harmonise short-term humanitarian assistance in education, make donor coordination challenging and often several donors are involved at the same VET school (as observed in Poltava and Chernihiv). This requires actor mapping at the level of targeted VET schools (see also Annex 6 for VET projects).

What synergies with other Swiss-funded projects were established? How effective was the coordination with projects funded by other donors?

DECIDE has established significant synergies with other Swiss-funded projects. The collaboration with EGAP resulted in the development of digital governance tools for online participatory budgeting, enhancing transparency and stakeholder engagement in schools. Working with EdUP, the project has contributed to the VET reform but some operational activities of DECIDE (construction of 10 career orientation hubs) pose risks of mixing roles (governance vs. operational input). DECIDE has also effectively coordinated with projects funded by other donors. The project works alongside the World Bank's LEARN programme on school network transformation, digitalisation of management processes (AIKOM) and infrastructure improvements among others (see Table 9 in Annex 6 for more details). It has complemented other donors' shelter construction initiatives to ensure safe learning environments. DECIDE's facilitates information sharing and strategic alignment, enhancing the overall effectiveness of donor interventions in Ukraine's education sector. However, challenges such as limited MoES capacity for managing coordination and disparities in regional resources is an area for improvement.

To what extent have the planned results (outputs and outcomes) been achieved? How many direct and indirect beneficiaries have been affected? How can these results be generally assessed, taking into account the experience from comparable projects in Ukraine and in other countries, and considering the ongoing emergency context?

The scope of DECIDE activities is impressive and the targets at outcome and output level will be achieved for both outcomes although clear evidence is difficult. The number of beneficiaries appears to be very high (more than 10m people). The M&E data includes multiple counting of the same beneficiaries as these might have participated in several distinct activities of DECIDE (webinars, summer camps, the course "Learning to live in the Community" or/and the initiative "Getting Stronger Together"). Despite progress in decentralisation management and strengthened local capacities the introduction of military administrations has contributed to a certain re-centralisation, fostered by the increase of subventions by the MoES to the hromadas (with related conditions and reporting requirements). The democratic decision-making was fostered by elaborating regional and educational strategies involving all stakeholders and implementing mini-grants in schools to mention a few.

Were the organizational structure, design (logical framework) and strategy of the current DECIDE phase adequate/conducive to achieve the set objectives and outcomes? If not, what should have been done differently?

The project design with the two outcomes follows an inherent logic and links the various policy levels well. The linkages of activities and their interplay over all four levels (national, oblast, hromada, school) are a clear strength of DECIDE. However, the numerous activities (and related output indicators) are not easily traceable from activity mapping to the logframe. Furthermore, the distinction between the DOCCU NGO and the DECIDE project is difficult to grasp from outside, they often appear to be identical. Especially if DOCCU NGO increasingly implements other projects the internal roles, responsibilities and procedures must be clear and transparent (also for cost allocations to the various projects).

To what extent has the project adjusted to the changed circumstances and the emergency context? To what extent have the chosen approaches in relation to the emergency context contributed to the project's effectiveness and achievement of its objectives?

The project has adjusted well to the emerging needs from the two major challenges (COVID-19 and the war). It has navigated numerous thematic and operational challenges and was able to deliver solid results even during these crises thanks to flexible management and a high level of motivation and dedication of the (small) team. While some voices form the international community were highly appreciating the systemic support of DECIDE others felt that the project is everywhere in education but lacks a focus. This can be attributed to the project's stepwise expansion of the scope of activities into shelter construction and then VET. DECIDE's identity (or core business) is not anymore clear to outsiders.

To what extent are the main stakeholders at different governance levels satisfied with the results achieved, as well as the responsiveness of DECIDE to their needs and requests?

The MoES was very appreciative of DECIDE's systemic support and yet flexible approach to address changing needs. This was also confirmed by partners at oblast as well as hromada and school levels. The project staff and experts can easily be reached and provide effective advice for solutions to governance issues and emerging new problems in the education management. The appreciation of DECIDE's support was especially also felt at local level when education managers, school principals and teachers illustrated the many benefits and hope DECIDE's activities brought to them.

Which major factors have influenced the achievement or non-achievement of the project objectives in different communities/regions and different thematic areas of intervention?

The achievement of results is mainly due to a dedicated and well performing team with excellent coordination efforts with stakeholders at central level (MoES), education institutions,

Associations of cities, hromadas, and the huge network it maintains with regional and local levels (hromadas and schools). While the additional support to the shelters is positively seen by beneficiaries the evaluation team is sceptical about the VET engagement, especially the career orientation hubs (which appear to represent show-rooms for the VET schools) and because the related MoES strategy is currently under elaboration. SDC's flexibility to reallocate funds after the war started and to provide additional credits have strengthened the achievements.

Are the costs justified in relation to the project achievements (number of beneficiaries vs. invested resources per beneficiary), taking into account the experience from comparable projects in Ukraine and other countries?

The costs are reasonable compared to the scope of activities and the added infrastructure component (shelters) to allow safe access to education. The shown results would indicate a great efficiency but there are often also other partners or donor projects contributing to the reported results. Benchmarking for learning outcomes is impossible as data is lacking. With the additional credits the project scope was tremendously expanded (e.g. the budget for the last year is four times higher than the average of the first four years). This was absorbed by additional staff and high workloads but also puts at risk the continuation of good quality services as staff capacities have to be expanded accordingly.

To what extent has the project managed to leverage co-financing for its interventions in regions, in particular private sector engagement and co-financing from local/regional budgets?

The project was able to leverage some local co-financing for shelters. However, the war and related economic problems have resulted in rather lower contributions from parents and the private sector. A new trend is that companies make stronger efforts to support VET schools because they are in dire need of recruiting new staff as often staff is in the army.

How efficiently was the project managed at all levels? Is the project management results oriented, innovative and cost-efficient? How do you assess the presence/outreach/network of the project in the partner regions and at the national level?

The project has 15 staff of which some are working part-time. Therefore, the project had a great cost-effectiveness and was able to have great outreach in the eight addressed education reform areas at national level. This was possible due to good leveraging of DECIDE's expert network, and working with relevant partners (such as the Association of hromadas or the Institute of Educational Analytics). The project was solidly anchored at local level and was innovative in the sense that it was ready to tackle any challenge that was faced by the MoES and where DECIDE involvement was asked for.

To what extent has the project influenced national legal and policy frameworks?

DECIDE was crucial and effective in several education related reform efforts thanks to its experts and the network of contacts at the different governance levels. There is evidence that it influenced national policies and legislation in several fields, to mention a few, the analytical support regarding the school network transformation, the contributions to the school nutrition reform and the elaboration of regional and educational strategies (including methodologies) which allowed for better prioritisation, consultation and resource allocation. The support to the VET reform will contribute to a new law (incl. VET financing and piloting a career orientation system).

Which positive or negative, intended or not intended results at all three levels of intervention (local, regional, national) can be identified?

DECIDE has supported the MoES in crucial and complex parts of the NUS reform and thus contributed to make the education decentralisation more effective, at local and regional level

the support to education managers and schools (e.g. capacity development, strategy development, councils). An unintended positive outcome of DECIDE was that it instilled hope at the level of schools for teachers and students in form of various activity strengthening democratic decision making ("Public Budget for Kids' Dreams", and "Learning to live in the Community") as well as the summer clubs have given hope to students, teachers and parents for the future. A risk is that the DECIDE support substitutes core tasks that should be implemented by the MoES and other ministries (e.g. school network transformation).

To what extent are the results of the project institutionalized/anchored at local, regional and national levels

The project has achieved significant institutionalisation of its results across governance levels. School governance mechanisms, public budgeting processes, and strategic planning have been embedded into community practices at local level by training the staff and teachers and documenting the procedures. It empowers local actors to sustain reforms independently. At the regional level, education councils and strategic frameworks prepared structures to maintain and improve education governance. Nationally, the project's contributions to legislative reforms for VET financing, school network modelling, and decentralization policies demonstrate its alignment with systemic changes. On the other side, the many pilots on local level lack a critical mass and might disappear if not scaled up to other hromadas of the targeted oblasts.

Which major factors might enhance the results achieved at different governance levels or prevent them from continuing?

Key factors enhancing the results achieved at different governance levels include the project's emphasis on capacity building, localisation, and institutionalisation. Through targeted training programmes, DECIDE has equipped thousands of education managers, school leaders and teachers, and community representatives with essential skills in governance, strategic planning, and stakeholder engagement. The institutionalisation of practices, such as school governance mechanisms and strategic frameworks, further ensures that these initiatives are embedded within formal governance and education systems, increasing their durability and sustainability over time. Despite these strengths, several challenges could prevent the continuation of project results. Political resistance to reform, such as the consolidation of schools in underpopulated areas, the absence of co-funding mechanisms across communities as well as uncompetitive salaries and institutional instability (staff changes) pose a risk for maintaining pilots and achievements.

The still very high financial dependency of DOCCU through the SDC financed DECIDE project poses a significant sustainability risk for the NGOs independent future operations.

To what extent has the mainstreaming of the transversal themes Gender Equality and Good Governance, as well as Conflict-Sensitive Programme Management approach contributed to the achievement of lasting results?

The integration of transversal themes has been pursued by the project in various ways. Gender equality approaches have promoted inclusivity, enhancing participation across diverse groups. This was facilitated by the high proportion of female in DOCCU and the various education institutions. Good Governance practices, such as transparent decision-making and community engagement were core project activities. The Conflict-Sensitive Programme Management approach has been addressing the inclusion of vulnerable populations, including internally displaced persons (IDPs).

5.2 Conclusions from the rapid education sector appraisal

Even though the limited scope of this mandate did not allow a full analysis of the education sector's priorities and gaps in the donor response, the findings still lead to several substantiated conclusions.

A comprehensive education reform in Ukraine is carried out amid armed conflict and massive displacement. The main axes of action are defined by the NUS and the decentralisation reform, EU integration, the provision of safe, quality and equitable education across a war-ridden country, and the large demand for skilled specialists to enable reconstruction and socio-economic recovery and development.

Demographic changes present a challenge, with many schools in various regions facing declining enrolment and potential closure. Table 7 in Annex 6 illustrates this for the VET schools. After 2022, Ukraine has experienced a further population loss of 5 million people, and the war has further exacerbated this issue by significantly reducing an already low birth rate.

The national and international response to the complexity of challenges is impressive in its scope, commitment and pace, but at the same time it became challenging to understand the coherence, and effectiveness of the diverse initiatives even for insiders. Financial and technical assistance has surged since 2022, with a gradual decline in humanitarian support expected, and already visible in 2024 in the humanitarian branch of education support.

This presents an opportunity for reflexion and re-orientation for the sector as well as for individual donors and partners. Greater alignment and communication among stakeholders could help to sharpen strategic focus, complementarity and purpose of engagement, streamline efforts and ensure more cohesive and effective support for Ukraine's education system.

During the field visit, there have been repeated indications that not all priorities under the NUS reform and in humanitarian assistance are sufficiently covered, be it geographically or per subsector.

Several important observations about the current state of vocational education and training (VET) and its future prospects in Ukraine can be made. In the context of Ukraine's socio-economic recovery, the expansion and modernisation of VET programmes and qualifications must align with economic priorities and potential.

Looking ahead, it is essential that these programmes support not only short-term labour market needs but also the country's mid- and long-term development. This should be framed within Ukraine's National Qualifications Framework and the development of educational and occupational standards. Unfortunately, the rapid appraisal did not provide sufficient insight into the catalogue of professional qualifications that is currently being fundamentally revised under the NUS reform, and how the different international responses align with the overall skills set in demand.

At the level of VET schools, international support for the comprehensive VET reform is focussing on qualifications in high demand for reconstruction, and to some extent also to energy efficiency and agrobusiness. This focus caters to important needs but might be too narrow with a view to the mid- and long-term socio-economic development of the country. It goes without saying that the international response cannot cover all vocational training programmes across all subjects. This underscores the importance of ensuring that the strategies of international donors and education authorities play up the strategic rollout of best practices for VET programmes, schools, and centres of excellence.

Comprehensive support for war veterans will also be crucial. As the war comes to an end, there will be a need for tailored approaches to help larger numbers of veterans and their families reintegrate into society and build sustainable livelihoods. This could include VET

programmes specifically designed for this group; alongside other services that help them transition to civilian life.

In addition, a career orientation system is still in development in Ukraine amid the substantial reform of the VET system and of qualifications on offer. This career orientation system should help guide individuals towards relevant skills development and is a key area for further focus. It will need to address lower secondary students in their choice of further educational pathways, but also advanced students and adults, and in particular vulnerable groups such as unemployed persons, internally displaced persons (IDPs), youth, veterans, returnees, and people with disabilities. Public servants at all governance levels have expressed strong interest in learning from international best practices in this area.

Moreover, there remains a need to strengthen support for upskilling in sectors aligned with the strong demand by employers and nurture economic development. There are significant national and business initiatives and international donor support in this area; however, more targeted interventions are required, especially for vulnerable groups, with a comprehensive perspective that spans the entire country.

There are significant gaps in the integration of humanitarian and development approaches, particularly considering shifting frontlines, changing populations, and evolving needs, as exemplified by the ongoing challenge of integrating IDPs into mainstream education in Western and Central Ukraine. This underscores the importance of building an equitable and resilient education system across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

Switzerland is presently not represented in the coordination mechanisms of the education sector, more precisely the ESWG. There are indications that national and international actors might not always be able to differentiate between positions held by Switzerland and by the projects it supports.

Finally, while the NUS reform at the pre-primary and primary education levels is formally complete, ongoing needs for adaptation and updating remain. Areas such as inclusion, student retention and progression, child protection mechanisms, and referral mechanisms require further exploration and attention.

6 Recommendations

6.1 Recommendations for DECIDE Phase 2

- **Continue with a Phase 2 of DECIDE as it provides systemic support to the education reforms, supports both capacity development and provision of equipment and refurbishment of schools, but sharpen the thematic focus of support:** DECIDE has delivered very good value for money through its systemic and adaptive support the education reform and its sub-themes. The scope of project activities, however, lack focus and address too many themes. The valued added in the VET sector was assessed as interesting but fragmentary and potentially insufficient time to pilot and analyse the lessons learned. Thus, VET activities are recommended to be evaluated and possibly phased out in a next phase of DECIDE (or continued with a separate project. See education sector recommendations below.

- **Prioritize interventions that leverage DECIDE's unique strengths in decentralization in education, dealing with cross-cutting issues, and full policy cycle capacity at central, regional, and local levels:** Emphasise decentralised education management (strategy development and implementation, making councils work, support in n school network transformation and digitalisation). This can also include democratic governance at school level (participatory budgeting, mini-grants, and summer camps).

  De-emphasize on areas where plenty of donor funding appears to be available, and the value added by Switzerland seems less obvious or the concepts are uncertain (e.g. school nutrition reform, school reconstruction, career orientation hubs (where an overall concept is felt missing and is under elaboration by the MoES) but a good mix between capacity development and infrastructure/equipment support is helpful.

- **Scale up the pilot experiences conducted in the targeted hromadas and oblasts**: Relevant and useful pilots have been conducted in the 20 hromadas of the five oblasts. Some of these have yet to be promoted or applied in the other hromadas in the pilot regions or in other oblasts not yet covered (e.g. school councils, "Public Budget for Kids' Dreams"). While noticeable efforts were made by DECIDE to scale up the pilots through webinars and trainings at national level it was mentioned in the field that the disparities within oblasts might increase if the project puts a focus only to selected hromadas and schools.

- **Develop shared leadership (within DOCCU) based on a strategic vision and business model to ensure that an effective management structure enhances DOCCU's resilience:** The DOCCU NGO should establish a clear strategy for the support to the education sector stakeholders and not embark ad-hoc on activities or new priorities that might be launched by the MoES or other partners. The strategy or business plan should also include strengthening of DOCCU's organisational management (allocation of responsibilities in the team) and its M&E system. An independent organisational assessment might allow to better balance the very high workloads and streamline management procedures and responsibilities and to position DOCCU as a delivering NGO attracting other donor funds.

- **Elaborate a concept for the deployment of experts and review their profile:** DECIDE uses more than 250 experts in 2024 for the various activities at the different levels of education governance. Their selection should be transparent, follow the subsidiary principle (not substituting MoES tasks), be complementary to the many other experts advising the MoES and be linked to the sharpened profile of DOCCU NGO and the future DECIDE activities.

- **The provision of hardware (shelter refurbishment if still needed in future, and equipment) should remain part of DECIDE portfolio:** This support is a carrot for oblasts and hromadas to strengthen transparent decision-making practices with involvement of different stakeholders and support school network transformation. This support should be conditional to the application of participatory practises in education governance and a fixed co-financing from local budget (e.g. 30%).

- **Develop exit strategies that enable authorities and institutions to continue independently the tools and processes initiated by DECIDE, ensuring long-term sustainability:** DECIDE has taken up many reform pilot activities but was not always able to close to sustainably anchor achievements (e.g. school nutrition). The problem is that each policy undergoes constant change or is challenged by the context (adaptation to crises or

technological challenges). Thus, there is a risk that pilot activities to not reach critical mass that would ensure sustainability.

- **Give more space for local ownership and branding in product and process development:** The evaluation team gained the impression that DECIDE is flagging its involvement quite prominently. Many activities were implemented with partners but sometimes their ownership was less visible. For example, the shelters' interior was designed by a professional designer while the student's creativity had no room. Possibly a missed opportunity.
- **Consider streamlining the reporting into one set of documents :** Currently the project elaborates an extensive progress report on activities for the beneficiaries (MoES, Ministry of Communities and Territories Development, oblasts and other educational institutions) as well as a report for SDC. This appears not very efficient. One common report with a separate logframe, equipped with the necessary data for SDC, could be sufficient.

6.2 Recommendations for the mid-term Swiss programming in education in Ukraine

It is recommended to build future programming on SDC's existing project portfolio in basic education, education governance, and VET, integrating both development cooperation and relevant components of humanitarian assistance. Successful Swiss initiatives developed in Ukraine should serve as models for scaling up and inspiring future efforts. At the same time, diversifying projects and implementing partners is essential. To maximise effectiveness, education initiatives should be interconnected with other sectors in SDC's portfolio, such as urban development, energy, water, and health, creating integrated, mutually reinforcing interventions that address the needs of humanitarian assistance, recovery, and development. The education portfolio should adopt a broad, inclusive understanding of basic education (spanning pre-primary, primary, and secondary levels) and vocational skills development. This approach should ensure that both immediate crisis responses and long-term strategies build resilience in education systems to withstand future shocks.

Potential entry points for such programming include:

Expand Switzerland's engagement in secondary VET

- **Broaden VET focus beyond reconstruction:** While current VET support focuses primarily on qualifications related to reconstruction, agrobusiness and energy efficiency, there is significant potential to expand into other areas crucial for Ukraine's long-term recovery and development. These areas include logistics/supply chain management, renewable energy, healthcare, financial services, IT software development and systems integration and heavy machinery operations. Partnerships with Swiss institutions, industries, and professional associations could play a key role in expanding these programmes. This may particularly apply to other domains of the Swiss portfolio such as health, energy, transport and water.
- **Promote gender equality in VET:** Efforts should be made to ensure that these expanded VET programmes attract a higher proportion of female students, with a focus on offering opportunities in male-dominated sectors, such as IT, renewable energy, and heavy machinery. Gender inclusivity should be a core aspect of VET development.

Support Upskilling for Adults and Vulnerable Groups

- **Targeted upskilling for vulnerable populations:** Explore opportunities to support upskilling courses, including formal certification, for vulnerable groups such as unemployed individuals, internally displaced persons (IDPs), youth, veterans, returnees, and people with disabilities. Special attention should be given to skills in high demand by employers and the potential for partnerships with employers and businesses. Ensure that the qualifications to be acquired align with Ukraine's National Qualification Framework and occupational standards.

Support Development and Implementation of a Comprehensive Career Orientation Strategy and System

- **Support the MoES and its partners to establish a robust, system-wide career guidance framework that goes beyond individual schools or programs.** Core components should include (i) individualised assessments: tools for evaluating students' skills and interests to guide career decisions, (ii) career information resources: a centralised repository of comprehensive, up-to-date information on educational pathways, qualifications, and career opportunities across various fields, (iii) labour market insights: regularly updated data on high-demand sectors, emerging fields, and job market trends to inform career choices, (iv) targeted communication: a communication strategy tailored to specific goals and target groups, promoting career orientation as an essential service rather than a VET-specific initiative, and promoting VET as a valuable and viable pathway for personal and professional development, emphasising that it is equally as worthy and rewarding as pursuing academic education or traditional white-collar careers.
- **Assist the MoES to operationalise a strategic and comprehensive career orientation system as part of the ongoing VET system reform.** Swiss support could include (i) technical assistance: provide expertise and guidance to ensure the strategy's alignment with best practices, (ii) institutional partnerships: expand partnerships and facilitate collaboration with Swiss institutions such as EHB (Swiss Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training), BIZ (Swiss Career Guidance Centers), Swiss professional associations or private sector representatives, to share insights and develop capacity.

Support the integration of IDPs and struggling learners

- **Support the integration of IDP children and youth into schools in their host communities** in Western and Central Ukraine, and/or other regions, as applicable. Contribute to a coherent and equitable strategy for this integration across the country. The technical approach could also be informed by studies, such as SDC's research on the value of the Swiss school system in international cooperation.
- **Provide equitable support for struggling learners across the nexus:** It is crucial to provide equitable catch-up initiatives for learners who have been out of education or only attended online classes for extended periods—whether they are IDPs or not. These initiatives should focus on helping all struggling learners, irrespective of their status, to (re-) integrate into the education system.

Maintain SDC's geographic and thematic approaches for education programming

- SDC's interventions should **continue to address multiple regions in a demand-driven, thematic manner** rather than focusing on singular locations or providing budget support. This approach should remain flexible to respond to emerging challenges, particularly in areas like pre-school and primary education, where the first phase of the National Unified System (NUS) reform has been completed but ongoing updates and adaptations will be necessary.

Strengthen engagement and visibility of Switzerland in education sector coordination

- **Enhance Switzerland's role in education coordination:** If Switzerland's education portfolio expands, a more proactive role in education sector coordination should be considered. This could help ensure a better visibility of Switzerland's education portfolio (as opposed to individual projects, and "blind spots" regarding education support in humanitarian interventions), and strengthen the integration of Switzerland's contributions into broader education reforms.
- **Regularly assess new areas for inclusion in Switzerland's portfolio**: In a highly volatile context, it is recommended to regularly assess areas within the education sector for their potential inclusion in the portfolio, such as non-formal education, extra-curricular activities, shelters, and post-secondary VET programmes. Key issues like student retention, progression, child protection mechanisms, and referral processes should also be addressed within the framework of broader educational reform.
- **Validate the potential to establish applied research and innovation partnerships between Switzerland and Ukraine:** Switzerland supports such schemes under the second cohesion contribution to the EU, for example the research and innovation programme in Poland. This could support to address education challenges in Ukraine (for example VET and its interlinkage to the labour market in the context of the European Qualifications Framework) and contribute to Ukraine's EU accession and strengthen linkages with Swiss researchers, universities of applied science and companies.

Annex 1: Terms of Reference

Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Cooperation Office Ukraine
Embassy of Switzerland

External Evaluation of the Swiss-Ukrainian Project "Decentralization for Improved Democratic Education" - DECIDE Phase 1

Combined with

a Strategic Review of the Education Sector's Priorities in Ukraine

Terms of Reference

1. Context of the Assignment

In 2019, after over a decade of a comprehensive support to the decentralization reform in Ukraine, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) decided to **also prioritize support to decentralization in the education management sector**. This decision was based on the following context related considerations.

The first stage of the decentralization and local self-government reform resulted in **fiscal decentralization** that allowed communities to retain 60% of the personal income tax (PIT) and local taxes, thus significantly increasing local revenues and opportunities for development. Local self-governments received **new competences and responsibilities for provision of public services** in their communities. However, both financial resources and competences were transferred only to those communities that had sufficient population and preconditions for economic sustainability. This became a powerful incentive for smaller local communities to **amalgamate voluntarily into bigger administrative units – territorial communities**. Those communities that amalgamated the earliest, received additional financing from the state budget for the development of their public infrastructure.

After the establishment of around 900 amalgamated communities (2019) it became evident that the majority of rural territorial communities had one significant issue in common: **over 60% (in some cases over 80%) of their annual budgets was spent on education**. At the same time, the results of the 2018 PISA assessment showed a notable **gap of 2,5 years between rural and urban students' performance**. This data confirmed the acute need for optimization of the educational network suffering from decades of inefficient management. This could be done via decentralization of education governance, and synchronization of the local self-government reform with the education reform. Additionally, as the transformation of the school network has often been perceived negatively by the population, it was essential to ensure and promote a strong engagement of young people and their parents in local decision making.

As a result, the Swiss-Ukrainian Project "Decentralization for Improved Democratic Education" (DECIDE) was designed to address these challenges. The Project's overall goal was defined as follows: **Citizens of amalgamated territorial communities, including vulnerable groups and IDPs, contribute to and benefit equally from democratic governance and high-quality education.** The goal is being pursued through two outcomes:

Outcome 1. National, regional, and local authorities effectively implement sectoral decentralization with a focus on deregulated and digitalized data-based education governance.

Outcome 2. Schoolboys/girls and their parents benefit from inclusive democratic school governance and active civic engagement in amalgamated territorial communities.

The overall implementation of the project is mandated to a consortium composed of two organizations that have unique mutually complementing expertise - the **Ukrainian NGO "DOCCU"** and the **Zurich University of Teacher Education**. The key project partners and

beneficiaries at the national level are the **Ministry of Education and Science** and the **Ministry of Regional Development**. At the subnational level DECIDE is implemented in five target regions: Odesa, Ivano-Frankivsk, Poltava, Luhansk and Chernihiv oblasts. At the local level the project closely works with pilot communities in the target regions and offers its advisory and capacity development support to hundreds of communities nation-wide.

The original budget of the ongoing Phase 1 of DECIDE during 2020-2025 was CHF 4,43 million. However, in the first months after its launch the project had to respond to the emergency challenges of the COVID crisis severely impacting the education sector. And after the launch of the full-scale war in 2022 DECIDE has been promptly responding to the colossal needs of Ukraine in managing the acute education crisis, while focusing on the project's key objectives of improving education governance nationwide and supporting communities in reforming and recovering education through democratic engagement. Due to the profound expertise of the project team and broad established partnerships with national, regional and local authorities, the scope of DECIDE has been gradually extended (to CHF 13,6 million) to support the recovery and reconstruction of educational facilities and to assist the Government in developing policies for the high school reform, including the vocational education and training (VET) reform.

As Phase 1 of DECIDE comes to an end in Q1 2025, SDC is planning its external evaluation that should look into the effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the project, as well as provide recommendations for shaping DECIDE Phase 2. Furthermore, taking into account the Swiss Cooperation Programme for Ukraine 2025-28, where human capital development and education may gain more prominence, this evaluation will also consider the strategic priorities in the education sector and Switzerland's value added as a basis for decision-making on a future potential broadening of the Swiss engagement in education, including vocational skills development.

2. Objectives of the Assignment

The **assignment** should reach the following key objectives:

1) **evaluate the results** of the DECIDE Project Phase 1 and **inform decision-making** on the future planning of its subsequent phase.
2) contribute to a **strategic reflection on Switzerland's support to the education sector** in the coming years.

Based on the defined objectives the assignment will consist of the following key elements:

1. **The external evaluation** will be structured around the 6 OECD-DAC criteria for evaluating development projects: relevance, coherence, impact, efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability, with a stronger focus on the 3 latter ones. The assignment is also expected to assess the extent to which transversal topics (Conflict-Sensitive Programme Management (CSPM), gender equality and good governance) have been reflected in the course of the project implementation.

2. Recommendations for Phase 2 of DECIDE. Based on the findings of the evaluation, suggestions should be made for an appropriate organizational setup, thematic and geographic scope of future DECIDE interventions to ensure a steady advancement of decentralization and improved democratic governance in the education sector, taking into account the ongoing conflict and uncertainty about the future.

3. **A strategic review of the education sector in Ukraine and Switzerland's current and potential future engagement.** Considering Ukraine's policy priorities and needs (incl. with regards to the ongoing emergency) as well as Switzerland's value added and positioning in relation to other donors, the strategic review will identify areas for potential broader Swiss engagement in the education sector from 2026 onwards. The review will specifically assess

whether Switzerland should consider broadening its engagement in vocational skills development in the coming years.

The list of issues to be addressed by the **external evaluation** includes, but is not limited to, the following key questions:

Impact

1. What has happened as a result of the project (outcome level, impact level if possible)? Which positive or negative, intended or not intended results at all three levels of intervention (local, regional, national) can be identified? How many direct and indirect beneficiaries have been affected? How can these results be generally assessed, taking into account the experience from comparable projects in Ukraine and in other countries, and considering the ongoing emergency context?

Relevance

2. To what extent are the project approaches and modalities appropriate for the advancement of the decentralization and education reforms?

Coherence

3. How are the project activities and deliverables aligned with the Ukrainian regulatory framework and coordinated with other donor funded initiatives?

Effectiveness

4. To what extent have the planned results been achieved?
5. Were the organizational structure, design (logical framework) and strategy of the current DECIDE phase adequate/conducive to achieve the set objectives and outcomes? If not, what should have been done differently?
6. To what extent has the project adjusted to the changed circumstances and the emergency context? To what extent have the chosen approaches in relation to the emergency context contributed to the project's effectiveness and achievement of its objectives?
7. To what extent are the main stakeholders at different governance levels satisfied with the results achieved, as well as the responsiveness of DECIDE to their needs and requests?
8. Which major factors have influenced the achievement or non-achievement of the project objectives in different communities/regions and different thematic areas of intervention?
9. To what extent has the project influenced national legal and policy frameworks?
10. What synergies with other Swiss-funded projects were established? How effective was the coordination with projects funded by other donors?

Efficiency

11. Are the costs justified in relation to the project achievements (number of beneficiaries vs. invested resources per beneficiary), taking into account the experience from comparable projects in Ukraine and other countries?
12. To what extent has the project managed to leverage co-financing for its interventions in regions, in particular private sector engagement and co-financing from local/regional budgets?
13. How efficiently was the project managed at all levels? Is the project management results-oriented, innovative and cost-efficient? How do you assess the presence/outreach/network of the project in the partner regions and at the national level?

Sustainability

14. To what extent are the results of the project institutionalized/anchored at local, regional and national levels?
15. Which major factors might enhance the results achieved at different governance levels or prevent them from continuing?
16. To what extent has the mainstreaming of the transversal themes Gender Equality and Good Governance, as well as Conflict-Sensitive Programme Management approach contributed to the achievement of lasting results?

Key questions to be answered while formulating the **recommendations for Phase 2**:

1. Which thematic components of the decentralization and education reform agenda shall be prioritized (considering the security context and profound needs for simultaneous recovery and reforms) in order to capitalize on the achievements of the current phase, and in view of other donors' programs?
2. What are the best approaches and modalities for future interventions to guarantee their sustainability upon the finalization of the project? What measures need to be considered for phasing out and exit?
3. How should the next phase of the project be shaped to adequately respond to the ongoing emergency context? To what extent should hardware activities (reconstruction) be a part of Phase 2?
4. What modalities/mix of modalities should be prioritized for effective results (grants, direct budget support to communities, institutional support to authorities, etc.)?
5. How can DECIDE respond most effectively to the needs of the conflict-affected population? Which vulnerable groups should be taken into consideration in the future phase?
6. What should be the considerations for defining the geographic focus for Phase 2?

The **strategic review** should explore in particular the following questions:

1. What are the key policy priorities of the current education reform agenda and to what extent are they covered by donor support?
2. What are the key development and humanitarian funding partners supporting the education sector, and what are the key modalities of this support?
3. If Switzerland decides to increase its support for the education sector, what reform components should it prioritize ensuring alignment with the strategic framework, harnessing its potential value added, and pursuing a coherent and systemic approach to its programming while taking into account the current context?

3. Methodology and Scope of Work

The external evaluation of the DECIDE Project will be conducted based on an analysis of the available project documentation and other relevant information collected through interviews and focus group discussions with project partners, stakeholders and beneficiaries at the national, regional and local levels. During the mission to Ukraine the evaluation team should plan ample time for meetings in Kyiv and in at least two pilot regions of DECIDE. Taking into account the security situation in Ukraine, the Embassy of Switzerland will provide security clearance for field visits.

The evaluation will be performed by an external team comprising up to 3 consultants, preferably **gender-balanced**: a leading international consultant, a national consultant, and an additional thematic consultant (international or national). A translator can be added when relevant for parts of the mission. An **SDC peer reviewer** from SDC HQ or another field office can join some parts of the evaluation. The latter should not be part of the offer, as her/his costs will be covered directly by SDC.

The **International Consultant (IC)** fully leads the mandate by developing an efficient and comprehensive methodology and ensuring smooth and efficient team work during all stages of the assignment. *Certain support in arranging logistics during the mission and in organizing meetings can be provided by DECIDE and the Embassy.* The IC selects a **Local Consultant (LC)** who will navigate the team in the local context and support overall assignment implementation, and a **Thematic Consultant (TC)** who will have complementary expertise in education management and education reforms to facilitate the education sector's strategic review. A **Peer Reviewer** can engage in all or selected stages of the assignment depending on availability, however is not considered a member of the evaluation team.

The following table gives an indicative overview of the scope of work. The exact time allocation is subject to negotiations between the Embassy in Kyiv and the evaluation team prior to concluding the contract.

Task/Activity	Number of days		
	IC	LC	TC
Analysis of relevant project documentation and preparatory activities (assignment schedule, development of the methodology, work plan with distribution of tasks, report outline, etc.)	4	2	2
Desk study and briefings with the Embassy in Kyiv and DECIDE Project team	3	3	3
Mission to Ukraine, interviews and focus group discussions with key national, regional and local stakeholders, selected Swiss-funded projects, international development partners/projects, direct and indirect beneficiaries	12	12	12
Debriefings with Embassy in Kyiv and DECIDE	1	1	1
Report writing	6	4	4
Total	**26**	**22**	**22**

4. Deliverables and Reporting

The review team is expected to produce the following deliverables:

1. Presentation (.ppt) for the preliminary discussion of the key findings at the final debriefings with the Embassy and DECIDE.
2. Evaluation Report (in line with the objectives outlined in Chapter 2 of these ToRs, max. 20 pages plus annexes; font Arial 11 with standard margins). The Final Report is to be submitted within 15 working days after the debriefing with the Embassy.
3. Final financial report (incl. timesheets justifying hours/days of work) is to be submitted to the Embassy within 15 working days after the completion of the mandate.

The language of the reports shall be English.

5. Indicative Time Frame

The assignment will be conducted within the following *indicative* timeframe:

September 2024	October-November 2024
Selecting the assessment team	Mission in Ukraine
Signing contract with IC	Final review report prepared
Preparatory activities and desk study	Financial report prepared

6. Selection Process

At least three international consultants are invited to submit a proposal in response to the present Terms of Reference.

Required expertise and qualifications of the evaluation team (*as a whole*):

- Profound experience in evaluation of interventions in the area of public administration, local self-government, decentralization, education management, education reforms, vocational skills development, including in different developing/transition countries, preferably in Eastern Europe;
- Proven experience and expertise in project design and implementation, evaluation methodologies;
- Prior experience and knowledge of the Ukrainian development and reform context, in particular decentralization and education reforms;
- Experience of working in and with international projects, organisations and/or local and national governments;
- Competence in mainstreaming gender equality, good governance and conflict-sensitive programme management;
- Ability to work independently and in a collaborative manner within a multicultural team;
- Excellent communication and good presentation skills;
- Full proficiency in English and Ukrainian.

Documents to be submitted:

1. Technical proposal (max. 3 pages, no predefined format), including the following parts:
   i) Understanding of the mandate, context and challenges;
   ii) Proposed methodology for the implementation of the whole exercise;
   iii) Process description and schedule for the assessment.
2. Curriculum Vitae of the international consultant and key team members, clearly stating the relevant experience.
3. Statement of availability.
4. Financial proposal (using the predefined format included in the Annexes). The Financial proposal shall include all costs related to the mandate.

Selection criteria:

- Quality of the technical proposal (weight: 30%);
- Experience of the international consultant (weight: 30%);
- Availability (weight: 20%);
- Costs according to the financial proposal (weight: 20%).

The proposals should be submitted by **12 September 2024** to Ms. Ilona Postemska, Senior National Programme Officer, Embassy of Switzerland in Ukraine (email: ilona.postemska@eda.admin.ch).

Annexes[1]:

i) **Form for Financial Proposal**

ii) **Documents for preparation of the technical proposal:**
- Swiss Cooperation Programme in Ukraine 2020–2023
- DECIDE Phase 1 project documentation

iii) **Additional documents for the review (upon request):**
- Selected progress reports and other relevant project documents
- Selected information on relevant Swiss-funded projects in Ukraine

[1] The listed documents will be provided upon request.

Annex 3: Description of Methodology

This chapter offers additional information about the methodology applied for the external evaluation and the rapid sector appraisal.

Document review: The evaluation analysed relevant strategic documents at national, regional and local level (incl. laws, decentralisation strategies, audits to mention a few) and reviewed the DECIDE project documents (credit proposals, logframes, progress reports, elaborated documents) as well as considered studies and evaluations conducted by other donors or academic institutions. The strategic review consulted sectoral studies, websites and sectoral analysis of other donors and projects in the education sector.

Team composition: The ToR have foreseen the participation of an SDC peer reviewer in order to inform the mission about current SDC education policies. Martina Ramming, Senor Education Policy Adviser of SDC, participated in the mission. She participated mainly in the interviews related to education sector issues and was not involved in the evaluation of DECIDE activities and drafting the corresponding parts of the report.

Interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGD): The following table provides an overview about the interviews and FGDs conducted in the various places as well as the gender composition.

Table 2: Overview about interviews and FGDs conducted in various places

Type	Number	Number of people met	gender composition (no. of f)
Interviews			
CH, Kiyv and online	35	41	29
Chernihiv	3	10	5
Poltava	8	14	11
Total	**46**	**65**	**45**
Focus groups			
Kiyv and online	4	15	10
Brovary	1	3	1
Chernihiv	2	9	9
Poltava	2	9	6
Total	**9**	**36**	**26**
Overall total		**101**	**71**

Source: Own compilation from mission programme and interview notes.

Sample selection: As the project has been working in five target regions (Odesa, Ivano-Frankivsk, Poltava, Luhansk and Chernihiv Oblasts) and given the limited time during the mission, only three field visits could be conducted. Therefore, a purposeful sampling of locations to visit took into consideration the overall and location specific security situation, travel logistics and the relevance and/or scope of the activity for the DECIDE project. The final selection was made in agreement with the Embassy when planning the mission.

Limitations: Due to the limited time available only four locations could be visited during the field visits. There was a risk of selection bias, as the hromadas and schools visited were chosen through purposeful sampling rather than random sampling. These visits to potential showcase examples may have introduced a bias, further limiting the ability to generalize.

It should also be noted that time series data was difficult to obtain. Not only has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the educations system but the war related population movements to other regions or abroad has created challenges for education statistics (e.g. no actual data on location and status of IDPs are available and sources of education funding is only available until the war started. Since then, many new subventions like for shelter construction, procurement of school buses etc. were introduced by the central government in 2023).

Interviews and focus group discussions with DECIDE beneficiaries occasionally felt closely managed (attendance of supervisors of usage of scripts for statements by beneficiaries). While the team did not have the impression that anything was being withheld, it was sometimes challenging to elicit clear or candid responses.

However, the most prominent challenge results from the context. How can efficiency and sustainability be assessed in a country experiencing the realities of a full-scale war? How do you assess the sustainability when 100% of the government spending, incl. education spending is financed by bi- and multilateral donors). Ukraine has received EUR 92bn since the start of the war in February 2022 and roughly needs around EUR 37bn per year to sustain the GoUA expenses for the civil administration (The Kyiv Independent, 2024).

D) Example of an interview guideline developed for the task

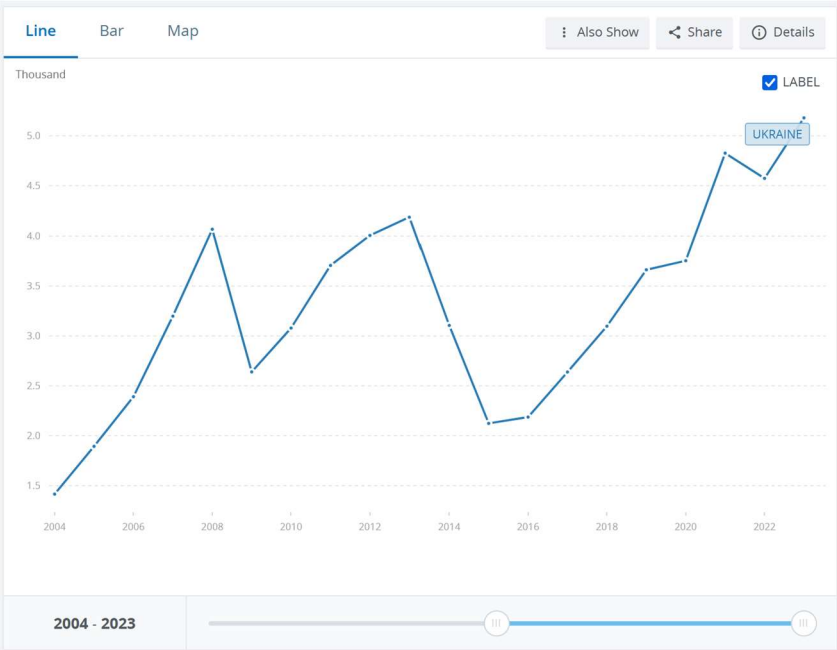
Nr.	Interview guideline for the SDC financed DECIDE evaluation A - Ministerial / Regional partners / Beneficiaries	Eval. Quest.
	Info about the Interview Date: xxx Stakeholder: xxx Names and functions: xxxx by	
1	Please describe briefly your involvement in the DECIDE project	
	- X	
2	What were the main achievements / highlights or results regarding the two components in your opinion: 1) regarding sectoral decentralisation (focus on deregulated and digitalised data-based education governance) 2) parents/schoolboys/girls benefit from democratic school governance and active civic engagement?	Eff.
	- X	
3	Were there any unintended effects as a result of project implementation?	Impact
	- X	
4	How do you assess the relevance of the DECIDE intervention for the needs of the Ukrainian education sector?	Rel.
	- X	
5	To which extent were the DECIDE efforts aligned with - the government reform priorities - other donor projects in the education sector?	Coh.
	- X	
6	Were the organizational structure, design and strategy of the current DECIDE phase adequate to achieve the set objectives and outcomes? If not, what should have been done differently?	Effec.

	- X	
7	To what extend the project adapted to the emerging situation? How effectively it has adapted to emergency situation? *(Scale of 1 - not at all to 10 – optimally)*	Effec
	- X	
8	Which factors have influenced positively and negatively project achievements?	Effec
	- X	
9	Can you give examples of co-financing for DECIDE interventions in regions, in particular private sector engagement and co-financing from local/regional budgets?	Effic
	- X	
10	Which results will remain within Ukrainian education system at local, regional, national level if the project will end? What should be done to enhance sustainability of project results?	Sust
	- X	
11	Were Equality and Good Governance, as well as Conflict-Sensitive Programme Management principles integrated into programming and implementation of the DECIDE project? Has it contributed to the achievement of lasting results?	Sust
	- X	
12	What do you consider the most pertinent priorities (or gaps) in the education sector which Switzerland should address in the coming years	Sect. appr.
	- X	
13	To which extent is decentralisation still a/the priority for the education authorities?	Sect. app.
	- X	
14	What do you consider the most relevant approaches or modalities to roll out good practices for future support in the education sector	Sect. appr.
	- X	
15	What should be avoided in any future intervention in the education sector?	Sect. appr.
	- X	
16	Final comment or recommendation for DECIDE Phase 2 or new interventions in the education sector?	All
	- X	

Annex 4: Ukraine info and data

A) General

Figure 5: Development of GDP per capita between 2004 and 2023 (current USD)



Source: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD

B) Education sector financing

Figure 6: GoUA spending on education between 2003 and 2022 in comparisons to Poland and the world (% of GDP)



Source: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.XPD.TOTL.GD.ZS?end=2022&locations=UA-1W-PL&start=2003&view=chart

Table 3: Education sector financing (UAH m)

Source of financing	2019	%	2020	%	2021	%
Regional budgets/Local government	170.50	70.6	180.40	71.3	223.80	72.3
Central government	46.00	19.1	46.90	18.5	56.40	18.2
Households	23.40	9.7	24.20	9.6	27.60	8.9
Private firms and corporations	1.60	0.7	1.40	0.6	1.70	0.5
Total	**241.40**	**100.0**	**252.90**	**100.0**	**309.50**	**100.0**

Source: https://stat.gov.ua/en/explorer?urn=SSSU:DF_SATELLITE_ACCOUNT_OF_EDUCATION(6.0.0)

Annex 5: DECIDE project info and data

Table 4: Overview about DECIDE beneficiaries (2020-2024)

DECIDE benefciaries & users of sector reform products		
1	Reform support as per table below (w/o shelters)	*10,000,000*
2	LGU capacity development	1,155
3	160 webinars and 500 individual advisory support	n.a.
4	Learnig to live in community (923 hromadas)	n.a.
5	Inter-municipal cooperation (24 agreements)	n.a.
6	Shelters	17,000
7	Hromada direct cooperation (teachers, students)	*5,000*
8	Public budgets	31,032
9	Getting stronger together (0.5m students, 95 master trainers, 7,377 tea	542,575
10	Summer clubs (83 hromadas, 30,716 students and 1,749 teachers)	32,465
	Total	**10,629,227**
	Note: it is assumed that 3, and 4 are subsumed under 9.	

Source: DECIDE 2024c

Table 5: Overview about DECIDE education sector reform results (2020-2024)

Name of NUS sub-reform area	Brief description	DECIDE deliverables
1. Decentralisation of Education Governance	Transfer of responsibility for education management and financing to democratically elected local governments and schools	1. **Advisory campaign for mayors, heads of education "Education in new communities from A to Z"** (covered 1,411 hromadas, 98% of all hromadas, online consultations, webinars, Q&A), 2. **Capacity development of LSGs** (in-service training in partnership with NAUCS for 385 LSGs (mayors, dept. mayors, ed. mngt. heads) from 257 hromadas (87% of all hromadas of the regions) of 5 partner regions Odesa, Chernihiv, Poltava, Ivano-Frankivsk, Luhansk) in blend mode on **LMS 'DECIDE'**; 3. **Development of institutional capacity of Association of Amalgamated Territorial Communities** (1,300 consultations, 62 Q&A, over 600 hromadas in professional community; legislation - over 30 draft amendments to legislation); 4. **Development of a 4-level system of strategic planning with a focus on education** (**87 strategic documents** (3 national, 1 regional recovery and development str.; 5 regionals sectoral in partner regions; 9 str. of hromada, 16 str. of education development in partner hromadas, 37 str. of school development, 10 str. of VET school development and **methodologies on strategic planning on regional, local levels, school and VET school**; 5. **System of criteria of education development** (190 indicators for strategic planning on 4 levels of governance, analytical module in AIKOM system (all indicators calc. automatically based on education statistics); methodology of calculation of the indicators for approval of Institute for Educational Analytics and MoES); 6. **Intermunicipal cooperation in education** (53 hromadas of partner regions concluded 22 intermunicipal cooperation agreements, draft amendments to legislation and recommendations to the National Register of the IMC agreements were developed). 7. Portal **Decentralization.ua** (over 5m clicks)
2. Digitalisation of Education Management	Supports all levels of education management in development of data-driven policies and in operative evidence-based decision making	The initiative 'Debureaucratization of Education Management in Ukraine' is aimed at creation of AICEM 2 system, which was developed in 2022-2024 as a new version of the automated informational complex of educational management. It aims to strengthen the GoU in data-driven decision-making by digitalizing educational municipal statistics and creating digital instruments for document flow and analysis of education recovery and development. AICEM covers all levels of public administration in the field of education. In particular, it comprises the analytical module, document flow module, reporting modules, educational profiles of communities, registers of children, school-age children, and the register of pedagogical staff. All the regions of Ukraine and all hromadas are registered in AICEM. It supports all levels of education management in developing data-driven policies and operative evidence-based decision-making. It should reduce reporting and paper document flow by 75%.
3. Upper-secondary School Reform	The reform stipulates that starting in 2027, tenth-graders will be able to choose between academic and vocational studies	Supporting MoES in implementation of the 3rd stage of NUS reform - creation of upper secondary profiled schools in Ukraine: 1. Support of the MoES in the development of the National Strategy for reform implementation (2024 - 2033) that includes demographic prognosis, national sociological research (80,000 respondents), and a basic study of the prerequisites for the implementation of the reform; 2 strategic sessions (incl. SWOT analysis) and 9 expert sessions involved over 400 experts in secondary, VET, non-tertiary education, local self-governance, economy, etc. 2. GIS mapping of the school network in collaboration with hromadas and regions including public discussions in 9 regions with over 560 hromadas (in progress). 3. Presentations of the reform strategy and network of educational institutions to the representatives of the Parliament.

4. VET Reform	The reform involves a large-scale "reboot" of the system, accompanied not only by modernization of infrastructure but also by changes in education standards and teacher training	Support of the MoES for the VET reform to sustain the recovery of infrastructure and local economy: support of the government in forming a network of VET schools through expert assistance in the transfer of property of VET schools from state to communal ownership; a pilot for the creation of **career guidance centers based on 10 vocational schools** to attract students of grades 8-9 to working professions; **pilot introduction of career guidance courses and training of career counselors in 22 schools of 9 communities;** establishment of multi-stakeholder cooperation between authorities regional and local authorities, education and the private sector for the development of the career support system for students.
5. School recovery initiative	Recovery of educational institutions damaged as a result of the war and reconstruction of the school bomb shelters to ensure access to safe education for schoolchildren	School recovery initiative "DECIDE: VIDBUDOVA" was launched in the second half of 2023 in Chernihiv, Poltava, and Odesa regions. To support 17`000 schoolchildren accessing safe education during the air raids, 24 bomb shelters in 20 hromadas were repaired, and educational centers were created. The initiative also encompasses the rehabilitation of school #13 in Chernihiv and the recovery of an inclusive resource center in Boodianka, located in the Kyiv region. The aim is to strengthen LSGs to recover ruined infrastructure and involve schoolchildren in the planning of recovery projects in line with the 'learning by doing' principle.
6. School Nutrition Reform	The reform contributes to the renewal of the school nutrition system to ensure healthy nutrition with a focus on volatile categories of schoolchildren. Was initiated by the first lady of Ukraine	1. The DECIDE Project provides expert and organizational support for policy development, specifically in the development of the School Nutrition Reform Strategy approved by the GoU. 2. The project also provided consultations and training for local communities across the country on HACCP and procurements (5,000 participants, over 100,000 webinar views); 3. Co-development of GoU`s portal ZNAIMO portal (14 video explainers, 2 manuals, 95 articles, etc.) with UNICEF; 4. Development of an Interactive Map of the needs of hromadas in providing school meals (covers 8,000 schools) with the focus on volatile groups of children (AICEM); 5. Promotion of pupils' healthy eating skills through out-of-school activities 'DECIDE Summer Clubs' organized in 2022-2024 for over 30,700 children across more than 83 communities in 19 regions of the country. 6. The HACCP system was successfully implemented in over 200 educational institutions across 16 partner communities. 7. Creation of 3 culinary career guidance hubs for retraining of school chiefs along with ToTs and training of future school chiefs, particularly those who will work in school canteens and kindergartens in the future (331 master-trainers in all the regions of Ukraine) within VET direction. 8. Renovation of the food block of the Chernihiv City School number 13 within the 'DECIDE: Vidbudova' school recovery initiative.
7. Out-of-school Education Reform	Out-of-school services should become accessible and meet the needs of children in both rural and urban areas	Support of the Ministry of Education and Science in the development of a National Concept of Extracurricular Education Development, in particular, conducting a national public opinion survey for 41,000 respondents (2024), developing the analytical part of the concept (2024), conducting a sociological study on the needs of the population in extracurricular education services of both the communal and private sectors (in progress)

8. Strengthening of MoES to provide e-services and raise awareness of participants of educational process during the war	Support for the stable operation of the information and educational resources of the Ministry of Education and Science provides access to information for millions of participants of the educational process during the war	Strengthening of the MoES to provide information to citizens regarding the educational process in a safe way during the war: 1. Chatbot for students, parents, teachers, heads of education, evacuated citizens "Educational bot" - ***EducationUaBot*** (56 thousand users); 2. The webpage https://emergency.mon.gov.ua/ in English about the education system in Ukraine for the international educational community, in particular for the ministries of education, school directors and teachers of the countries (4,000 users), 3. The webpage of the Ministry of Education https://mon.gov.ua/ (2024 - 500 thousand users); 4. VET schools portal - https://proftech.mon.gov.ua/ (20 thousand users in 2024); 5. Platform of the National Multi-Subject Test (NMT) https://testportal.gov.ua/ (in 2022-2024: 794,000 students); 6. Development of the LMS for the All-Ukrainian online school portal (https://lms.e-school.net.ua/) in partnership with the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Information, the NGO "Osvitoria", UIRO during the war became the main resource for education of students in Ukraine and abroad (3.5 million users).

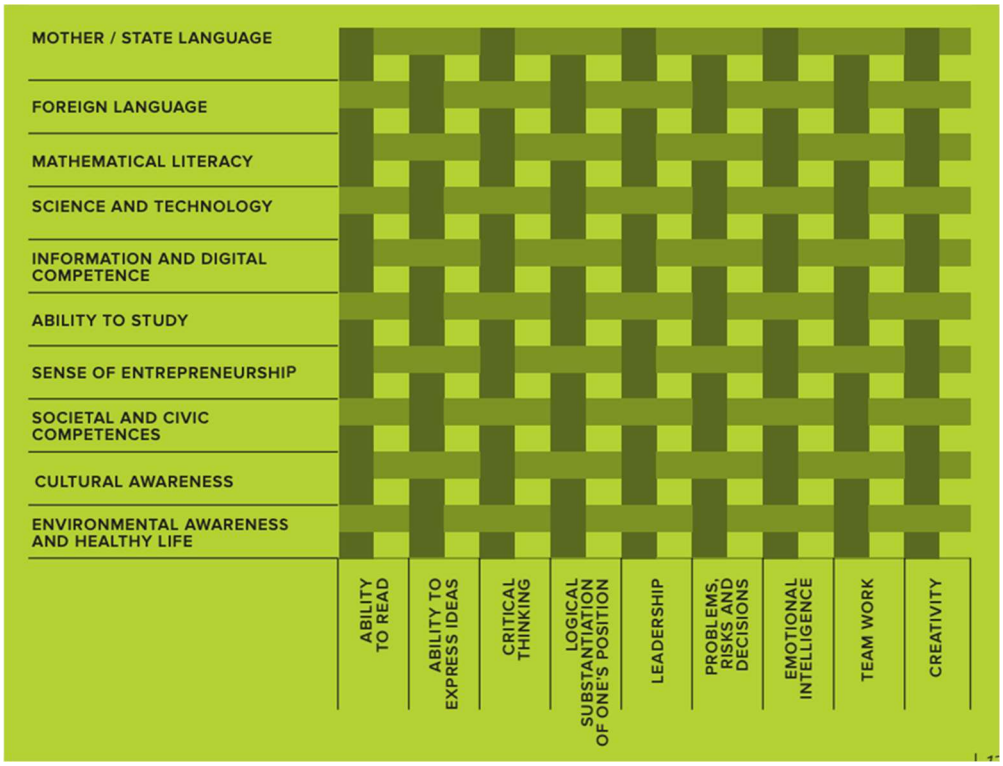
Source: DECIDE 2024c

Note: Adding up all the beneficiaries and users the number is in the range of 10m persons.

Annex 6: Education sector and donor supported projects

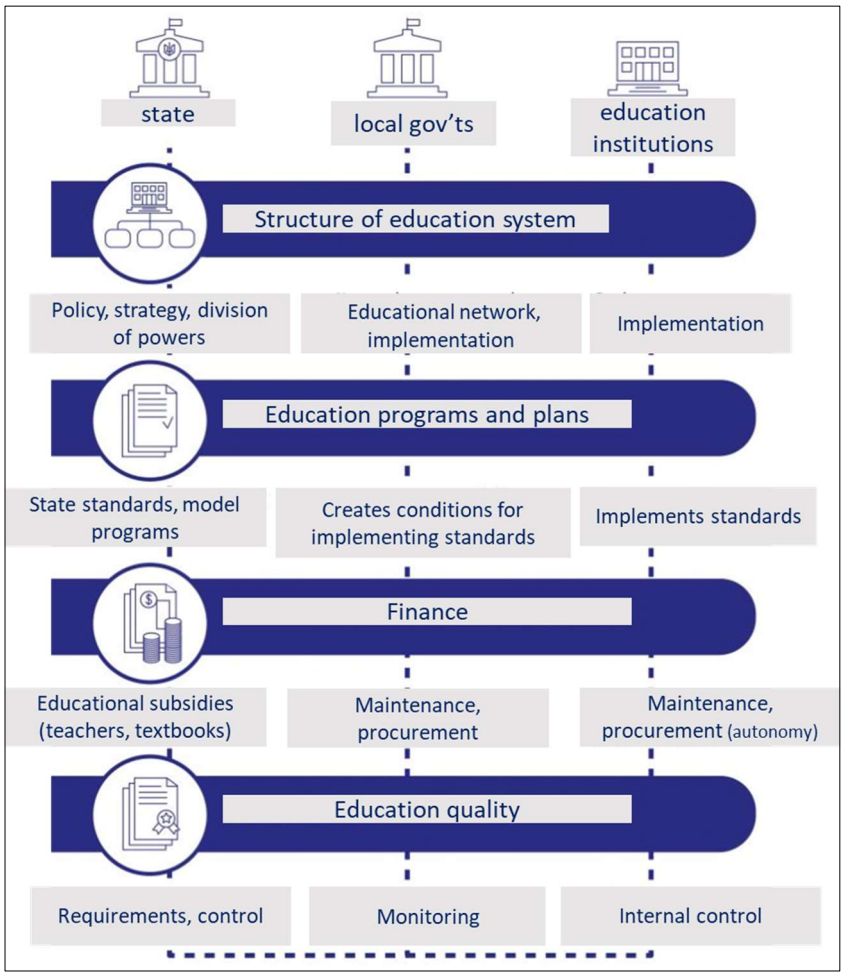
A) NUS and education statistics

Figure 7: Pupil development framework for NUS. Key competencies and cross-cutting skills



Source: MoES, 2016

Figure 8: Governance bodies in the field of education



Source: Law on Education 2017

Table 6: Education sector statistics 2022/2023 academic year

PRESCHOOL EDUCATION (March 2023)

Indicators	Values
Number of functioning preschool education institutions (PEIs), *units*:	**10 302**
• Providing usual mode of education (full-time), *units*	5 785 (56,1%)
• Providing distance education, *units*	2 963 (28,8%)
• Providing blended education, *units*	1 554 (15,1%)
Number of destroyed PEIs, *units*	116
Number of children, *persons*	**739 722**
Share of preschool children enrolled in PEIs, *%*	79,0
Number of pedagogical staff in PEIs, *persons*	**102 832**

GENERAL SECONDARY EDUCATION (March 2023)

Indicators	Values
Number of functioning general secondary education institutions (GSEIs), *units:*	**12 929**
• Providing usual mode of education (full-time), *units*	4 475 (34,6%)
• Providing distance education, *units*	3 975 (30,7%)
• Providing blended education, *units*	4 479 (34,7%)
Number of destroyed GSEIs, *units*	226
Number of hub schools, *units*	1 279
Number of branches of hub schools, *units*	1 597
Number of private GSEIs, *units*	406
Number of pupils, *persons*	**3 985 866**
Including first-graders	324 961
Pupils of 11th (12th) grades	225 967
Number of pupils enrolled in hub schools, *persons*	584 881
Number of pupils who can be transported to GSEIs, *persons*	256 915
Total number of pupils in GSEIs provided with hot meals, *persons*	1 098 607
Number of GSEIs with functioning (working) canteens, *units*	9 037
Number of teachers, *persons*	**387 988**

OUT-OF-SCHOOL EDUCATION (March 2023)

Indicators	Values
Number of functioning out-of-school education institutions (OSEIs), *units*	**1346**
• Providing usual mode of education (full-time), *units*	481 (35,7%)
• Providing distance education, *units*	328 (24,4%)
• Providing blended education, *units*	537 (39,9%)
Number of destroyed OSEIs, *units*	23
Number of pupils, *persons*	**1 011 403**
Number of teaching staff, *persons*	**20 421**

INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT (March 2023)

Indicators	Values
Number of GSEIs with inclusive education, *units*	**7 012**
Number of inclusive classes, *units*	25 567
Number of pupils in inclusive classes of GSEIs, *persons*	**34 643**
Number of teacher assistants, *persons*	**22 685**
Number of inclusive resource centers, *units*	676

DIGITAL EDUCATION (March 2023)

Indicators	Values
GSEIs with optical internet connection, *units*	8 503
Connection of GSEIs to the e-journal, *%*	54,3
Connection of regional and local education departments to e-reporting, *%*	100,0
Users of the All-Ukrainian Online School, *persons*	526 000

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (January 2023)

Indicators	Values
Number of functioning vocational education and training (VET) institutions, *units*:	**670**
• Providing usual mode of education (full-time), *units*	170
• Providing distance education, *units*	211
• Providing blended education, *units*	289
Number of destroyed VET institutions, *units*	22
Number of students, *persons*	**230 474**
Coverage of students with SEN, *persons*	3 855
Orphans and children deprived of parental care, persons with disabilities, *persons*	12 984
Number of pedagogical staff involved in the educational process, *persons*	**30 201**

PROFESSIONAL NON-TERTIARY EDUCATION (December 2022)

Indicators	Values
Total number of professional non-tertiary education institution (PNTE), *units*	**740**
Including:	
Independent legal entities, *units*	348
In the structure of higher education institutions, *units*	392
of which are subordinated to the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, units	138
Number of destroyed **PNTE** institutions, *units*	15
Number of students in the PNTE, *persons*	**331 488**
By educational and professional degree and degrees of higher education, *persons:*	-
• Professional junior bachelor	307 531
• Junior specialist (educational qualification level)	20 819
• Junior bachelor	11
• Bachelor	3 127
Total number of scientific, scientific-pedagogical and pedagogical staff of legal entities, *persons*	**25 834**
of them in institutions of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, persons	9 599

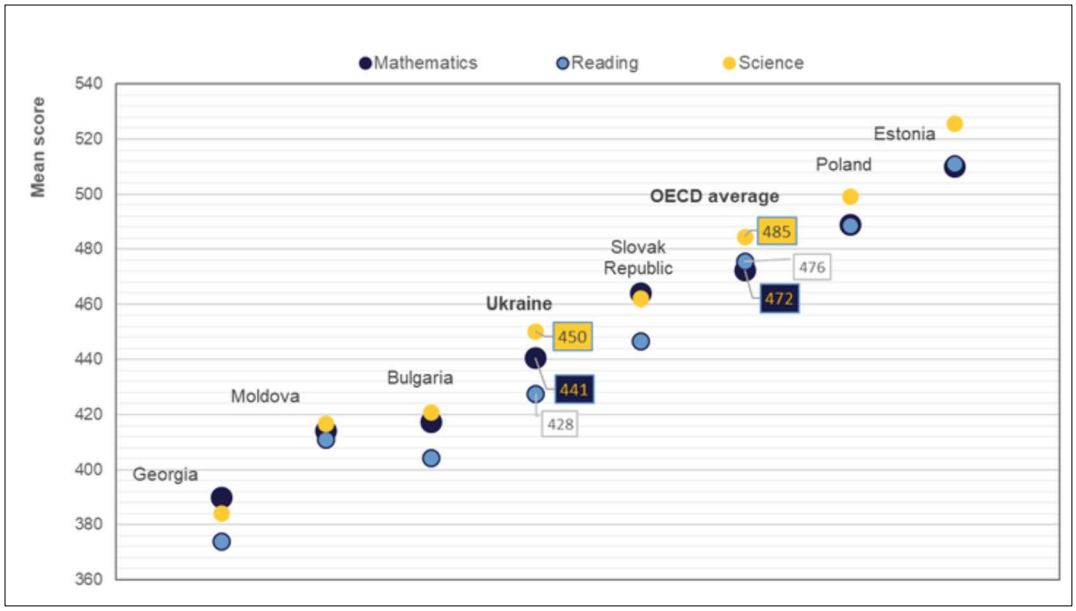
HIGHER EDUCATION (December 2022)

Indicators	Values
Number of higher education institutions (HEIs): universities, academies, institutes, *units*	**332**
• State-owned	191
of which are subordinated to the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, units	133
• Communal	25
• Private	116
Separate structural subdivisions (institutes, academies, colleges) and colleges within the structure of the HEI, *units*	550
Number of destroyed HEIs, *units*	8
Total number of applicants (HEIs, separate structural subdivisions), *persons*	**1 112 965**
of which in the institutions of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, persons	869 365
• Junior specialist (educational qualification level)	31 852
• Junior bachelor	2 880
• Bachelor	727 848
• Specialist	778
• Master	316 623
• Doctor of Philosophy	32 859
• Doctor of Arts	125
Total number of scientific, scientific and pedagogical, and pedagogical staff of HEIs-legal entities, *persons*	**161 385**
of them in institutions of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, persons	114 045

Source: https://iea.gov.ua/en/main-activities/scientific-and-analytics-activities/main-educational-statistic/

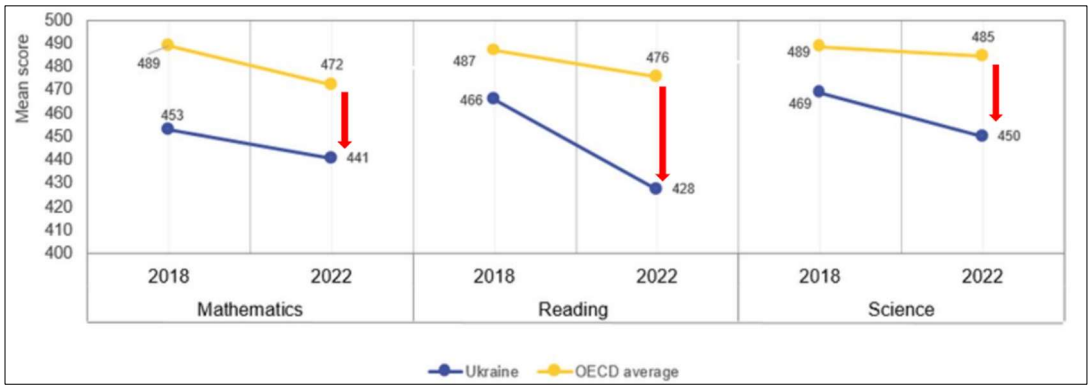
B) PISA results

Figure 9: PISA results Ukraine 2022



Source: OECD, 2022

Figure 10: Trend in PISA results 2018 to 2022 for Ukraine



Source: OECD, 2022

C) VET schools

Table 7: VET sector responsiveness to population decrease in Ukraine

Year	Number of the population of Ukraine	Number of VET students	Number of VET schools
2010	45,778,500	416,469	940
2015	42,928,900	304,113	798
2016	42,760,500	285,820	787
2017	42,584,500	269,359	756
2018	42,386,403	254,991	736
2019	42,153,201	245,775	723
2020	41,902,416	246,855	711
2021	41,588,354	250,336	694
2022	41,167,336	up to the results of the enrolment campaign 2022-2023	approx. 634 as of October 03, 2022

Source: Leu-Severynenko (2022)

D) Overview on selected Swiss and other donor education/decentralisation projects in 2024

Table 8: Overview about current Swiss projects in education in Ukraine

Project name and duration (Phase)	Donor	Implementer	Objectives	Approaches
DECIDE Phase 1 (1/2020-5/2024)	SDC	DOCCU NGO	Goal: Citizens of amalgamated territorial communities contribute to and benefit equally from democratic governance and high-quality education Outcomes: (1) National, regional and local authorities effectively implement sectoral decentralization with a focus on deregulated and digitalized databased education governance. Outcome 2: Schoolboys/girls and their parents benefit from inclusive democratic school governance and active civic engagement in amalgamated territorial communities.	See Chapter 3 of DECIDE evaluation report for details
DECIDE Phase 2 (6-2025-5/2030)	SDC	DOCCU	Not yet defined	
EduP (website) Phase 3 (7/2023-6/2027)	SDC	Swisscontact	VET schools and businesses will collaborate to create innovative programs, including modular courses for adults and recognition of prior learning via qualification centers. Both occupational and educational standards will be updated.	The third phase of EdUP project is extended in both the number of the schools (29 instead of 25) and number of occupations (6 instead of 1)
EGAP (website) (2015-2023, extended)	SDC	East Europe Foundation	Our objective is to improve the quality of life of Ukrainians through implementing convenient and transparent governance services. To ensure that citizens do not waste time on bureaucracy and collecting documents. To ensure public services are easily accessible everywhere: from the capital to remote mountain villages. To create all preconditions in society that residents of any region can easily influence life in their communities through initiating projects and addressing local authorities. To make communication with the government user friendly everywhere, regardless of the place where you live.	.

Table 9: Overview about current major education projects in Ukraine

Project name and duration (Phase)	Donor	Implementer / budget	Objectives	Approaches
LEARN 2024-2027	World Bank	USD 415m	To support the education system in Ukraine: improving the conditions for teaching and learning, implemented through subventions from the State Budget to local budgets; ensuring that students, teachers and school staff have access to safe conditions for face-to-face teaching and learning. LEARN will support teaching and learning conditions* established in three strategic goals: Strategic Goal 2.1: School students learn in a safe, modern, and inclusive educational environment. I Strategic Goal 2.2: School students receive quality education following the NUS principles. Strategic Goal 2.4: Pedagogical teams of education institutions work based on partnership principles and implement the NUS principles. *Role of Partners in Program Implementation: • Government of Finland - Support on NUS Pilot for 10-12 grades • UNICEF United Nations - Supporting learning recovery programs aligned to NUS • UNESCO United Nations - Contributing to teacher training programs development • OECD - Design of the Upper secondary reform • Republic of Korea - Support the design of educational materials	All of Ukraine On NUS reform, selected interventions on: (i) improving teaching and learning conditions and (ii) strengthening management capacity of the education system. Results Area 1: (a) Ensuring safe, energy-efficient shelters and low-emission school transportation; (b) Providing teacher and manager training on NUS curriculum; (c) Delivering updated, competency-based, student-centered textbooks and materials nationwide; (c) The provision of updated textbooks and teaching materials aligned with NUS principles of competency-based and student-centered education. Results Area 2: Focus on improving the government's capacity to distribute resources efficiently, through changes in the regulations, budget allocations, and management procedures applied in the subventions to the regions. Support the school network optimization efforts in the context of the declining demographic trends. i) Data-driven of selection of schools and municipalities to be supported by the state budget; (ii) Prioritization of vulnerable groups and/or high-need areas, for example students lacking transportation to school, and students with disabilities; (iii) Improved systems for planning, targeting, and monitoring subventions.
U-LEAD with Europe 2016-2024 Next phase starts in 2025	European Union and its member states Germany,	GIZ, EUR 217m	To strengthen the capacities of key actors and stakeholders at national, regional and local levels in order to enhance local self-government in municipalities, also during the times of war and recovery.	24 Regional Offices and works with municipalities all over Ukraine. Covers 13 thematic areas, including education. Political and legal consultations to strengthen the capacity of key actors at the national and local levels

	Poland, Denmark and Slovenia			Trainings, consultations and other capacity building activities covering important and relevant topics of their work in the conditions of war and post-war recovery. Supports local governments in the planning, coordination and implementation of reconstruction activities, facilitates cooperation between the EU and Ukrainian municipalities, supports the implementation of municipal projects, digital transformation at the local level, and improves access to education at the local level through schools' reconstruction and creation of the digital learning centres. 100 municipalities located in war-affected regions of Ukraine that have sustained severe damage and destruction will receive support in repair and small-scale reconstruction.
USAID DOBRE 2016-2025	USA	USD 107m	To help the TCs govern themselves effectively, openly, and accountably; to promote active and effective participation of citizens in decision-making and community affairs.	Work with 60 TCs in ten oblasts of Ukraine: Dnipropetrovsk; Chernihiv; Kharkiv; Zaporizhzhia; Kherson; Kirovohrad; Mykolayiv; Ternopil; Ivano-Frankivsk; and Chernivtsi. Since 2022 – aims to help the TCs recover from the war and resume their development; strategic planning; financial management; service delivery; local economic development; crisis management; modern communications; civic engagement; and capacity building and will be augmented with material assistance.
USAID HOVERLA 2021-2027	USA	USD 150m	To progress and strengthen decentralization reform by supporting local governance institutions to become more self-reliant, accountable to citizens, and able to provide services effectively. Ensure Ukraine's local self-governance system is increasingly institutionalized and effective. Facilitate more self-reliant subnational governance. Create mechanisms to allow citizens to play an increasingly influential role in local governance.	National level: Presidency, Cabinet of Ministers, Ministry of Communities, Territories and Infrastructure Development, Ministry of Digital Transformation, Verkhovna Rada (Parliament) Regional level: Oblast Administrations, Rayon Administrations, Municipality Councils Other Institutions: National Institute for Ukrainian Civil Service, Universities, State Emergency Service, Local Government Associations All regions.
UCORD 2022-2026	Switzerland (SDC)	CHF 16,9m	To transform the governance structures and building the capacity of Ukrainian regional development agencies, so that they can lead and facilitate recovery, identify priorities, and build partnerships to design and deliver projects enabling regions to reach their potential.	Component 1 embeds the regional policy development in Ukraine through supporting and strengthening the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) in pilot oblasts Component 2 seeks to improve public services delivery in WASAW (water supply, sanitation, and waste management) sector with a focus on environment Component 3 aims at constructing social cohesion through culture, dialogue and creative industries Operates in Khmelnytskyi, Sumy, Ternopil, and Vinnytsia oblasts

POLARIS 2024-2028	Sweden (Sida)	SEK 250m	Addressing the needs of the multilevel governance system while simultaneously enhancing the capacity of hromadas to deliver public services and take an active role in the recovery and reconstruction processes, in line with EU accession requirements.	Five thematic areas: **education**, fiscal decentralisation and budgeting, administrative services, local authority-led recovery, and international municipal cooperation. All regions.
SURGE 2019-2024	Canada	NA	To assist in rebuilding Ukrainian communities by implementing the best economic, social, and inclusive practices. To build community capacity and encourage civil society to be directly involved in the recovery process, analyze and prioritize key needs, and support strategic planning and project management	Strategic management and planning. Expert and methodological assistance in project preparation and proposals. Development of social services. Support in creating recovery and growth plans. Establishment of partnerships and coordination with international organizations. Expert support in attracting external investments. Communication support. Data collection and analysis. Expert support in recovery project implementation. Implementation of sustainable development principles. Legal support for recovery processes. Projects: Community-Led Inclusive Recovery. Strategic Planning & Digital Governance. Administrative Services. ANP-NATO. Border Infrastructure Development. Public Investment Governance. EHealth. Child Protection. Criminal Justice. Retaining Access to School Education. Food Security. Prevention of Human Trafficking. Crisis Communications. Humanitarian Assistance Governance

Note: This is an extract from the MoES project list of around education projects (MoES, 2024b)

Table 10: Overview about current VET projects in Ukraine

Project name and website	Donor	Implementer / budget	Objectives	Approaches
EU4Skills "Better Skills for Modern Ukraine" (website)	EU, Germany, Finland, Poland and Estonia	GIZ (n.a)	To support the establishment of a modernized VET system contributing to sustainable and inclusive socio-economic development. It allows a better economic governance, focusses on increased diversification and higher labour productivity. Improving the VET system will be achieved i.a. through the effective implementation of a reform action plan, an optimized VET network, improved attractiveness and quality of VET for both, male and female learners, and an increased relevance to the labour market.	Nine VET Centres of Excellence in nine oblasts of Ukraine (Chernihiv, Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk, Ivano-Frankivsk, City of Kyiv, Odesa, Ternopil, Volyn and Zakarpattia)
EIB (complements the EU4skills)	EIB	MoES (EUR 58m loan)	See above	See above
Skills4Recovery (website)	EC, BMZ, Poland, Estonia,	GIZ (EUR 14m)	The Overall Objective of the Action is to support Ukraine in its EU membership path and implementation of the AA/DCFTA while strengthening its resilience and capacity to respond to the impacts generated by Russia's war of aggression. The Specific Objective (outcome) of the Action is "Qualified workforce is available for the recovery of the Ukrainian economy."	Strengthening capacities of VET providers' to implement labor market-aligned curricula during Ukraine's recovery have been enhanced. Ensuring that VET providers offer fast-track and longer-term vocational training aligned with recovery needs. Helping VET providers and employment institutions develop tools to support career changes for target groups. Developing strategic vocational training concepts tailored to recovery needs have been refined. Forming scalableapproaches for fective workforce training concepts have been communicated for replication.
Ukraine National Identity Through Youth (UNITY) (website)	USA, USAID	IREX	Expand economic opportunities for the youth (entrepreneurship and career preparedness for the youth aged 10-35)	All of Ukraine. Installing 20 modular Transitional Learning Centers (TLCs) in communities most devastated by the war. Media literacy training in the program digital learning centers and transitional learning centers delivered. Workshops and informational campaigns on mine safety for teachers are delivered. Roadmaps to restore access to education in communities delivered. After-

				school catch-up programs are developed and implemented. Up to 250 vulnerable children (9th and 11th grades) are supported with scholarship programs. Digital training for teachers are delivered. MHPSS training to assist educators help students are delivered. Digital solutions for formal and non-formal learning opportunities are developed and delivered.
"Mriemo ta Diemo" (website)	USA, USAID	IREX	Youth have improved access to safe and relevant formal and non-formal learning opportunities.	Multicomponent project, School education, VET. To Install 20 modular Transitional Learning Centers (TLCs) in war-affected communities. Deliver media literacy training in digital learning centers and TLCs. Conduct workshops and campaigns on mine safety for teachers. Implement roadmaps to restore education access. Develop and launch after-school catch-up programs. Provide scholarships to up to 250 vulnerable 9th and 11th-grade students. Offer digital training for teachers. Deliver MHPSS training to help educators support students. Create and implement digital solutions for formal and non-formal learning opportunities.
Vocational training in the Eastern Partnership (website)	Germany	KfW via USIF	The goal of the project is to offer a job market-relevant and high-quality vocational education through the Centres of Excellence and to improve the employability of graduates. Objectives: modernisation of existing Ukrainian VET schools into Centres of Excellence including rehabilitation of the infrastructure procurement of new equipment and machines, establishment and expansion of cooperation with employers and the strengthening of the VET image.	Transformation of VET schools into Centres of Excellence in line with ongoing institutional reforms and the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. The centres will be established through new construction or substantial reconstruction and modernisation of existing VET schools, including on-campus dormitories. The project includes establishing one VET Centre of Excellence in 9 administrative regions (oblasts) of Ukraine.
Support of New Ukrainian School and VET reforms (website)	ECW	KSE/FCA	Learning outcomes are improved through ensuring equal access to quality education under New Ukrainian School and VET reforms for war-affected communities	The project aimed to ensure access to learning content, including digital one, based on newly established educational programs and standards; teacher's professional development; learning materials and kits to support learning activities; research and quality data collection to ensure monitoring, analysis and data-driven policy-making

Source: MoES, Excel Sheet as per September 2024

E) NGOs active in the education sector

Table 11: Overview about most important NGOs active in the education sector

Organisation	Head	Site	Activities
Osvitoria	Zoya Lytvyn	https://osvitoria.org/	Teacher training Global Teacher Prize Work with boarding schools Preparation for admission Reconstruction
EdCamp	Olexander Elkin	https://www.edcamp.ua/	SEN Change school in 7 months Teacher training
Teach for Ukraine	Oxana Matyash	https://teachforukraine.org/	Teach for Ukraine Educational soup and making up for educational losses in general
Re:Osvita	Liliya Hrynevych	https://reosvita.org/	Everything around NUS Research
KMBS	Olexander Savruk	https://kmbs.ua/ua/	Education of educational managers
Spivdiya	Iryna Tuliakova	https://spivdiia.org.ua/#projects	Implementation of non-formal education, STEM
See by Heart	Olesya Yaskevytch	https://www.facebook.com/bachytysercem/	Inclusion: work with children, teachers, parents
Dzerelo	Myroslazh Nikolaev, Zenya Kushpeta, Oksana Kunanets-Svarnyk	https://dzherelocentre.org.ua/	Educational rehabilitation center for children with disabilities
Me and my school	Iryna Minkovska	https://meandmyschool.ua/	Teacher training, activities for children
Parental control	Zoya Zvyniatkivska	https://www.facebook.com/batkivskycontrol?locale=ru_RU	Community of active parents

Smart Education	Galina Tytysh	https://smart-osvita.org/	Support of NUS, education advocacy
Educational House of Human Rights in Chernihiv	Alexander Kozorog	https://ehrh.org/	Protection of human rights through education
Zaporuka	Natalia Onipko	https://zaporuka.org.ua/pro-nas/	Support for families with children with cancer
Children to Children Fund	Natalia Kiselyova	https://kids2kids-fund.com/uk/	Assistance to children of vulnerable categories
Education for Succes	Ivan Savytskyi	https://www.edukraine.org.ua/	Social entrepreneurship in school
Space of Dignity	Olena Gantsyak-Kaskiv, Karl Plesner	https://dignityspace.org/about/	Establishing dialogues between the conflicting parties in order to restore mutual understanding and create prerequisites for joint development
Institute of Peace and Understanding	Horova Olena	https://imip.org.ua	Building trust and involving participants in the process of discussion, decision-making or conflict resolution
Ukrainian Academy of Leadership	Roman Tychkivskyi	https://ual.ua	A platform of personal and social development for young people based on values
School of Superheroes	Evgenia Smirnova	https://smallheartwithart.org/ua/about_school/	Network of schools in hospitals
Radooga	Oleksii Vasylevskyi	https://www.radooga.com	MHPSS, children affected by war process painful experiences
Solidarity Fund PL	Pavel Kost, Adam Sauer	https://solidarityfund.org.ua	VET

Source: Derived from a list prepared for the Education Cluster (2023)

Annex 7: Fotos from field visits



Agricultural VET school in Reshitilivska (Poltava Oblast): installation of a career orientation hub



Mini-project developed by students under the “Public Budget for Kids’ Dreams” activity as part of the new shelter in Tereshky Lyceum, Poltava Oblast.



Lab space in the renovated shelter in Tereshky Lyceum, Poltava Oblast



Local and donor version of the Poltava education strategy



Student group in the shelter in Chernihiv

Annex 8: Selected documents and websites

DECIDE project documents

DECIDE (2024a): Annual Monitoring Reports to the partner Ministries and partners: Ministry of Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine and Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, as well as other state partners and the five Oblast authorities

DECIDE (2024b): Annual reports 2020-2024, incl. financial statements

DECIDE (2024c): Excel file with the project activity mapping

DECIDE (2024d): DECIDE Organisational Chart

DECIDE (2024e): Lists of short-term and long-term experts

DECIDE (2024f): Detailed financial statement, Annex 2 of the Annual Report 2023

DECIDE (2024g): Logframe report, Annex 4 of the Annual Report 2023

DECIDE (2023a): Additional Credit 3 (09.11.23)

DECIDE (2023b): revised Logframe

DECIDE (2023c): Additional Credit 2 (16.05.23)

DECIDE (2023d): revised logframe

DECIDE (2023e): DECIDE: VET (power point presentation)

DECIDE (2022a): Additional Credit 1 (28.11.22)

DECIDE (2020): Project Document, Version 10.01.20, modified in 2024

DECIDE (2019a): Entry Proposal

DECIDE (2019b): Logframe

DECIDE related websites (incl. partners)

AIKOM modules (2024): website

DOCCU NGO (2024): website

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Management response to the
Evaluation of the Swiss-Ukrainian Project "Decentralization for Improved Democratic Education" (DECIDE) Phase 1, including a Rapid Education Sector Appraisal

Management Response

The Management Response (MR) states the position of the SDC on the recommendations of the **Evaluation of the Swiss-Ukrainian Project "Decentralization for Improved Democratic Education" (DECIDE) Phase 1,** while the findings of the rapid education sector appraisal have been taken notice of as an important background information for a future planning of potential interventions in the education sector. The MR provides a solid basis for a strategic decision-making and planning of a consecutive phase of DECIDE. The relevant governmental stakeholders have been consulted to ensure that the key findings and recommendations are properly contextualized and aligned with the key reform priorities.

Assessment of the evaluation

The mandate was implemented by a team of four external experts in accordance with international standards. The tasks were attributed among the team as follows: Dieter Zürcher, team leader and evaluation methodology expert, and Iryna Kravchuk, expert in evaluation and monitoring, oversaw the implementation of the DECIDE project evaluation. Karen Roberts, an education policy expert, led the strategic review. Alevtyna Sedochenko, an education expert from Ukraine, contributed substantially as a resource person for education reform and sector analysis, working under the direction of the team leader. All team members contributed to interviews and Focus Group Discussions for the project evaluation and sector appraisal, working collaboratively and interchangeably during the mission in Ukraine. Martina Ramming, SDC Senior Education Policy Advisor, joined the mission to Ukraine as a peer reviewer. The evaluation process was professionally managed and included close involvement of the SDC's representatives at the Embassy of Switzerland in Ukraine.

The main objectives of the evaluation – to assess the project Phase 1 based on the OECD-DAC criteria with a focus on efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability, and to provide recommendations for Phase 2 – have been met by the evaluators. The SDC appreciates the comprehensiveness of the evaluation report and the sound analysis of key elements of the SDC's performance within the DECIDE project.

The report's analysis and resulting recommendations are considered to be useful for strengthening the strategic orientation of the planned Phase 2 of DECIDE.

Main findings

The SDC highly values the presented findings on a significant contribution of the DECIDE project to the decentralization in the education governance sector. The evaluation highlights the project's unique multi-level approach that allowed achieving systemic reforms, comprehensive capacity building, and community engagement while addressing urgent war-related needs. The recommendations supported by rich collected evidence represent an important basis for strategic reflections on the future thematic scope, positioning and intervention logic of DECIDE Phase 2. The findings and recommendations of the external evaluation have

also been used for in-depth consultations on the key parameters of Phase 2 with the Government of Ukraine and the project implementing partners.

Most of the recommendations are supported by SDC and will be duly followed-up either in full or in a more nuanced manner to consider the volatile context, significant inter- and intra-regional development disproportions, and strategic priorities of the Government of Ukraine.

In particular the recommendation on sharpening the thematic focus of support, prioritizing interventions that leverage the DECIDE's unique strengths and scaling up the DECIDE approaches to additional hromadas and oblasts will be reflected in the future project phase design. The provision of hardware will remain an important element of the intervention strategy though the choice of interventions will be strictly informed by the strategic planning, which is a government priority within the public investment management policy. Taking into account that the subsequent phase will be a final one, a serious attention will be drawn to the development of the exit strategy to ensure a long-term sustainability beyond the project duration. Using the instrument of an external Partner Risk Assessment, the recommendations on strengthening effective management structures of the DOCCU NGO and its practices of deployment of experts will be followed-up.

Out of the nine recommendations, five are 'fully agreed' (green), three are 'partially agreed' (orange) and one is not agreed ('disagree' - red) – see table below. The SDC agrees to seize this opportunity to improve its results by taking specific measures in line with the recommendation.

1.	Continue with a Phase 2 of DECIDE as it provides systemic support to the education reforms, supports both capacity development and provision of equipment and refurbishment of schools, but sharpen the thematic focus of support	
2.	Prioritize interventions that leverage DECIDE's unique strengths in decentralization in education, dealing with cross-cutting issues, and full policy cycle capacity at central, regional, and local levels	
3.	Scale up the pilot experiences conducted in the targeted hromadas and oblasts	
4.	Develop shared leadership (within DOCCU) based on a strategic vision and business model to ensure that an effective management structure enhances DOCCU's resilience	
5.	Elaborate a concept for the deployment of experts and review their profile	
6.	The provision of hardware (shelter refurbishment if still needed in future, and equipment) should remain part of DECIDE portfolio	
7.	Develop exit strategies that enable authorities and institutions to continue independently the tools and processes initiated by DECIDE, ensuring long-term sustainability	
8.	Give more space for local ownership and branding in product and process development	
9.	Consider streamlining the reporting into one set of documents	
Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree

Overview of recommendations, management response and measures

Recommendation 1		
Continue with a Phase 2 of DECIDE as it provides systemic support to the education reforms, supports both capacity development and provision of equipment and refurbishment of schools, but sharpen the thematic focus of support: DECIDE has delivered very good value for money through its systemic and adaptive support the education reform and its sub-themes. The scope of project activities, however, lack focus and address too many themes. The value added in the VET sector was assessed as interesting but fragmentary and potentially insufficient time to pilot and analyse the lessons learned. Thus, VET activities are recommended to be evaluated and possibly phased out in a next phase of DECIDE.		
Management response		
Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree
The evaluation report brings valuable evidence on the effective systemic support to the education governance reforms delivered by DECIDE. Most of the activities implemented in Phase 1 will be continued and scaled up during Phase 2, which is also a request by the Government of Ukraine. The recommendation on sharpening the focus of the project is well received, though a more nuanced and phased approach will be taken to ensure that the already made investments (in terms of expertise and resources) are not lost. In particular: - The Recovery component (recovery of schools and school shelters) will be replaced with a strategy-driven recovery and modernization of the education facilities in line with the strategic reform priorities and community needs. The overall amount for recovery will be decreased. - The school nutrition reform will be supported primarily with policy and strategic planning advice by in-house project experts, while targeted hardware investments in communities will be phased out. It does not however exclude, that punctual projects in support of this reform may be implemented if they fall under the criteria of strategy-driven and needs-based projects as stated above. - The VET hardware interventions (career guidance hubs in VET schools) will be discontinued; however, the existing 10 pilots will be completed and phased out during 12-18 months while ensuring that all lessons learnt are properly documented and disseminated to the Ministry and other stakeholders. - Upon the request of the Government, DECIDE will continue supporting the legal process of transfer of VET schools from the state ownership to the regional or local ownership, and will pursue with the development of the system of professional orientation for schoolchildren (coordinated at the local and regional levels), complementing the approach of the citizenship education interventions successfully implemented in Phase 1. These interventions respond to important needs and complement engagements by other partners.		

Measures	Responsibility	Timing
a) The component on recovery of schools and school shelters will be finalized and the approach of the empowerment and engagement of communities (including schoolchildren and their parents) into the recovery and reconstruction will be duly documented and broadly disseminated.	DECIDE	during 2025

b) The current piloting of the career guidance hubs in VET schools will be consolidated within 12-18 months to ensure proper documentation of the model, collection of lessons-learned and dissemination of the recommendations to key stakeholders. The findings can be potentially integrated into a new TVET intervention of SDC after 2026.	DECIDE SDC	during 2025-mid 2026
c) The ProDoc of Phase 2 will reflect a more sharpened thematic focus, emphasizing the decentralized governance in the education sector.	DECIDE in coordination with SDC	April-May 2025

Recommendation 2		
Prioritize interventions that leverage DECIDE's unique strengths in decentralization in education, dealing with cross-cutting issues, and full policy cycle capacity at central, regional, and local levels: Emphasise decentralised education management (strategy development and implementation, making councils work, support in school network transformation and digitalisation). This can also include democratic governance at school level (participatory budgeting, mini-grants, and summer camps). De-emphasize on areas where plenty of donor funding appears to be available, and the value added by Switzerland seems less obvious or the concepts are uncertain (e.g., school nutrition reform, school reconstruction, career orientation hubs (where an overall concept is felt missing and is under elaboration by the MoES) but a good mix between capacity development and infrastructure/equipment support is helpful.		
Management response		
Fully agree	**Partially agree**	Disagree
The point of prioritization of activities that leverage the unique strength of DECIDE, i.e. convergence of expertise in key reform streams (decentralization, local self-government reform and education governance reform), is valid and will be reflected in Phase 2. As stated above (see Recommendation 1), de-emphasizing of certain thematic areas will be managed in a nuanced and phased manner, to ensure that the invested resources are not lost and the strategic priorities of the Ministry of Education and Science are supported.		
Measures	Responsibility	Timing
see measures to Recommendation 1		

Recommendation 3		
Scale up the pilot experiences conducted in the targeted hromadas and oblasts: Relevant and useful pilots have been conducted in the 20 hromadas of the five oblasts. Some of these have yet to be promoted or applied in the other hromadas in the pilot regions or in other oblasts not yet covered (e.g., school councils, “Public Budget for Kids’ Dreams”). While noticeable efforts were made by DECIDE to scale up the pilots through webinars and trainings at national level it was mentioned in the field that the disparities within oblasts might increase if the project puts a focus only to selected hromadas and schools.		
Management response		
Fully agree	Partially agree	**Disagree**
The point on the need to extend the number of partner hromadas and oblasts is valid and will be reflected in Phase 2. It is planned to extend the project geography; thus, besides		

the **current five partner oblasts** (Odesa, Ivano-Frankivsk, Poltava, Luhansk and Chernihiv), the project will expand its activities **to four additional oblasts**. New pilot oblasts will be selected based on the following criteria: 1) geographic balance of Swiss interventions; 2) commitment of regional authorities to advance decentralized education governance reforms; and 3) a significant number of IDPs. In the eight partner oblasts, direct interventions are planned in **48 newly selected partner hromadas**. In Lugansk oblast, which is currently under occupation, the project will continue to operate at the level of expert support. The current partner hromadas will remain in the focus of the project and will serve as champions and role models for the dissemination of DECIDE tools and approaches to neighbouring hromadas in respective oblasts.		
Measures	Responsibility	Timing
a) elaboration and approval of the selection process for new partner oblasts	DECIDE in coordination with SDC	2025
b) organization of a competitive selection process for new pilot hromadas in the partner oblasts	DECIDE	2025

Recommendation 4		
Develop shared leadership (within DOCCU) based on a strategic vision and business model to ensure that an effective management structure enhances DOCCU's resilience: The DOCCU NGO should establish a clear strategy for the support to the education sector stakeholders and not embark ad-hoc on activities or new priorities that might be launched by the MoES or other partners. The strategy or business plan should also include strengthening of DOCCU's organisational management (allocation of responsibilities in the team) and its M&E system. An independent organisational assessment might allow to better balance the very high workloads and streamline management procedures and responsibilities and to position DOCCU as a delivering NGO attracting other donor funds.		
Management response		
Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree
The recommendation is well received and will be looked into within the framework of the external Partner Risk Assessment (PRA) of the NGO DOCCU to be held in March-April 2025. The findings of the PRA will become the basis for a detailed plan of actions for an institutional strengthening of the NGO to be implemented and duly monitored during Phase 2. At the same time, it is not foreseen that Phase 2 would undergo the same rapid budget growth trajectory as Phase 1, which facilitates a more structured and planned approach. This will also be communicated accordingly to the relevant Ministries with a view of managing expectations.		
Measures	Responsibility	Timing
a) Select a consultancy for conducting an external PRA	SDC	February 2025
b) Elaborate a plan of actions based on the findings and recommendations of the PRA	consultancy, DOCCU NGO, SDC	May 2025
c) Implement the plan of actions for an institutional strengthening of DOCCU NGO.	DOCCU NGO monitored by SDC	tbd (depending on the recommendations)

d) Communicate to the government stakeholders the importance of a structured approach to project implementation in order to manage the expectations.	SDC	Following the adoption of Phase 2

Recommendation 5		
Elaborate a concept for the deployment of experts and review their profile: DECIDE uses more than 250 experts in 2024 for the various activities at the different levels of education governance. Their selection should be transparent, follow the subsidiary principle (not substituting MoES tasks), be complementary to the many other experts advising the MoES and be linked to the sharpened profile of DOCCU NGO and the future DECIDE activities.		
Management response		
Fully agree	**Partially agree**	Disagree
This recommendation is fully supported and will be also duly followed-up within the process of an external Partner Risk Assessment and its follow-up measures. Additionally, SDC will reinforce its coordination with the Ministry and other development partners and projects to ensure a complementarity in provision of expertise.		
Measures	Responsibility	Timing
a) Ensure a follow-up based on the recommendations of the PRA	DECIDE monitored by SDC	tbd (depending on the recommendations of the PRA)
b) Reinforce coordination with the Ministry and other development partners within the Sectoral Working Group on Education and other coordination formats (e.g., Skills Alliance, bilateral meetings, etc.)	SDC	2025-2030

Recommendation 6		
The provision of hardware (shelter refurbishment if still needed in future, and equipment) should remain part of DECIDE portfolio: This support is a carrot for oblasts and hromadas to strengthen transparent decision-making practices with involvement of different stakeholders and support school network transformation. This support should be conditional to the application of participatory practises in education governance and a fixed co-financing from local budget (e.g. 30%).		
Management response		
Fully agree	Partially agree	**Disagree**
The recommendation is fully supported. DECIDE will allocate meaningful resources for hardware for partner hromadas using it as a strong incentive to implement education governance reforms which usually face strong resistance. At the same time, all the hardware interventions will be planned strictly in line with local and regional development strategies to reinforce the implementation of the public investment management policy. Co-financing will be a requirement, though the exact level of co-financing from local budgets will be defined after the selection of partner hromadas. A more tailor-made approach to the level of co-financing may be considered depending on the inter-regional and intra-regional development disproportions, to ensure that the project does not leave behind those hromadas that are less developed.		

Measures	Responsibility	Timing
a) Make co-funding mandatory for the provision of hardware. Include the analysis of socio-economic development and budgetary capacities of regions and hromadas into the selection methodology.	DECIDE in coordination with SDC	2025
b) Upon the selection of hromadas develop a methodology for co-financing of hardware projects taking into account the actual needs and budgetary capacities of the selected hromadas.	DECIDE in coordination with SDC	2025

Recommendation 7

Develop exit strategies that enable authorities and institutions to continue independently the tools and processes initiated by DECIDE, ensuring long-term sustainability: DECIDE has taken up many reform pilot activities but was not always able to close to sustainably anchor achievements (e.g. school nutrition). The problem is that each policy undergoes constant change or is challenged by the context (adaptation to crises or technological challenges). Thus, there is a risk that pilot activities do not reach critical mass that would ensure sustainability.

Management response

Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree

During Phase 2 that will also be a final project phase, DECIDE will focus on dissemination of its approaches to 32 additional hromadas (48 in total) in 8 oblasts (one third of all regions of Ukraine) which will allow to reach a critical mass of active promoters of DECIDE approaches. The approaches of DECIDE will be closely coordinated with other donor-funded projects using various governmental coordination platforms. At the same time, the required legislative changes will be supported at the national level to ensure irreversibility of the launched reforms. Additionally, as an exit strategy DECIDE will intensify its collaboration with national associations of local self-governments strengthening their expertise and building their institutional capacities in guiding their members in the implementation of education reforms. And finally, the DOCCU NGO, the lead partner in the consortium implementing DECIDE, will continue its work in the education governance sector beyond the project duration. That is why starting from Year 4 of DECIDE the NGO will be encouraged by SDC to actively develop their portfolio of projects funded by other donors.

Measures	Responsibility	Timing
a) Selection of additional oblasts and hromadas	DECIDE	2025
b) Develop cooperation with the national associations of local self-governments	DECIDE	2025-2026
c) Intensify coordination with other donor-funded projects using the governmental coordination platforms	DECIDE & SDC	2025-2030
d) Using the findings of the external Partner Risk Assessment of DOCCU NGO (2025) develop a plan for institutional strengthening of the NGO. Ensure that starting from Year 4 NGO is actively engaged into projects funded by other donors.	SDC and DOCCU NGO	2029-2030

Recommendation 8

Give more space for local ownership and branding in product and process development: The evaluation team gained the impression that DECIDE is flagging its involvement quite prominently. Many activities were implemented with partners but sometimes

their ownership was less visible. For example, the shelters' interior was designed by a professional designer while the student's creativity had no room. Possibly a missed opportunity.		
Management response		
Fully agree	**Partially agree**	Disagree
In the recovery component that covered over 20 communities in three regions of Ukraine and needed to be implemented within rather a short period of time for an intervention of this complexity, it was critical to use approaches that would make the recovery of school shelters more cost-efficient and expeditious. The unified design of the school shelters was one of such approaches that helped to significantly optimize time and resources. According to the feedback from educators and children who could choose from several pre-designed colour options, the proposed designs were perceived as modern and smart. Moreover, the designs developed by the project are now also used by other schools that rehabilitate shelters at the cost of the state budget, which proves their usability. At the same time, the SDC fully supports and strongly promotes the engagement of students into all the recovery projects. DECIDE will continue the practice of organizing inclusive competitions of student projects focusing on equipping and designing common spaces in schools. The visibility of hromadas will be also more proactively promoted.		
Measures	Responsibility	Timing
a) Ensure a meaningful students' engagement in all hardware interventions in DECIDE Phase 2.	DECIDE	Phase 2

Recommendation 9		
Consider streamlining the reporting into one set of documents: Currently the project elaborates an extensive progress report on activities for the beneficiaries (MoES, Ministry of Communities and Territories Development, oblasts and other educational institutions) as well as a report for SDC. This appears not very efficient. One common report with a separate logframe, equipped with the necessary data for SDC, could be sufficient.		
Management response		
Fully agree	Partially agree	**Disagree**
While the proposed recommendation could potentially simplify the reporting process for the project, its implementation is not deemed feasible due to the requirements of the national legislation and specific requirements of the donor. At the same time, SDC will continue actively engaging into the policy dialogue on the optimization of the procedures for the registration and monitoring of the international technical assistance projects by the Government of Ukraine, seeking opportunities for streamlining project reporting procedures.		

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Signature Head of IC / Deputy Head of IC