

SCHOOLS FOR DEMOCRACY:
Supporting Educational Reforms in
Ukraine (2021 - 2024)

Programme Report



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Introduction

Since its inception in 2015, the Schools for Democracy (SfD) Programme has been central in promoting democratic reforms in Ukraine's education system. With the support of Norway, European Wergeland Centre (EWC) partnered with the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (MoES) to foster democratic culture, citizenship education, and systemic change in schools and preschools across the country.

The Programme's latest cycle (2021-2024) faced extraordinary challenges due to the Russian Federation's full-scale invasion in February 2022. This unprecedented act of aggression reshaped the political landscape and the priorities within the Ukrainian education system, bringing about immense destruction

and displacement. Yet, Ukrainian educators, students, and communities demonstrated remarkable resilience. Schools became not only places of learning but also hubs of democratic citizenship, providing refuge, humanitarian aid, and support for displaced families.

This final report reflects on the Programme's efforts and achievements during this tumultuous period. From facilitating policy reforms to offering capacity-building opportunities for educators, the SfD Programme adapted to new realities, addressing both immediate needs and long-term goals. Key initiatives included continued implementation of the New Ukrainian School reform, development of innovative educational materials, and support of professional learning communities.



By the end of this cycle, the Programme had reached over 140,000 course participants, significantly enlarged its preschool component, and developed a suite of online and blended courses and other teaching and learning resources to enhance inclusive and democratic teaching practices. In response to the war, it also prioritized integration activities of internally displaced and refugee children, built psychological resilience among teachers, and sustained dialogue with national and international stakeholders to support the education sector's recovery.

As the SfD Programme concludes its current phase, this report outlines the major trends, activities, and outcomes of its three years of work. It also highlights the resilience and commitment of Ukrainian educators and students, who continue to uphold the values of democracy and inclusion even in the face of war. Through these efforts, the Programme reaffirms its mission to strengthen democratic culture in Ukraine's education system and foster European cooperation for a brighter future.

Impact

The SfD Programme has contributed to democratic changes in education and society in general. Despite challenges posed by the ongoing war, the Programme continued fostering systemic democratic reforms in education, promoting inclusion, and strengthening European cooperation.

Contribution to Democracy and Resilience

The Programme's central mission – to promote democratic values in Ukrainian education – has gained heightened relevance amidst Russia's invasion. Schools have transformed into centres of democratic citizenship, hosting displaced persons, distributing aid, and fostering community solidarity. The Programme has contributed to strengthening networks and professional communities of educators which helped to mobilize support during the disruption in the beginning of the war.

52

publications
produced and
disseminated in
Ukrainian media

321000

readers reached
through our
publications



3

new MOOCs
developed

8

new online
blended courses
developed

85000

new MOOC
participants

12000

new online
blended course
participants

Addressing Educational Disruption

War has severely disrupted the education system, with over 3000 schools damaged or destroyed and millions of students displaced. In response, the Programme innovatively transitioned activities online, maintaining continuity in teacher training and student engagement. The development of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and online blended courses has provided educators with tools to navigate these challenges, supporting their professional growth and the continuity of quality education.

Promoting Inclusion and Equity

Inclusion has been a cornerstone of the Programme, emphasizing the importance of reaching such groups as displaced and special-needs students. Cooperation with the initiatives like the School of Superheroes and tailored psychological support for educators have addressed the unique challenges of wartime education. These efforts have not only supported academic achievement but also nurtured emotional resilience and social cohesion among students and educators.

Building Communities of Practice

The establishment of professional learning communities has strengthened networks among educators, fostering collaboration and mutual support. These communities have become vital platforms for sharing best practices, particularly in emergency and blended learning contexts.

Long-term Democratic Changes in Education

By embedding democratic principles in curricula and educational governance, the Programme is cultivating a generation of students equipped to participate actively in democratic processes. It has also laid the groundwork for systemic change by engaging policymakers and contributing to key reforms, such as the New Ukrainian School and inclusive education strategies.

7100+

followers on the
Programme
Facebook page

1600+

preschool educators
in *Democratic
Kindergarten Network*

8

policy documents
adopted

21

policy groups and
communities of
practice joined

Main lessons learned

What worked well?

Flexibility and Adaptability Are Key to Success

The Programme's ability to adapt to the dynamic context of war has been crucial. By transitioning activities online and integrating psychological support into training, the Programme demonstrated how flexibility can sustain operations even during extreme challenges.

Partnerships Reinforces Impact

Close collaboration with national and international stakeholders, including the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, Ukrainian Institute for Education Development, and different civil society organisations has amplified the Programme's reach and impact. This underscores the value of partnerships in achieving systemic educational reform.

Research and Evidence-Based Practices Improve Programme Relevance

The inclusion of research components has provided valuable insights into the needs and challenges of the target groups. This evidence-based approach has helped refine Programme activities, ensuring alignment with the evolving context.

Building Professional Learning Communities Enhances Impact

Creating communities of practice among educators has facilitated knowledge sharing and mutual support. These networks have not only helped educators navigate wartime challenges but also established sustainable mechanisms for ongoing professional development and democratic practice.

Youth Engagement Catalyses Change

Engaging youth as active participants in democratic processes has fostered a sense of agency and empowerment among the younger generation. This involvement has highlighted the critical role of youth in driving societal transformation.

Psychological Support Needs to Be Embedded in Teaching Practices

Integrating psychological support into the Programme's framework addressed the emotional and mental health challenges faced by educators and students during wartime. This approach has proven essential for maintaining effective learning environments.



Main lessons learned

What do we take with us into the new cycle of the Programme?

Foster Stronger Community Engagement

Local stakeholders, including parents and municipal leaders should become more active partners in the Programme. Reintegrating parents as a target group and deepening collaboration with local governments could strengthen ties between schools and communities, fostering a more supportive educational ecosystem.

Overcome Resistance to Democratic Practices

Hierarchical structures in many schools and kindergartens remain a barrier to adopting democratic methods. Targeted training programmes for school principals and mentorship initiatives to support educators in implementing democratic approaches could help overcome this resistance and foster systemic change.

Sustain Networks Beyond the Programme

While professional learning communities have been instrumental, ensuring their sustainability after the Programme ends is crucial. Establishing independent, locally led networks and providing seed funding for community initiatives would preserve their benefits and extend their reach over time.

7700+

children joined
mobile youth
work trainings

51

kindergartens
took part in the
mentorship
programme

Programme Effectiveness

The SfD Programme has demonstrated strong cost-effectiveness, achieving significant outcomes with relatively limited resources. By leveraging digital tools, forging strategic partnerships, and utilizing local expertise, the Programme maximized its impact, even during the challenging context of wartime. Its ability to adapt to constraints and deliver results underscores its value as a model for efficient investment in Ukraine's democratic education system.

Here are some outcomes that represent a high return on investment, advancing democratic education and strengthening resilience during a period of immense challenges:

- **Policy Contributions:** The Programme provided valuable input to key national education strategies, influencing systemic reforms that support long-term democratic education.

- **Educator Training:** Over 140 000 enrolments in online courses since 2021, with many returning for additional courses, reflect strong engagement and Programme relevance.
- **Professional Learning Communities:** The Programme established networks that promote collaboration and innovation among educators, fostering continuous professional development.

The Programme's innovative emphasis on digital learning and localized engagement has proven to be a cost-effective alternative to traditional education initiatives. Unlike infrastructure-heavy approaches, this model has allowed the Programme to:

- Reach diverse and remote regions, including frontline areas, without requiring substantial capital investments.
- Deliver scalable, impactful training programmes at a fraction of the cost of in-person initiatives.

Programme Sustainability

Key factors

Policy Work and Systemic Change

The Programme's alignment with national education reforms, such as the New Ukrainian School, has reinforced its sustainability. Contributions to policy development, collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Science, and focus on partnership with other key partners in the educational system – among teacher training institutions and centres for professional development, have ensured that Programme outcomes are embedded within Ukraine's strategic educational framework.

Resilience-Oriented Strategies

By integrating digital learning solutions and adapting to wartime challenges, the Programme has established scalable, flexible methods for delivering democratic education. These tools ensure access to training and resources, even in disrupted contexts.

Capacity Building for Educators

The Programme has developed a robust network of educators, trainers, and professional learning communities. These networks act as catalysts for continued democratic education practices, empowering teachers to share knowledge and inspire systemic changes within their institutions.

Democratic Competences in Focus

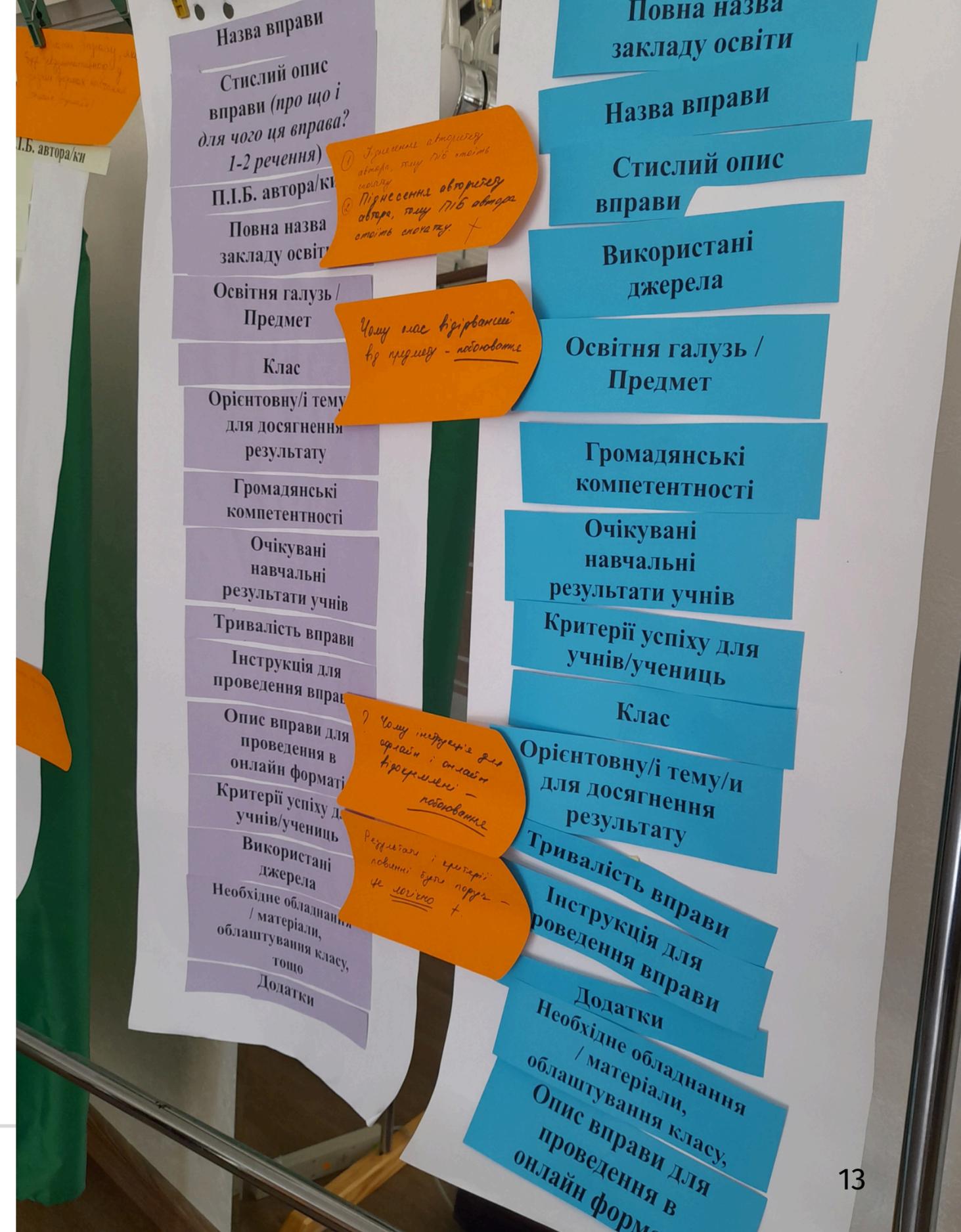
Ukraine's rapidly changing political and social landscape, compounded by war, creates uncertainty for the continuation of educational reforms. Focus on democratic practices in educational institutions and developing democratic competences of teachers and students in this volatile environment remains a critical factor that keeps Ukraine's education system adherent to the democratic development.

Conclusion

Path Forward

A new three-year SfD Programme aims at sustaining and strengthening democratic resilience of children and youth in Ukraine and Moldova through education and, therefore, improving social coherence, inclusion, and participation for all.

The new Programme will **expand its geographic reach** to include underserved and conflict-affected areas, ensuring that rural schools and displaced communities receive the necessary support. By **strengthening local ownership**, it will enhance cooperation with governmental and educational institutions, embedding democratic education into long-term policy frameworks. A greater emphasis on inclusive education will ensure that displaced students, as well as those with special needs, receive adequate resources and psychological support.





Additionally, the Programme will play a vital role in **reconstruction and recovery**, contributing to democratisation of Ukraine's education system while also supporting Moldova's education sector in fostering democratic resilience.

Furthermore, working across **formal, non-formal and informal education** will create a holistic approach to democratic education, equipping the next generation with the skills and competencies necessary for civic engagement and national development. Finally, by **fostering international cooperation**, the Programme will align Ukraine's education reforms with European democratic agenda.

Partners



Center for Educational Initiatives

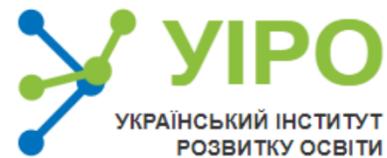


ВСЕУКРАЇНСЬКИЙ ФОНД
«КРОК ЗА КРОКОМ»

savED



MINISTRY
OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE
OF UKRAINE



YIPO
УКРАЇНСЬКИЙ ІНСТИТУТ
РОЗВИТКУ ОСВІТИ



SMART
OSBITA



INTERNATIONAL
STEP by STEP
ASSOCIATION

PROMETHEUS



Комунальний заклад Львівської обласної ради
ЛВІВСЬКИЙ ОБЛАСНИЙ ІНСТИТУТ
ПІСЛЯДИПЛОМНОЇ ПЕДАГОГІЧНОЇ ОСВІТИ

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