Technical support for the project "Supporting young people to succeed – building capacities to better integrate non-formal and formal learning, Estonia" (REFORM/SC21/066)

Deliverable 10: External evaluation of the project

Final evaluation report
Date: July 2023

Author: Inga Pavlovaite, external evaluator

Executive summary

This is the final evaluation report of the project funded by the EU's Structural Reform Support Programme and implemented by ICF, and its subcontractors (Praxis, Civitta Estonia, Tallinn University and international experts), in cooperation with and for the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research and the European Commission.

The key evaluation findings are as follows. In terms of project relevance, its objectives continue to remain pertinent to the needs, problems and issues in the policy area of integrating non-formal and formal learning in Estonia. This relevance was also appropriately ensured via the integration of various stakeholders and target groups into the project governance structures. In relation to project effectiveness, the planned project activities were completed as scheduled within the overall planned timetable. Delays encountered between the individual project activities were due to the number of rounds of revisions and finetuning of the individual Deliverables before their finalisation. All three main outcomes planned for the project have been achieved at the final stage of the project. This was underpinned by such factors as successful coordination between the range of stakeholders in Estonia, effective support provided by the contractor and acting upon the main risks in good time.

The project added value in the Estonian context was through focussing the political attention to the challenge of integration, providing a framework for the reform and external expert support to drive the reform. The added value was also evident bringing the reform challenges to the focus in the debate and boosting the efforts to address the challenges in a systematic and collective way involving all the key stakeholders. Over its duration, the project has made attempts to improve its coherence with other relevant developments in the Estonian education system. The project was implemented in an efficient way, with appropriate planning and flexibility to adjust the implementation according to the needs and requirements emerging. The sustainability of the project is likely to be high as the Ministry of Education and Research has taken onboard the recommendations from the project for further reform through concrete follow-up activities that are expected to be supported by ESF+ project funding for the 2024-2028 period.

Lessons learnt from the project point to the need to make extra effort to engage its final beneficiaries, the communication and dissemination choices throughout the project duration, the need for concise deliverables and policy recommendations which are explicitly prioritised and sequenced for all stakeholders. The two key recommendations relate to Recommendation 1 supporting the Estonian stakeholders becoming "ambassadors" for what is a unique education system reform internationally and Recommendation 2 following up the implementation of proposed actions at the national, local and education provider levels.

1. Introduction

This is the final report pertaining to Deliverable 10, the External Evaluation of the project, relating to the contract REFORM/SC21/066 – "Supporting young people to succeed – building capacities to better integrate non-formal and formal learning" for the Government of Estonia[2]. The European Commission's Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support (DG REFORM) has procured the services of ICF (together with of its subcontractors – Praxis, Civitta Estonia, Tallinn University and international experts) to provide technical support in the framework of the project - "Supporting young people to succeed – building capacities to better integrate non-formal and formal learning" requested by the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research (REFORM/SC21/066). The project is funded by the EU through the Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP).[3]

The final evaluation covers the period up to end June 2023, and includes reflections on all nine Deliverables of the project. Some of the final versions of the Deliverables were not yet finalised at the time of this final evaluation report, however, it was unlikely that they will change in any significant form. The report is structured based on the report structure agreed in the Inception Report (with a maximum length of 15 pages) and provides an overview of evaluation aims, scope and theory of change (this section), main findings of the evaluation (section 2), and key lessons and recommendations (section 3). It is accompanied by the Annex 1 (evaluation framework and approach), Annex 2 (list of interviews), Annex 3 interim beneficiary survey and Annex 4 final beneficiary survey.

Box 1: Project aims and expected outcomes

This project aimed to **support the better integration of non-formal[4] and formal[5] learning in Estonia.** Informal learning[6] is outside the scope of this project. Formal education is understood as comprising education at primary and secondary level, including both general education and (initial) vocational education and training. Similarly, non-formal education and learning should be understood as comprising youth work, including hobby education. In Estonia non-formal education is seen as serving individuals' needs, as well as an attractive target and means to reach policy goals in the field of education and youth as well as in other policy areas. The aim of better integrating non-formal and formal learning is to maximise learning in different learning environments. This contributes to a more flexible education system which prioritises learners' unique needs, potential and motivations, promoting social cohesion and a culture of lifelong learning. The overall aim is to support individuals to succeed personally and professionally throughout their life course.

It was expected that the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, having been closely involved in the design and subsequent implementation of the contract and consulted by the contracting

---

[2] Projekt "Noorte edu toetuseks: võimekus lõimida huvihariduses omandatut formaalharidusse" 2021-2023 | Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium (hm.ee)

[3] Structural Reform Support (europa.eu)

[4] Non-formal learning is understood as learning that takes place outside of a school and is undertaken with a certain objective to develop oneself. Non-formal education can take place in very different environments (for example, in hobby education or supplementary education, but also in nature), where learning and teaching may not be the only objectives. Non-formal learning has an objective in the same way as formal education, but it is voluntary. It can be carried out by professional trainers or, for example, volunteers or peers (cf Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020).

[5] Formal learning mostly takes place in a school environment and is organised on the basis of curricula. Formal education has specific objectives and is conducted by teachers who are specially prepared and qualified. Learning objectives are mostly set externally, and the learning process is monitored and evaluated. Formal learning is mandatory until a certain level or age (cf Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/estonian_lifelong_strategy.pdf).

[6] Informal learning is, from the learner's perspective, learning without a specific objective. It takes place in everyday situations (for example, in families, at work, etc.) and therefore the results of informal learning are not directly visible for the learner (cf Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020).

authority (DG REFORM) on all draft deliverables, will adopt the deliverables through its internal mechanisms and implement the recommendations and guidelines contained in the final deliverables. Provided that these recommendations and guidelines are implemented, **the expected outcomes of the project** were as follows:

1. **Outcome 1:** The Estonian authorities are aware of policy options to achieve better integration of non-formal and formal learning, including legislation, funding schemes and models of governance.

2. **Outcome 2:** The Estonian authorities have co-created and validated guidelines for the integration of non-formal and formal learning together with relevant stakeholder from non-formal and formal education and local governments.

3. **Outcome 3:** The Estonian authorities have a plan for effective implementation of the reform.

The project implementation was structured around the following Deliverables:

- Deliverable 1: Analytical report on the integration of non-formal and formal learning in Estonia
- Deliverable 2: Analytical report on relevant examples of policy and practice from other countries
- Deliverable 3: Online peer exchange with experts from other countries, and a study visit to Finland
- Deliverable 4: Impact assessment including cost-benefit analysis
- Deliverable 5: Preliminary recommendations for legislation and policy
- Deliverable 6: Co-creation of Guidelines for the integration of formal and non-formal learning
- Deliverable 7: Report from the piloting of the Guidelines
- Deliverable 8: Final recommendations on legislation and policy, and recommendations on implementation
- Deliverable 9: Communication and outreach strategy.

The evaluation is not covering the long-term effects of the activities that the project produces which – as also noted in the RfS - depend on the endorsement, adoption and implementation of the deliverables by Estonian government as well as wider policy conditions which remain outside the responsibility of the European Commission and the contractor (p.8 of the request for services).

The theory of change below describes the rationale for the project, its objectives and expected chain of events and results. It provides a 'theory of change' for the evaluation. The theory of change below is based on the project's knowledge of non-formal and formal learning and education and the key reform for the education system of Estonia. Figure 1 summarises the theory of change used for this evaluation, based on the version agreed as part of the inception phase.

Figure 1 Theory of change underpinning the project

Figure 1 Theory of change underpinning the project
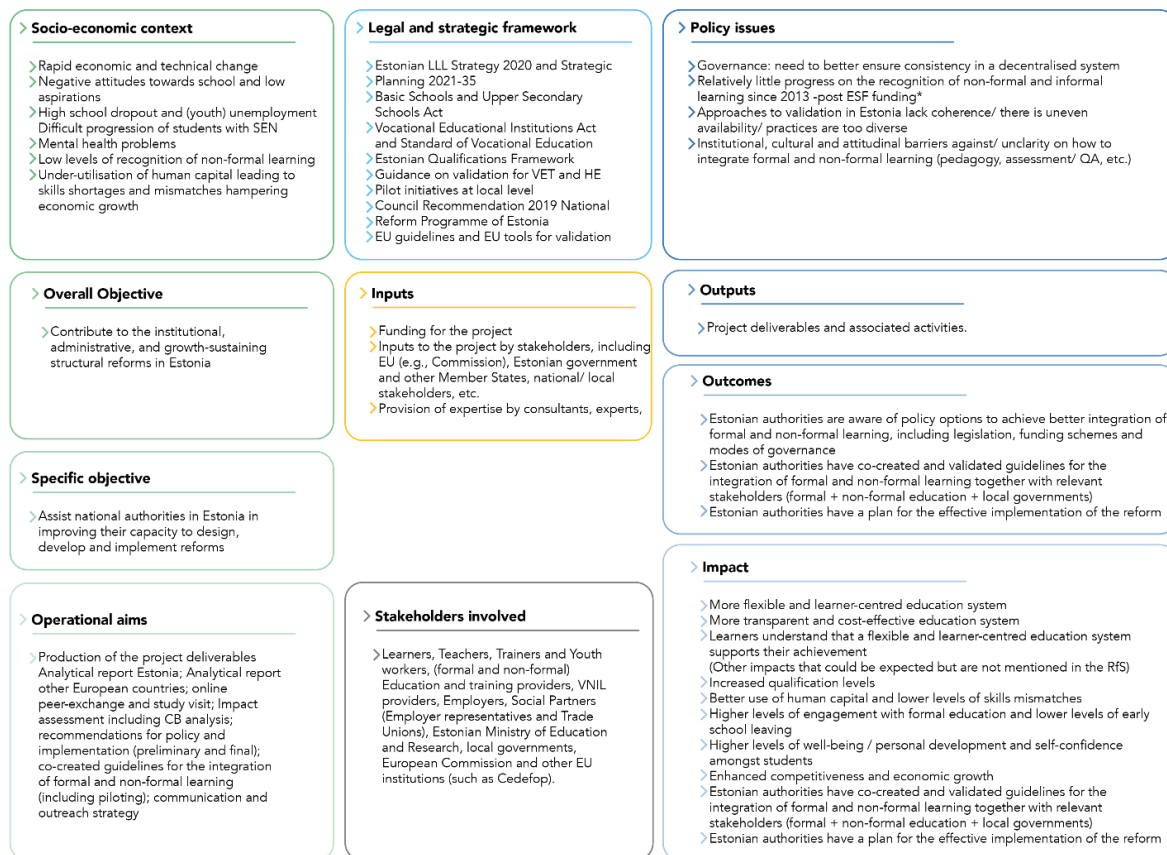
Source: project inception report.

2. Main evaluation findings

In this section, key evaluation findings are presented, by the main evaluation criteria, such as the relevance, effectiveness, added value, coherence, efficiency and sustainability.

2.1. Relevance

Relevance is an assessment whether the project activities are appropriate to the priorities of the target group of stakeholders, young people themselves and the education policy developments in Estonia. At the end of the implementation of the project, its **objectives continue to remain pertinent to the needs, problems and issues in the policy area of integrating non-formal and formal learning in Estonia**. The specific needs, problems and issues in moving forward the integration of non-formal and formal learning have been explicitly identified and analysed through one of the main project deliverables, Deliverable 1, Analytical report on the integration of non-formal and formal learning. They have been further refined, developed and reflected in subsequent Deliverables. Thus, the main needs have been formally identified, based on the evidence collected. It is appropriate that such formal analysis took place early at the start of the project and has underpinned the development of subsequent Deliverables.

The (original) project objectives proven to have been appropriate and (still) correspond to the target group needs in Estonia. This was confirmed in the key informant interviews undertaken for the evaluation. Key informants confirmed that pursuing the integration of non-formal and formal learning remains a key policy priority in Estonia. This is one of the main education system needs and challenges, relevant in the current context of ensuring good quality education centred around the needs of young people. According to stakeholders: *"yes, we still have the same problems and the focus is at the right*

place." (a project stakeholder) or "I have been working on this issue for years and it's good to see the project pushing the integration and delivering results." (a project stakeholder). Similarly, both at the interim and final evaluation stage, beneficiary survey respondents echoed the continuing relevance of the project focus on the need to better integrate non-formal and formal learning. As shown in the Figure below, the opinion on continuing relevance of the project to the needs is unanimous in both surveys, as all either agreed or strongly agreed with this, and none have disagreed.

Figure 2 Views of project beneficiaries: by establishing the project, the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research has responded well to the needs to better integrate non-formal and formal learning. Do you agree with this statement?
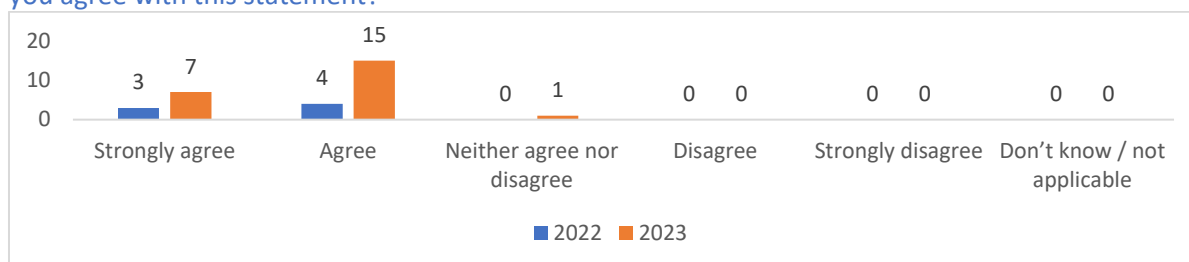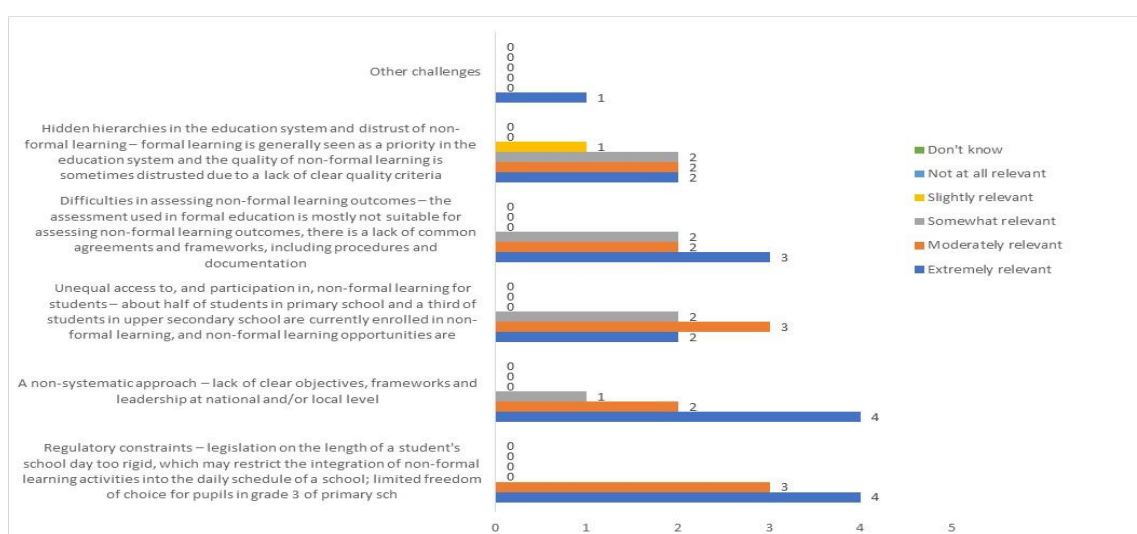

Source: Beneficiary survey (interim evaluation), 2022. N=7. Beneficiary survey (final evaluation), 2023. N=23. The figure shows the number of respondents per response category.

Furthermore, the project remains **relevant to the different needs and challenges faced** with respect to the integration of non-formal and formal learning in Estonia. This was confirmed through the key informant interviews and the results of the beneficiary surveys. In the survey, the beneficiaries identified that the main challenges and needs addressed by the project are most relevant in the context of their work. As shown in the Figure below, whilst the views on the particular relevance of specific challenges differed slightly, the overall prevailing opinion in both interim and final surveys is that the challenges addressed by the project are relevant to the work of project beneficiaries. The two main challenges that were noted as slightly more relevant to the work of beneficiaries were the same - the regulatory constraints and the lack of systematic approach. In contrast, the views on the relevance of the challenge of hidden hierarchies and distrust in the non-formal learning were more evenly split.

Figure 3 Views of project beneficiaries: the project aims to address various challenges in the implementation of the integration of non-formal and formal learning at the level of the education system. How relevant do you think these challenges are in the context of your work?

3.1. Interim evaluation stage, views in 2022

Source: Beneficiary survey, 2022. N=7. The figure shows the number of respondents per response category.

5

3.2. Final evaluation stage, views in 2023
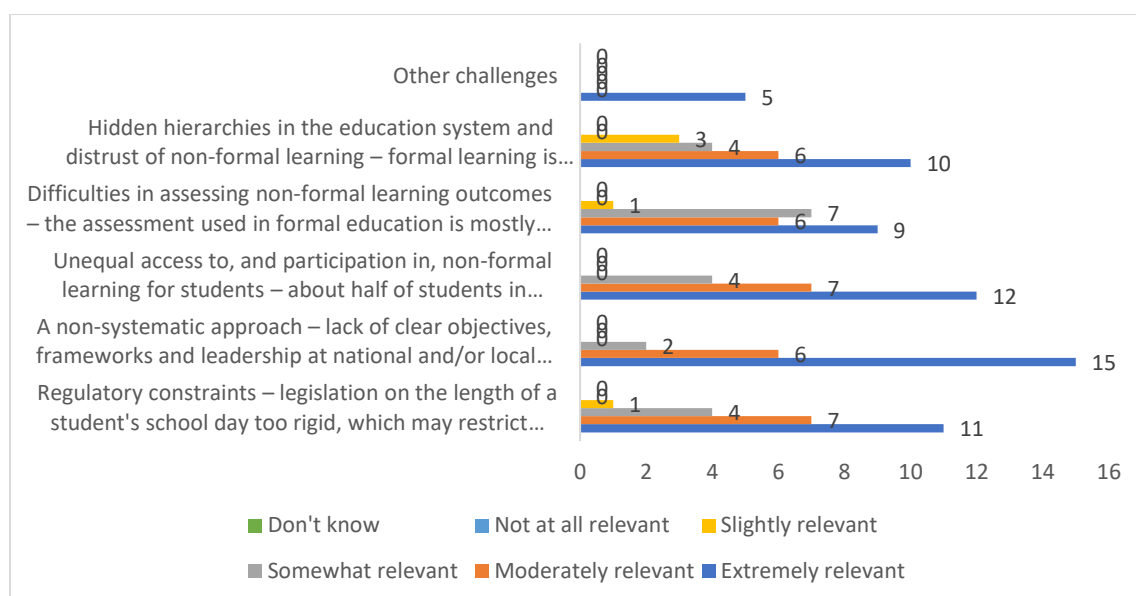
Beneficiary survey (final evaluation), 2023. N=23. The figure shows the number of respondents per response category.

The key informants in both interim and final evaluation stages also expressed the view that the project was addressing the relevant needs to reform the current education approaches to ensure a continuing relevance of formal and non-formal education pathways, the education choices available to young people and their interest in the learning process. The project was done in the spirit of learning centred around the needs of young people, for example: *"the integration of non formal and formal learning is a very big priority and it's a part of our whole educational goals that we have set for ourselves."* (a project stakeholder)

The relevance of the specific project activities and final contents of its Deliverables to the stakeholder needs was appropriately **ensured via the integration of various stakeholders and target groups into the project governance structures,** such the Project Board, the Steering Committee and Working Group. Their membership included all the relevant stakeholders in Estonia with respect to the integration of non-formal and formal learning, indicating a very inclusive and open approach in the project. As shown in Table 1, the wider membership of the project Working Group included all the main stakeholders with respect to the integration of non-formal and formal learning, including the associations of formal and non-formal education institutions, teacher unions, municipalities, other relevant Ministries, cultural organisations, employer associations, youth work organisations, youth organisations and one parents association. Importantly, the structure and general composition has remained largely the same throughout the project, but specific individuals have been added as complements or to replace people that have left. The Working Group was also extended for the co-creation/piloting phase. Also, internally within the Ministry of Education and Research, a number of departments participated in the project activities, demonstrating a cross-departmental interest and pro-active participation in the project.

Table 1: Membership in the project governance structures

Project Board	15 members	12 Ministry of Education and Research 1 European Commission 2 External contractor (ICF and Praxis)

Steering Committee	7 members (plus Project Board)	5 Ministry of Education and Research 2 Education and Youth Board
Working Group	42 members	Hobby school /non formal learning associations: 10 Teacher unions: 10 Municipality and regional association: 7 Ministries (other than the Ministry of Education and Research): 5 Cultural organisations: 3 Education employer association: 2 Youth worker associations: 2 Youth organisations: 2 Parents association: 1

Source: analysis of project documentation.

At the same time, a key challenge throughout the project was to include **in the project activities the parents and young people themselves**. The parents should be considered especially important, given the prominent role they play in the educational pathways of children up to 18. Also, the voice of young people themselves has not particularly strong in the project activities. This was highlighted as a concern at the interim evaluation stage and the project team took steps to address this challenge (see also section 3.1). Thus, some young people and two youth organisations participated in the project activities, especially at the co-creation/piloting stage. However, given that most Working Group members were the education system providers, rather than its users, extra effort required to include the final beneficiaries of the project has been one of the key lessons learnt (**see Lesson 1**, section 3.2).

2.2. Effectiveness

Effectiveness is assessed as the extent to which the project has achieved its objectives, delivered its outputs and expected outcomes as specified in the theory of change (see Figure 1 and Box 1).

2.2.1. Achievement of project outputs and outcomes

The planned project activities were completed as scheduled, unless extensions have been agreed, and the project has overall been implemented within its planned timetable (see Table 2). The two final Deliverables 8 and 9 are, at the time of this report, at the pre-final stage and awaiting the final round of comments and feedback from the Ministry of Education and Research.

Table 2: Overall timetable and progress against the expected milestones, status: end June 2023

	Status
Deliverable 1: Analytical report on the integration of non-formal and formal learning in Estonia	finalised
Deliverable 2: Analytical report on relevant examples of policy and practice from other countries	finalised
Deliverable 3: Online peer exchange with experts from other countries, and a study visit to Finland	finalised
Deliverable 4: Impact assessment including cost-benefit analysis	finalised
Deliverable 5: Preliminary recommendations for legislation and policy	finalised
Deliverable 6: Co-creation of Guidelines for the integration of formal and non-formal learning	finalised
Deliverable 7: Report from the piloting of the Guidelines	finalised
Deliverable 8: Final recommendations on legislation and policy, and recommendations on implementation	pre-final, final comments expected by July 2023
Deliverable 9: Communication and outreach strategy	pre-final, final comments expected by July 2023

Source: analysis of project documentation, project progress report.

Thus, this shows that the **individual planned activities in the project have been completed as planned.** This overall positive level of implementing project Deliverables and individual activities demonstrates an effective delivery of project implementation. At the same time, delays encountered during the project were due to the number of rounds of revisions and finetuning of the individual Deliverables before their finalisation. All the Deliverables underwent additional rounds of consultation with the wide range of project stakeholders, which led to the extended process of their finalisation. This process of revising and finalising the Deliverables contributed to ensuring their relevance and stakeholders' buy-in and satisfaction. At the same time, it does raise questions about the appropriate advance planning and decisions about the format of deliverables. This is reflected in **Lesson learnt 3** (see section 3.2).

This overall finding of successful project implementation is the view also shared by the key informants interviewed and the beneficiaries surveyed (the survey results at the final evaluation are used, as interim survey results covered only the initial Deliverables). As shown in the Figure 4 below, only one beneficiary respondent indicated that the activities were implemented poorly and very poorly. Views on the effectiveness of different activities differ slightly, with the organisation of project meetings receiving the most positive feedback. This is followed by the positive feedback on the Deliverables connected to the piloting activities, D6 and D7. However, this is also reflecting the fact that most respondents attended the meetings, whereas fewer engaged with other Deliverables and hence, commented on their effectiveness. What is also noted is a lower awareness amongst the respondents of several Deliverables, such as D3, D4, D5 as well as the latest project Deliverables D8 and D9. Whilst the latter can be expected given that D8 and D9 are being finalised, the former Deliverables should have received more prominence amongst the project stakeholders. This is supporting the key lesson learnt on further transparency and dissemination of project Deliverables (**see Lesson 2, section 3.2**).

Figure 4 Views of project beneficiaries: How well have the concrete project deliverables been implemented?

	Very well	Well	Fair	Poor	Very poor	Don't know
Project Board / Steering Committee / Working Group meetings	2	10	5	0	0	6
Deliverable 1: Analytical report on the integration of non-formal and formal learning in Estonia	3	7	3	1	1	8
Deliverable 2: Analytical report on relevant examples of policy and practice from other countries	2	7	3	1	1	9
Deliverable 3: Online peer exchange with experts from other countries, and a study visit to Finland	0	3	2	0	1	**17**
Deliverable 4: Impact assessment including cost-benefit analysis	1	0	3	1	1	**17**
Deliverable 5: Preliminary recommendations for legislation and policy	2	5	4	0	2	**10**
Deliverable 6: Co-creation of Guidelines for the integration of formal and non-formal learning	**2**	**4**	**5**	1	1	3
Deliverable 7: Report from the piloting of the Guidelines	**2**	**5**	**2**	0	1	6
Deliverable 8: Final recommendations on legislation and policy, and recommendations on implementation	3	0	3	0	1	9
Deliverable 9: Communication and outreach strategy	0	1	3	1	1	**10**

Source: Beneficiary survey (final evaluation), 2023. N=23. The figure shows the number of respondents per response category.

This is also the view supported by the key informants interviewed who consider that looking overall, the project activities were implemented successfully and on time: *"everything went really quite fluent in a way that the project grew from the very start" (a project stakeholder).* At the same time, several issues were also pointed out in the interviews:

- The reports for some Deliverables (D1 is over 75 pages; D2 is 67 pages) were long, complex and requiring several rounds of comments and reiterations to finalise. Whilst it was acknowledged that this part of the necessary process in the project, the key lesson learnt is that the Deliverables need to be more concise and appealing to the reader. The subsequent Deliverables such as D8 and D9 are considered to be addressing this issue. This is reflected in Lesson learnt 3 (see section 4.2).
- At the interim stage, there was a view that more could be done to interlink the individual Deliverables and show their users how the findings from D1-D3 link together, and what their joint implications are for the project. Since the interim evaluation stage, this point has been taken onboard and subsequent Deliverables were much more clearly linked and building on each other.

All **three main outcomes planned for the project** have been achieved at the final stage of the project (see Table 3), as demonstrated through the finalisation of specific project Deliverables linked to the specific outcomes. In addition, all key informants also agreed in the interviews that the project outcomes are achieved. In that sense, having a clearly defined project theory of change and planning process with clear links between the Deliverables and outcomes has been instrumental in supporting the achievement of three outcomes.

Table 3: Overview of the progress towards achieving three project outcomes

| Project outcome planned	State of progress
Outcome 1: The Estonian authorities are aware of policy options to achieve better integration of non-formal and formal learning, including legislation, funding schemes and models of governance.	Achieved: the policy options have been identified and validated through Deliverables 4 and 5
Outcome 2: The Estonian authorities have co-created and validated guidelines for the integration of non-formal and formal learning together with relevant stakeholder from non-formal and formal education and local governments.	Achieved: the guidelines have been co-created and validated with stakeholders in the piloting through Deliverables 6 and 7
Outcome 3: The Estonian authorities have a plan for effective implementation of the reform.	Achieved: a concrete plan for implementing the reforms has been identified in Deliverables 8 and 9, and five follow-up activities from the Ministry of Education and Research to be funded through the ESF+ project

2.2.2. Success factors for the project

The complexity of such wide-ranging reform project requiring change at the education system level relies on a number of key success factors, such as:
- To what extent the coordination between the range of stakeholders in Estonia was successful
- To what extent the support provided by the contractor was effective
- To what extent the main risks were identified and acted upon.

To start with, **the coordination and cooperation of the range of stakeholders involved in the project can be considered good.** This is confirmed by the findings from the key informant interviews and the beneficiary survey. The key informants agreed in the interviews that the project enabled a good participation of the range of stakeholders. It was acknowledged by all interview partners that the involvement of stakeholders in the project activities was good, showing the high interest and willingness to engage. Similarly, the results of the beneficiary survey at both interim and final stages show that most respondents considered that the interaction with the main stakeholders is either well or very well organised (see Figure 5 below).

Figure 5 Views of project beneficiaries: the project relies on the coordination and cooperation between a range of stakeholders in Estonia. How well is the interaction with the main stakeholders organised?
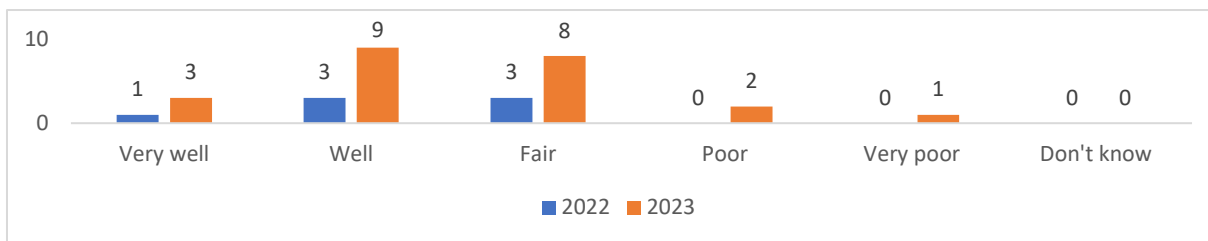
Source: Beneficiary survey (interim evaluation), 2022. N=7. Beneficiary survey (final evaluation), 2023. N=23. The figure shows the number of respondents per response category.

The second success factor considered is **the support provided by the external contractors to the project**. Overall, this was considered to be of good quality, timely and efficient. This is confirmed by the findings from the key informant interviews and the beneficiary survey. The key informants agreed that the external contractors have been effective in their agreed roles. What has been highlighted in the interviews was that the project was managed very professionally, supported by flexibility, clear planning and open communication. Similarly, the results of beneficiary survey show that most respondents provided the top ratings for the support provided by the contractor (see Figure 6 below).

Figure 6 Views of project beneficiaries: how many stars would you give to the support provided by the contractor (ICF, in collaboration with Praxis, Tallinn University and Civitta Estonia) so far? 5 stars=excellent, 1 star=poor.
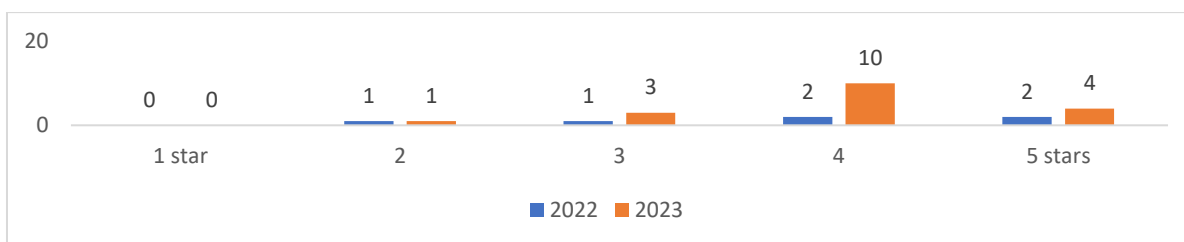
Source: Beneficiary survey (interim evaluation), 2022. N=7. Beneficiary survey (final evaluation), 2023. N=23. The figure shows the number of respondents per response category.

Finally, a key success factor relates to the **appropriate risk management in the project.** The key risks / challenges and success factors been appropriately identified in the planning and implementation of the Project activities. To start with, the results of beneficiary survey at the final stage show that most respondents considered that the main strategic and operational risks to the project have been addressed either very well or well. This is the trend also confirmed in the interim evaluation survey (see Annex 3). This related both to the strategic risks such as failure to involve relevant stakeholders, or managing external conditions, as well as operational risks such as insufficient quality of project deliverables, inability to organise meetings or manage technical issues during the meetings.

Table 4: Views of project beneficiaries: Based on your knowledge, how well have the main risks to the project success been identified and addressed?

	Insufficient quality of project deliverables	Failure to involve relevant stakeholders	Inability to organise project meetings and activities	Technical issues during the project meetings	External conditions that hamper the implementation of the project or the development of participatory actions (e.g. the COVID-19 pandemic)	Lack of resources and/or personnel changes in the project
Very well	0	2	2	8	6	1
Well	9	9	12	8	9	8
Fair	4	4	3	3	3	5

Poor	1	4	3	0	1	1
Very poor	0	1	1	1	0	2
Don't know / not applicable	9	3	2	3	4	6

Source: Beneficiary survey (final evaluation), 2023. N=23. The figure shows the number of respondents per response category.

The key informants interviewed also identified a number of risks they perceive for the success of the project:

- The risk that the Recommendations for the reform remain rather general and are difficult to translate into realistic activities which could be implemented by the Ministry of Education and Research, municipalities, formal and non-formal education providers. This has been addressed through drafting of D8 Final recommendations which are structured around three policy options, and identify concrete steps for the state level, local governments, non formal and formal education providers. It is also appropriate that for each recommendation concrete steps are specified, as well as activities, obstacles and challenges. It is understood that the recommendations will be also structured by their order of priority and sequencing (see also Lesson 4, section 4.2).
- Connected was a concern expressed that the Recommendations reflect the needs of larger municipalities and smaller municipalities, as well as different areas of the country (rural and urban). The non-formal learning activities are larger in scale in urban and bigger municipalities, and the reform proposals need to be realistic enough to work in the different contexts of Estonian education system. Whilst the drafting of D8 Final recommendations does not differentiate between actions required from larger or smaller providers or different areas of the country, they do apply across the country, as the changes are to be implemented at the education system level. At the same time, recommended changes are also likely to cater for the different needs – such as proposals for a common digital register responding to the need for an IT system especially from larger municipalities or funding the integration coordinators at schools also at smaller municipalities.
- Some of the proposed actions are likely to require legislative changes, and the drafting and implementation of legal changes take time and requires significant political will. Indeed, D8 Final recommendations identified the need to prepare an amendment to the law defining the role of integration coordinator at school and allowing the free subject of non-formal education to be counted as part of the compulsory curriculum.

2.3. Added value

Added value is the extent to which the project adds value compared to other actions in the integration area of non-formal and formal learning in Estonia. There is additional value resulting from the project activities, compared to other developments in non-formal and formal learning in Estonia and broader education policy. Also, the issues addressed by the project continue to require action by the Estonian stakeholders (as discussed under section 3.1 Relevance). The added value from the project has been identified in the key informant interviews and the beneficiary survey. As shown in the Figure below, most respondents to the final survey agree or strongly agree on three aspects of the added value from the project, in terms of the project focussing the political attention, providing a framework for the reform and external expert support to drive the reform. Less agreement was on the added value aspect of providing accountability to drive the reform. This echoes the views expressed in the interim evaluation (see Annex 3).

Figure 7 Views of project beneficiaries: what main added value of the project do you see? To what extent do you agree with the following statements

	It has put the challenge of integrating non-formal and formal learning into the focus of the policy and stakeholder discussions	It has provided a framework and plan of action to develop the concrete reforms	It has provided external expert support to drive the reform plans	It has provided more accountability to drive the reform
Strongly agree	7	7	6	2
Agree	15	13	10	7
Neither agree nor disagree	1	1	3	7
Disagree	0	1	0	2
Strongly disagree	0	0	0	1
Don't know	0	1	4	4

Source: Beneficiary survey (final evaluation), 2023. N=23. The figure shows the number of respondents per response category.

For key informants, the key added value aspects of the project related to the boost it provided in terms of bringing the challenges to the focus in the debate and boosting the efforts to address the challenges in a systematic and collective way involving all the key stakeholders. Prior to such a national scale project, there were local projects and attempts for such integration. However, the project has allowed to discuss and work out the reform proposals applicable to the whole system, going beyond the initial focus on the accreditation of non-formal learning. It also brought together systematically and over time the wide range of Estonian stakeholders involved, allowing the different groups to hear each other out and develop further their understandings of the integration. As put by one stakeholder, *"it is a very good idea to have this bigger project and involve international experts and have proper discussions about this theme to bring this more into focus and identify what are the reasons we see so little successful integration" (A project stakeholder).*

2.4. Coherence

Coherence is assessed as the extent to which the project activities and outcomes are coherent with other education and non-formal learning policies in Estonia. Overall, **the evidence shows that the project has made attempts to improve its coherence with other relevant developments in the education system in Estonia**. This has been identified as a concern at the interim stage. On one hand, the project is firmly rooted in the framework of the education system in Estonia, through its strong ownership through the Ministry of Education and Research and the participation of the range of relevant stakeholders in the project activities. Indeed, the first D1 of the project was aimed to root the project by assessing the existing framework for the integration in Estonia. This is also confirmed in some key informant interviews. In addition, the analysis of the final project Deliverables shows that they made links with the existing education tools and mechanisms (e.g. digital register, training of formal and non-formal education teachers).

On the other hand, some stakeholders interviewed pointed out a risk of a silo approach in the individual project as such. In their view, there was a need to better connect the project activities with other ongoing activities to integrate the non-formal and formal learning in other education sectors in Estonia, and in existing frameworks at the local level. This mixed evidence is also echoed in the beneficiary survey responses. At the interim stage, the respondents were equally split in their views on how coherent the project is with other similar activities in Estonia (see Figure 8 below). The positive opinion on improved coherence of the project emerges in the final survey responses, where the majority thought that the project is coherent with other activities in this field in Estonia.

Figure 8 Views of project beneficiaries: How coherent do you think the project is with other activities in non-formal and formal education in Estonia?
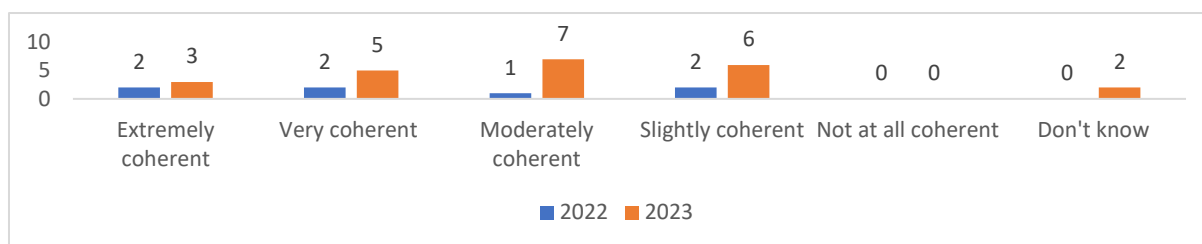
Source: Beneficiary survey (interim evaluation), 2022. N=7. Beneficiary survey (final evaluation), 2023. N=23. The figure shows the number of respondents per response category.

2.5. Efficiency

Efficiency assesses the extent to which the project has used the least costly resources to realise the desired results, when examining the outputs in relation to the inputs. Whilst the budgetary information on the project cost was not used, the overall prevailing view of the key informants interviewed was that the project was implemented in an efficient way, with appropriate planning and flexibility to adjust the implementation according to the needs and requirements emerging. As an example, the decision to switch the language of deliverables into Estonian (from original English) was mentioned as an appropriate reaction to work efficiently, enabling the Estonian stakeholders to have a closer say in commenting on the project deliverables. Also, the decisions to hold most meetings online and focus face to face meetings on interactions with key project stakeholders enabled a good use of travel budget in the project to focus on the core activities, engagement with stakeholders and avoid unnecessary travel.

2.6. Sustainability

Sustainability assesses the extent to which the project outcomes are likely to be sustained after the end of the EU funded technical support to the Estonian stakeholders. The analysis of final project Deliverables shows that the Estonian stakeholders have taken onboard the recommendations from the project for further reform. The Ministry of Education and Research has adopted a set of concrete follow-up activities, building on the project Deliverables. Their implementation will be supported through using ESF+ funding. It is appropriate that a general time-bound, concrete, measurable and specific target is set[7], and concrete activities are underpinned by actions, timetable covering the multi-annual perspective 2023-2028 and specific commitments (see Table 5). Furthermore, a communication and outreach strategy drafted in Deliverable 9 will support the dissemination of project results to a wider range of stakeholders. In this way, it is likely that the benefits of the project continue after the finalisation of project outputs and outcomes. At the same time, it can be expected that the follow-up activities of the Ministry of Education and Research will sustain the momentum and provide leadership for the reform and implementation of recommendations. However, attention needs to be paid that the other key stakeholders, especially the local governments, pro-actively participate and concretely follow up the project recommendations. This is an area to be reviewed in the project follow-up survey (see Recommendation 2, section 3.2).

Table 5: Policy recommendations and follow-up activities from the project

Type of stakeholder	Recommendations (as per D8, version end June 2023)	Follow – up activities by the Ministry, in the ESF+ project

---

[7] The specific and measurable target set is as follows: "As a result of the activity, by 2029 at the latest in every Estonian local government with at least 1 elementary school or high school, there will be a systematic integration between formal education provider and non-formal education provider. This is achieved through the support of FE-NFE integration mentors, the creation and distribution of instructional materials, updating the curricula of the fields of interest and raising general awareness."

State	1. Develop principles, guidance materials and support measures for the integration of FL and NFL 2. Establish a common digital education register for FL and NFL Prepare amendments to legislation that allow optional subjects to be recognised as a part of the compulsory curriculum To organise joint trainings for general education schools and NFL organisations on the integration of FL and NFL (incl. trainings for integration coordinators). 3. Monitor and assess the progress and success of the policy change in the integration of FL and NFL. 4. To support the development of the professional system of informal education and to continue popularising the professional system of youth work	1. Manual/instructional material for integrating FL and NFL 2. Setting up and coordination of FL-NFL mentor system 3. Form and content description of NFL curricula 4. Open application round for the support of projects of cooperation groups of local governments to promote the implementation activities of the integration of FL-NFL 5. FL-NFL integration conferences
Local governments	7.To make the integration of FL and NFL a priority for local governments in the development plans in the field of education and youth, while monitoring and analysing the progress and success of the integration. 8.Establish and fund the role of integration coordinator as a separate position in schools. 9.Ensure opportunities for young people with fewer opportunities to participate in the NFL. 10.Map out the region's NFL opportunities and lead networking meetings between NFL providers and schools.	
Non-formal education providers	11.To support youth workers in obtaining the qualification of a youth worker (information, enabling participation in training, linking the wage system to the qualification) 12.To participate in the development of guidelines for the description of the learning outcomes of the NFL and the structure of the curricula of the FL and NFL and their comparison.	
Formal education providers	13. Set out the principles and organisation of completing and recognising compulsory, elective and optional subjects through NFL in the curriculum of general education schools 14.Enhance the internal coordination of integration and appoint an integration coordinator at school. 15.To address learning outcomes from NFL more broadly in the school curricula, building bridges with the general competences of the curriculum.	

Source: draft Deliverable 8, communications from the Ministry of Education and Research. Abbreviations: non-formal education (NFL) and formal learning (FL).

Based on the interviews with the key informants, a set of the main factors that have led to the Project outcomes becoming sustainable are identified as follows:

- The project final recommendations were developed sequentially, based on the evidence collected, assessed and discussed with the project stakeholders. This evidence base emerged gradually during the project and built sequentially on the previous Deliverables. Hence, the final set of recommendations is a logical outcome of the project activities rooted in the evidence base.

- The project final recommendations and Deliverables were developed in a highly inclusive process whereby they were shared, discussed, and validated with a wide range of project stakeholders. This ensured that the key stakeholders had a say in the process of defining the reform options and concrete recommendations. At the same time, reflection should be given as to the timing of publishing all project deliverables, for the future projects (see Lesson 2, section 3.2). In the Estonian case, the Ministry of Education and Research has committed to full transparency and publishing all the project deliverables. Consideration should be given whether in the future this should occur as and when the deliverables are finalised, to disseminate and respond to the stakeholder interest.

- It was important in the project implementation that the evidence base included a reflection on the international experiences with the integration. As put by one stakeholder, *"it opened our eyes"* and allowed to see that the Estonian reform is unique internationally in trying to achieve the integration at the system level. The inputs of international experts and experiences from other countries were appreciated by the key stakeholders as bringing value and supporting the successful delivery of project activities and outcomes.

3.Lessons learnt and recommendations

This section firstly addresses the follow up to the recommendations identified at the interim evaluation stage, and then concludes with overall lessons learnt from the project to inform the delivery of similar projects in the future.

3.1. The recommendations from the interim evaluation

On the basis of the interim evaluation findings, a number of recommendations were formulated and communicated to the project team. At the final stage, as shown in Table 6, they have been largely taken onboard and implemented in the final stage of project activities.

Table 6 – How the interim evaluation recommendations were addressed

Recommendations	Concrete ways to implement	Follow up by the project team
Recommendation 1: secure more prominently the voice of young people and their parents in the project	• Involve young people and parents explicitly in the piloting activities in the municipalities • Develop communication activities about the project targeting young people and parents (fun and engaging)	• Extra effort was made to encourage young people to participate in meetings and project activities such as piloting. This remained a challenge • Students and parents have been identified as specific target groups for the communication and outreach strategy D9. The strategy in D9 provides recommendations for how the project results should be communicated to these groups.
Recommendation 2: address the risk of compressing the process of validating and developing the guidelines, piloting, and developing a reform plan into a short time period during the second phase of the project	• The project timetable for the remaining period needs to ensure that the outstanding activities are scheduled within sufficient time • Delays to collecting stakeholder feedback and genuinely working together to develop joint documents need to be planned and accounted for in the timetable and planning of time allocation to the project	• The outstanding Deliverables were scheduled in parallel and flexibly to ensure compliance with the overall timetable • Extra time was allowed when needed to provide feedback and comments from stakeholders
Recommendation 3: integrate better and share information between different activities in the Ministry on the topic of integration of non-formal and formal learning also in other education sectors (such as higher education)	• Information on other similar projects could become a standard item in the project governance meetings • Distribute the information to the project Working Group members	• There is less evidence of this in the project meeting minutes and communications

Source: interim evaluation report.

3.2. Overall lessons learnt and recommendations

The key lessons learnt are formulated as follows.

Lesson 1: how to involve final beneficiaries? Extra emphasis needs to be given to ensure the participation of final beneficiaries of such projects, in this case, young people and their parents. It is challenging to ensure their participation and pro-active measures need to be taken to hear their voice amongst other stakeholders, including policy-makers and authorities (such as for example giving the final beneficiaries more seats in the project activities).

Lesson 2: how to communicate and disseminate? A reflection needs to be taken at which points and how to communicate the projects' activities and publish its deliverables. In this project, most Deliverables will be published, at the end of project duration, which is a welcome step in terms of transparency and accountability. At the same time, consideration should be made whether it would be more beneficial to publish the project deliverables as they are finalised and inform the stakeholders accordingly throughout the duration of the project.

Lesson 3: how to structure project deliverables? They need to be short, succinct and focussed on the main messages, to be read and useful for time-short policy-makers. The main findings can be accompanied by longer reports summarising the evidence base and research process. This needs to be agreed in advance in the project team and expectations clarified. Also, the language issue is crucial, and the project team needs to make a decision which language to use in the deliverables to balance the needs of local policy-makers and stakeholders and inputs required from the international experts.

Lesson 4: how to draft policy recommendations? They need to be based in the evidence collected during the project and evolve sequentially throughout the project, based also on stakeholder inputs. The recommended actions should be structured by the order of priority, identifying which actions are critical to implement first and which can be optional or for the medium term. The actions should also be ordered sequentially so that their order of implementation is clear to the stakeholders involved.

With this in mind, the following recommendations are formulated.

Recommendation 1: project activities have shown that the Estonian attempt to integrate formal and non-formal learning at a system level is a unique experience internationally. Thus, the Estonian stakeholders could act internationally as the "Ambassadors" in this respect. This could be supported further by the EC with respect to disseminating project results at the European level.

Recommendation 2: A follow-up survey of the project is planned in the medium term. In it, it would be important to take stock how the Ministry of Education and Research, but also other stakeholders, especially the local municipalities, are implementing the project recommendations and follow up actions.

Annexes

Annex 1 Evaluation framework and methodological approach

Evaluation criteria	Evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Means of verification (data sources and methods)
Relevance: Extent to which the activities to date and planned are appropriate to the priorities of the target group of stakeholders, the education policy developments in Estonia	■ To what extent are the project activities still relevant? ■ To what extent have the (original) project objectives proven to have been appropriate? ■ How well do the (original) objectives (still) correspond to the target groups' needs in Estonia? ■ How relevant is the project to the different target groups affected?	■ Project objectives are pertinent to needs, problems and issues in the policy area of integrating non-formal and formal learning in Estonia, which have been identified	■ Analysis of project documentation ■ Analysis of consultations with key informants and project beneficiaries
Effectiveness Extent to which the Project is achieving its objectives and expected three outcomes and is expected to continue to do so	■ To what extent are the planned activities implemented successfully? ■ What core achievements from the Project are noted in relation to the three main outcomes planned? ■ Have the key risks / challenges and success factors been appropriately identified in the planning and implementation of the Project activities?	■ The planned activities demonstrate sufficiently good planning to ensure their effective delivery	■ Analysis of project documentation ■ Observation of project meetings ■ Analysis of consultations with key informants and project beneficiaries
Efficiency Extent to which the Project uses the least costly resources to realise the desired results, when examining the outputs in relation to the inputs	■ To what extent has the process of producing and disseminating the Project outputs and outcomes been cost effective? ■ To what extent are the costs involved justified, given the changes/effects which have been achieved?	■ The resources deployed were appropriate to the scale of activities and the costs are reasonable vs. outputs achieved	■ Analysis of project documentation ■ Analysis of consultations with key informants and project beneficiaries
Coherence Extent to which the project activities and outcomes are coherent with other education and non-formal learning policies in Estonia	■ To what extent are the project activities coherent with other main policy and contextual developments in Estonia? ■ To what extent has the project adopted to reflect any changes in the context and policy framework in Estonia?	■ Project is highly coherent with other policy initiatives and works in synergies with its context	■ Analysis of project documentation ■ Observation of project meetings ■ Analysis of consultations with key informants and project beneficiaries
Added value Extent to which the Project adds value compared to other	■ What is the additional value resulting from the project activities, compared to other developments in non-formal and	■ The elements of added value are clearly articulated,	■ Analysis of project documentation

Evaluation criteria	Evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Means of verification (data sources and methods)
actions in the integration area of non-formal and formal learning in Estonia	formal learning in Estonia and broader education policy? ■ To what extent do the issues addressed by the project continue to require action by the Estonian stakeholders?	acknowledged by stakeholders and demonstrated by the key evaluation findings.	■ Analysis of consultations with key informants and project beneficiaries
Sustainability Extent to which the project outcomes are likely to be sustained after the end of the EU funded technical support	■ Will the benefits of the Project continue after the finalisation of project outputs and outcomes? ■ What are the main factors that have led to the Project outcomes becoming sustainable or not?	■ Results from Project are likely to continue in the short and long term	■ Analysis of project documentation ■ Analysis of consultations with key informants and project beneficiaries

Methodological approach of the evaluation

As noted in the Better Regulation Guidelines, evaluation goes beyond an assessment on what has happened, and considers why, how and to what extent the outputs and outcomes have occurred[8]. Thus, the evaluation covers the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, sustainability and added value of the project, in line with the evaluation criteria defined in the Better Regulation Guidelines[9]. An evaluation framework used in the evaluation is presented in Annex 1, linking evaluation criteria to specific evaluation questions, and these to judgment (or success) criteria and specific data sources. The evaluator undertook the following activities to prepare the final report:

- Reviewed and integrated the findings from the interim evaluation report, which was provided in Q4 of 2022, and reflected the assessment of the progress of the project to date, based on the document review, preliminary interviews with stakeholders, and interim beneficiary survey.
- As part of the evaluation, the evaluator reviewed and assessed the main project deliverables (Deliverables 1-9). Additional desk-research was undertaken to examine the minutes from the project meetings.
- The evaluator undertook qualitative in-depth interviews with key informants (selected by the evaluator amongst project stakeholders in the Project Board, Steering Committee and Working Group (consisting of around 40 stakeholders), such as the Ministry of Education, the local governments, trade unions) during the life of the project. These have provided rich qualitative data on the different elements of the evaluation criteria –and also including success of the project on the various respects identified in the intervention logic. The interviewee details are included in Annex 2. Interviews were undertaken both at the interim and final evaluation stage.
- The evaluator also attended several Steering Group meetings, to inform the examination of the project process and governance dynamics and presented a short overview of the evaluation findings.
- During May and June 2023, the evaluator launched the final survey of beneficiaries, to gather their views on the project process and the utility of its outputs to date. The survey was based on largely

---

[8] See swd2021_305_en.pdf (europa.eu), p. 23.
[9] See swd2021_305_en.pdf (europa.eu), p. 26.

closed questions. The survey was hosted in an easily accessible survey platform Qualtrics, which also enables completion via mobile phone, and was translated into Estonian. The full beneficiary survey is included in Annex 3. The survey was undertaken both at the interim and final evaluation stage, and their findings are compared in the report.

Annex 2: List of interviews conducted for the evaluation

1. Official, Ministry of Education and Research
2. Official, Ministry of Education and Research
3. Official, Ministry of Education and Research
4. Official, European Commission
5. Official, local municipality
6. Official, local municipality
7. Official, local municipality
8. Official, Education trade union
9. Head, non-formal learning provider
10. Head, non-formal learning provider
11. Teacher, non-formal learning provider
12. Teacher, non-formal learning provider
13. Member of the contractor team
14. Member of the contractor team

Annex 3: Beneficiary survey results – interim evaluation

The online survey was translated into Estonian and distributed to the wide membership of the Working Group of the project between August and September 2022 (42 members). In total, 7 responses were received.

Q1 Your name (optional)

The answers are kept confidential.

Q2 Your job title (optional)

No responses were provided.

Q3. What type of organisation do you work for?
Most respondents work for the national ministry, with single respondents from hobby education, formal education and a local municipality.
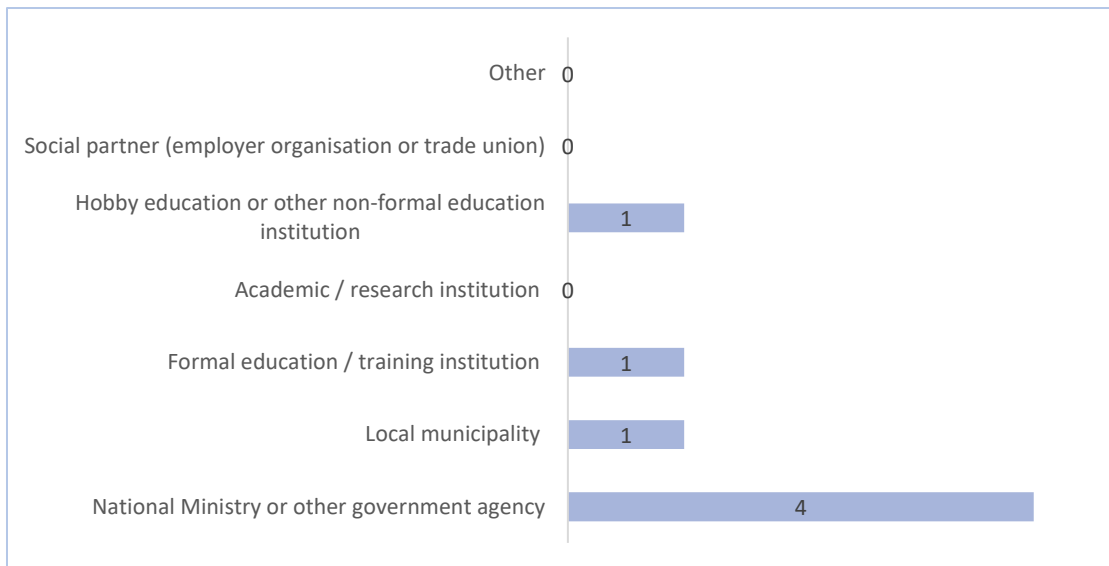
N=7.

Q4. How familiar are you with the project?
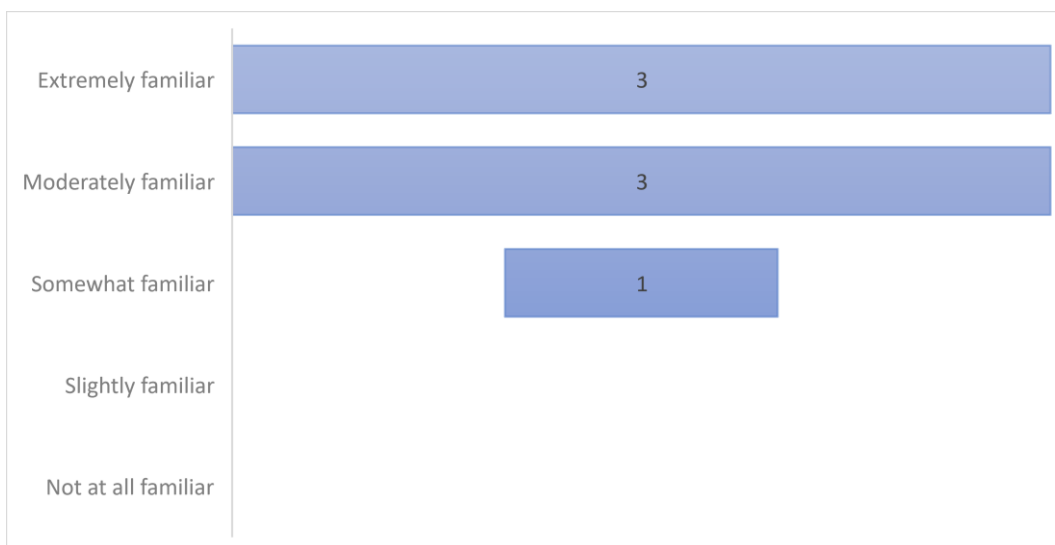
N=7.

Q5. Which of the following project deliverables are you aware of / have you been participating in?

Q6. By establishing the project, the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research has responded well to the needs to better integrate non-formal and formal learning. Do you agree with this statement?
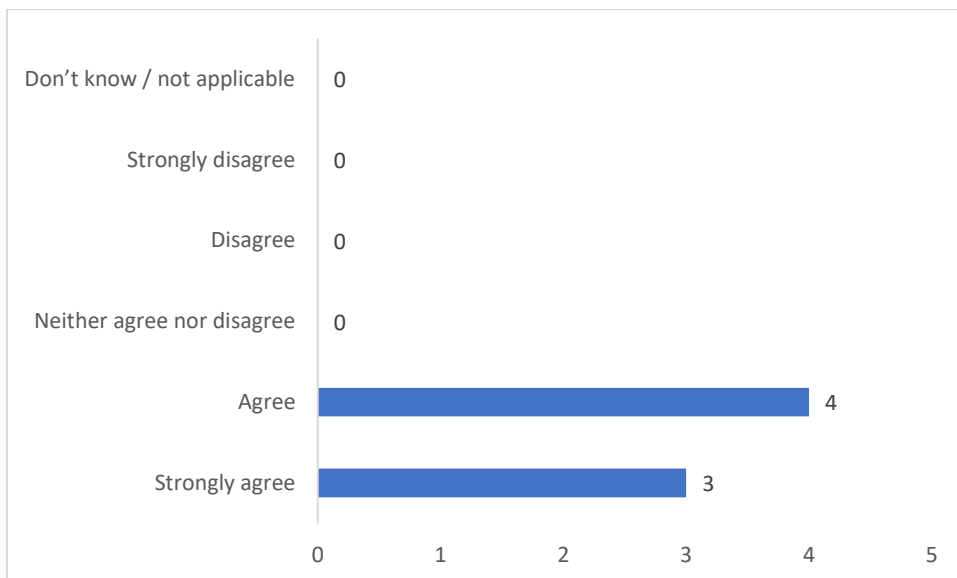
Q7. The project aims to address various challenges in the implementation of the integration of non-formal and formal learning at the level of the education system. How relevant do you think these challenges are in the context of your work?
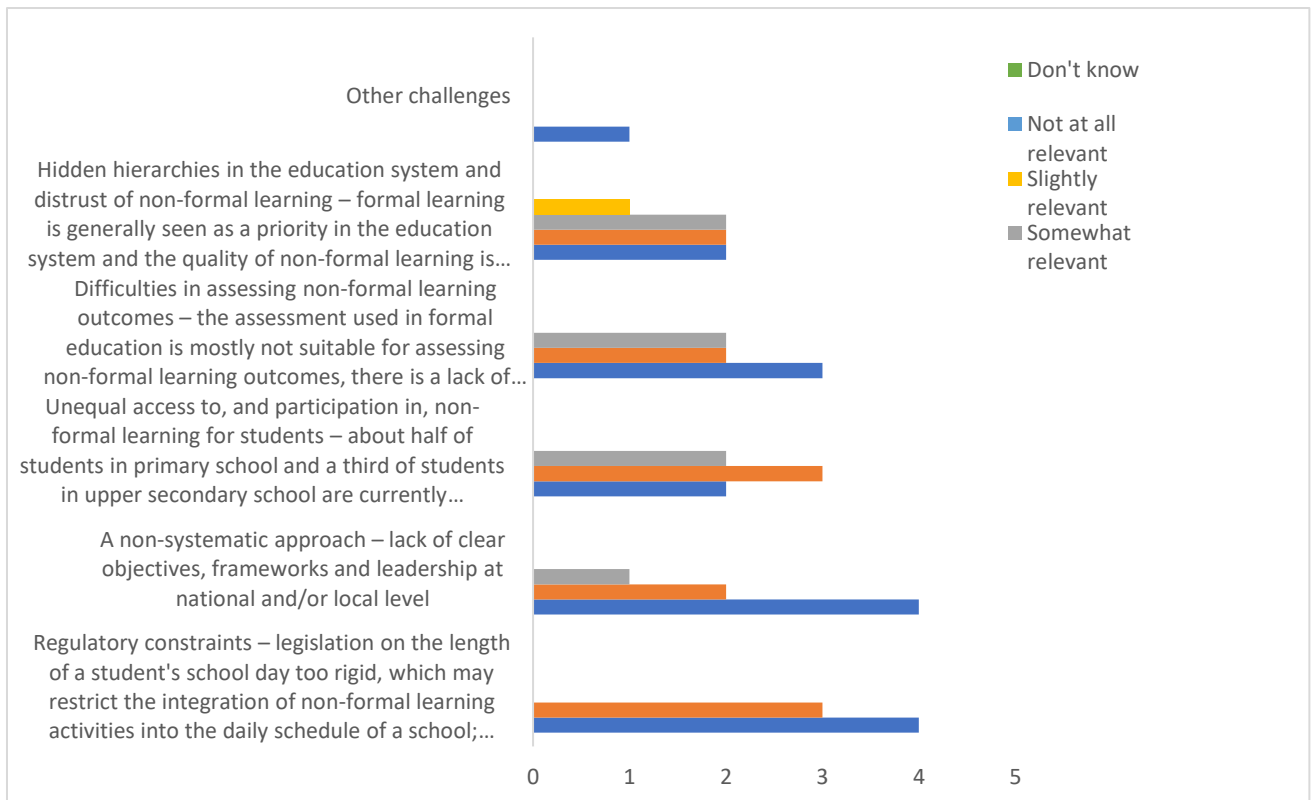
Open text:

1) koolid/õpetajad on liiga ülekoormatud lõimisega tegelemiseks, vastavaid õpilaste mentoreid vm tugipersonali napib 2) üldharidus on rahastatud riigieelarvest, huviharidus KOV eelarvest. Kui huviharidus võtab rohkem rolli, siis riigi raha KOVile ei liigu. 3) liiga mehhaaniline lähenemine lõimisele, nt muusikaõpetus outsource'tud huvikoolist.

1) schools/teachers are too overburdened to deal with the gap, there is a shortage of appropriate student mentors or other support staff 2) general education is funded from the state budget, recreational education from the local authority budget. If VET takes on a bigger role, no state money will go to the LAs. 3) too mechanical approach to integration, e.g. music education outsourced from a leisure school.

Pärnus oleme kohalikul tasandil oluliselt kaugemale jõudnud kui riigis üldiselt. In Pärnu, we have come much further at local level than in the country as a whole.

Q8. How well have the concrete project deliverables been implemented to date?

Deliverable 5: Preliminary recommendations for legislation and policy
Deliverable 4: Impact assessment including cost-benefit analysis
Deliverable 3: Online peer exchange with experts from other countries, and a study visit to Finland
Deliverable 2: Analytical report on relevant examples of policy and practice from other countries
Deliverable 1: Analytical report on the integration of non-formal and formal learning in Estonia
Project Board/Steering Group/ Working Group meetings

0 1 2 3 4 5

Legend: ■ Don't know ■ Very poor ■ Poor ■ Fair ■ Well ■ Very well

Q9. Based on your knowledge, how well have the main risks to the project success been identified and addressed?

Lack of resources and/or personnel changes in the project
External conditions that hamper the implementation of the project or the…
Technical issues during the project meetings
Inability to organise project meetings and activities
Failure to involve relevant stakeholders
Insufficient quality of project deliverables

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

Legend: ■ Don't know ■ Very poor ■ Poor ■ Fair ■ Well ■ Very well

Q10. The project relies on the coordination and cooperation between a range of stakeholders in Estonia. How well is the interaction with the main stakeholders organised?

Q11. How many stars would you give to the support provided by the contractor (ICF, in collaboration with Praxis, Tallinn University and Civitta Estonia) so far?   5 stars=excellent, 1 star=poor. If you don't know please leave this blank.
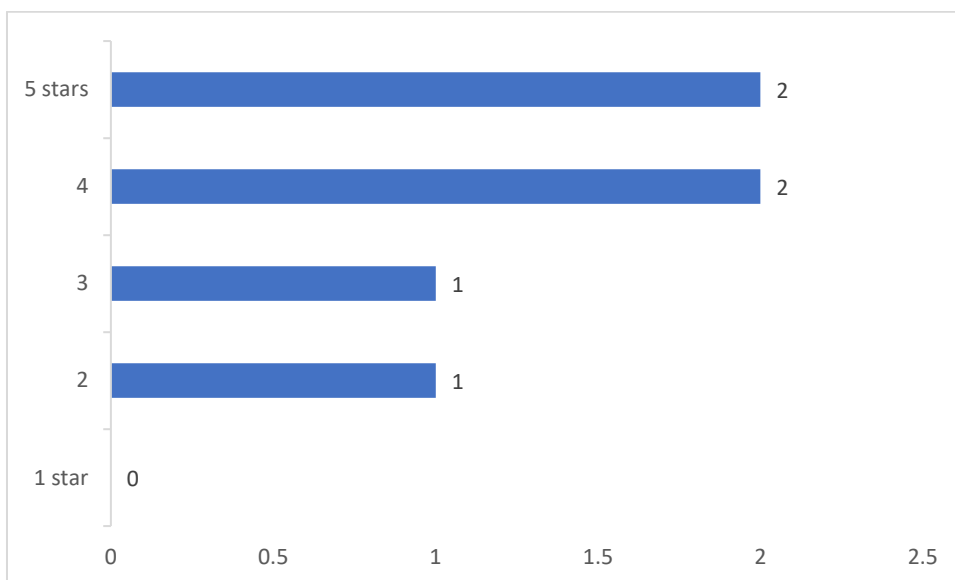
N-6.

Q12. How coherent do you think the project is with other activities in non-formal and formal education in Estonia?
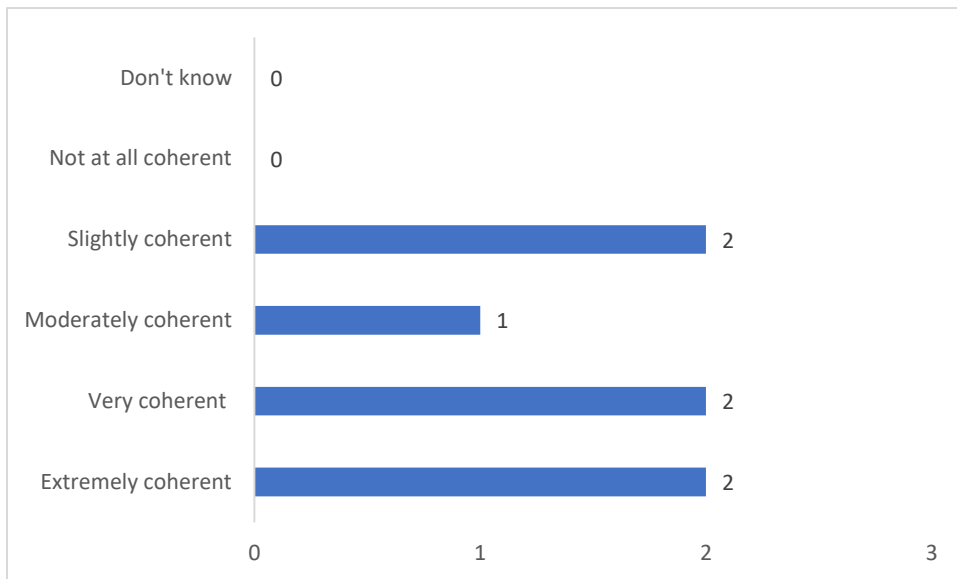
Q13. What main added value of the project do you see? To what extent do you agree with the following statements
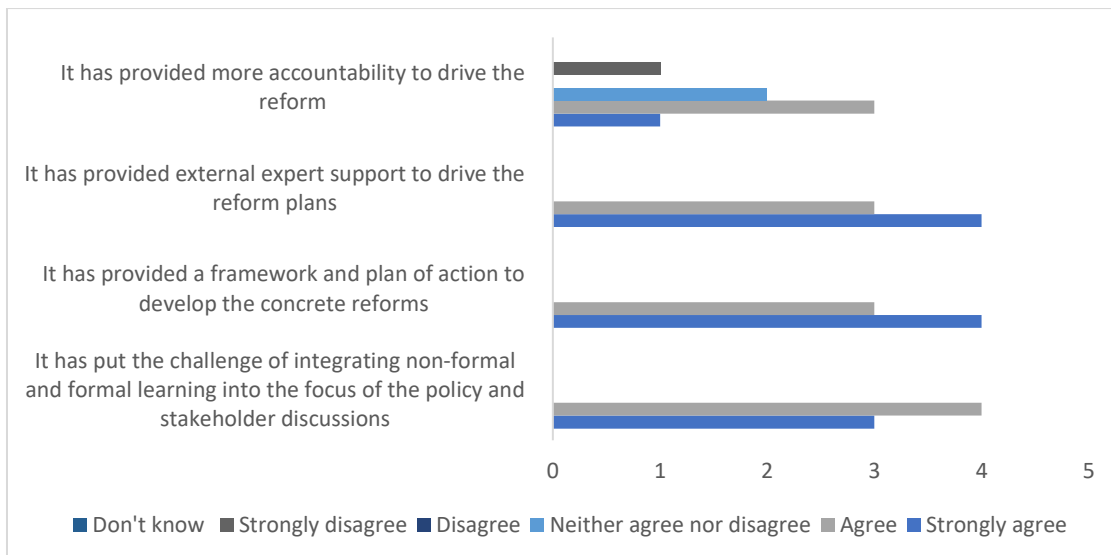
Q14. How can project deliverables and implementation be improved to better support stakeholders in designing, developing and implementing reforms to better integrate non-formal and formal learning?

Rohkem alategevustesse kaasata, praegu ei saa hästi aru, kuidas ma peale töörühma koosolekutel osalemise reaalselt saan panustada.

Get more involved in sub-activities, at the moment I don't really see how I can contribute beyond attending working group meetings.

Töö edenemine töörühma kohtumiste vahepealsel ajal on teadmata. Ilmselt tasub teha eraldi praktikute (mitteformaal ja formaalhariduse andjatega) kohtumisi (vabandan, kui neid on tehtuid), et mõista just praktiliselt vaatest probleeme. Regulatsioonide vastavusse viimine ei peaks probleemne olema, kuid ilmselt on probleemne just praktiline tasand.

The progress of the work in the intervening period between working group meetings is unknown. It is probably worth doing separate practitioner (non-formal and formal educators) meetings (apologies if these have been done) to understand the issues from a practical perspective. Alignment of regulations should not be a problem, but it is probably the practical level that is the problem.

Minule hetkel tundub, et projekti on kaasatud ministeerium, kõrgkoolid ja huvikoolid, kuid välja ja tahaplaanile on jäänud formaalharidust pakkuvad koolid. Nendel puudub hetkel ülevaade, et selline projekt ja lõimimise soov üldse riigil on.

At the moment, it seems to me that the ministry, higher education institutions and schools of interest are involved in the project, but that formal schools have been left out and in the background. At the moment, they have no idea that the state even has such a project and a desire for integration.

Praeguseks hetkeks ei ole projekti väljundid veel sellisel kujul, et saaks hinnata, mida saaks paremini teha. Oleme ministeeriumi sees näinud esialgset varianti mõjude analüüsist, millele tegime väga põhjaliku tagasisidestamise just seetõttu, et meil oli raskusi näha D4 raporti praktilist väärtust.

At this stage, the outputs of the project are not yet in a form that allows an assessment of what could be done better. We have seen a preliminary draft of the impact analysis within the ministry, to which we gave very thorough feedback precisely because we had difficulty seeing the practical value of the D4 report.

Suurte ja väikeste omavalitsuste vajadused on erinevad ning seda on vaja konkreetsemalt silmas pidada. Üks universaalne mudel ei pruugi sobida kõigile. Soovitaksin kaasata ka lapsevanemaid, kes on selle protsessi seni ehk märkamata võtmetoimija.

The needs of large and small municipalities are different, and need to be more specifically addressed. One-size-fits-all may not be appropriate. I would also recommend involving parents, who are perhaps a key player in this process that has so far been overlooked.

Q15. Do you have any other views about the project that you wish to share with the evaluator?

Ei, arvan, et see on vajalik projekt.

No, I think it is a necessary project.
Riigi algatused samas valdkonnas võiks olla omavahel paremini integreeritud ja kommunikatsioon tugevam. Hetkel tundub, et HTM on tellinud ülikoolidelt nii lõimimise andmebaasi loomise kui ka poliitilised soovitused, aga projekti tegijad üksteise tegemistega liiga palju kursis ei ole. Tänan kaasamast projekti!

National initiatives in the same field could be better integrated and communication stronger. At the moment, it seems that the PES has commissioned universities to create an integration database as well as policy recommendations, but the project promoters are not too familiar with each other's activities. Thanks for getting involved in the project!

Annex 4: Beneficiary survey results – final evaluation
The online survey was translated into Estonian and distributed to the wide membership of the Working Group of the project between May and June 2023 (42 members). In total, 23 responses were received.

Q1 Your name (optional)

The answers are kept confidential.

Q2 Your job title (optional)

The answers are kept confidential.

Q3 What type of organisation do you work for?	Base		23
	National Ministry or other government agency		7
	Local municipality		7
	Formal education / training institution		3
	Academic / research institution		0
	Hobby education or other non-formal education institution		6
	Social partner (employer organisation or trade union)		0
	Other		0

Q4 How familiar are you with the project?	Base		23
	Extremely familiar		3
	Moderately familiar		12
	Somewhat familiar		6
	Slightly familiar		2
	Not at all familiar		0

Q 5 Which of the following project deliverables are you aware of / have you been participating in?	Base		23
	Project Board / Steering Committee / Working Group meetings		15
	Deliverable 1: Analytical report on the integration of non-formal and formal learning in Estonia		13
	Deliverable 2: Analytical report on relevant examples of policy and practice from other countries		12
	Deliverable 3: Online peer exchange with experts from other countries, and a study visit to Finland		6
	Deliverable 4: Impact assessment including cost-benefit analysis		4
	Deliverable 5: Preliminary recommendations for legislation and policy		12
	Base		16
	Deliverable 6: Co-creation of Guidelines for the integration of formal and non-formal learning		12
	Deliverable 7: Report from the piloting of the Guidelines		7
	Deliverable 8: Final recommendations on legislation and policy, and recommendations on implementation		3
	Deliverable 9: Communication and outreach strategy		0

Q6 By establishing the project, the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research has	Base		23
	Strongly agree		7
	Agree		15
	Neither agree nor disagree		1
	Disagree		0
	Strongly disagree		0
	Don't know / not applicable		0

responded well to the needs to better integrate non-formal and formal learning. Do you agree with this statement?				

Q7 The project aims to address various challenges in the implementation of the integration of non-formal and formal learning at the level of the education system. How relevant do you think these challenges are in the context of your work?	A non-systematic approach – lack of clear objectives, frameworks and leadership at national and/or local level	Base		23
		Extremely relevant		15
		Moderately relevant		6
		Somewhat relevant		2
		Slightly relevant		0
		Not at all relevant		0
		Don't know / not applicable		0
	Hidden hierarchies in the education system and distrust of non-formal learning – formal learning is generally seen as a priority in the education system and the quality of non-formal learning is sometimes distrusted due to a lack of clear quality criteria and competence requirements for instructors	Base		23
		Extremely relevant		10
		Moderately relevant		6
		Somewhat relevant		4
		Slightly relevant		3
		Not at all relevant		0
		Don't know / not applicable		0
	Unequal access to, and participation in, non-formal learning for students –	Base		23
		Extremely relevant		12
		Moderately relevant		7
		Somewhat relevant		4
		Slightly relevant		0
		Not at all relevant		0

about half of students in primary school and a third of students in upper secondary school are currently enrolled in non-formal learning, and non-formal learning opportunities are often provided at a cost to households and unevenly provided across municipalities	Don't know / not applicable			0
Regulatory constraints – legislation on the length of a student's school day is considered too rigid, which may restrict the integration of non-formal learning activities into the daily schedule of a school; there is also limited freedom of choice for pupils in grade 3 of primary school and in schools where the language of instruction is Russian	Base			23
	Extremely relevant			11
	Moderately relevant			7
	Somewhat relevant			4
	Slightly relevant			1
	Not at all relevant			0
	Don't know / not applicable			0
Difficulties in assessing non-formal learning	Base			23
	Extremely relevant			9
	Moderately relevant			6

	outcomes – the assessment used in formal education is mostly not suitable for assessing non-formal learning outcomes, there is a lack of common agreements and frameworks, including procedures and documentation	Somewhat relevant		7
		Slightly relevant		1
		Not at all relevant		0
		Don't know / not applicable		0
	Other challenges (please specify)	Base		5
		Extremely relevant		5
		Moderately relevant		0
		Somewhat relevant		0
		Slightly relevant		0
		Not at all relevant		0
		Don't know / not applicable		0

Q8 How well have the concrete project deliverables been implemented?	Project Board / Steering Committee / Working Group meetings	Base		23
		Very well		2
		Well		10
		Fair		5
		Poor		0
		Very poor		0
		Don't know / not applicable		6
	Deliverable 1: Analytical report on the integration of non-formal and formal learning in Estonia	Base		23
		Very well		3
		Well		7
		Fair		3
		Poor		1
		Very poor		1
		Don't know / not applicable		8
	Deliverable 2: Analytical report on relevant examples of policy and	Base		23
		Very well		2
		Well		7
		Fair		3
		Poor		1

	practice from other countries	Very poor		1
		Don't know / not applicable		9
	Deliverable 3: Online peer exchange with experts from other countries, and a study visit to Finland	Base		23
		Very well		0
		Well		3
		Fair		2
		Poor		0
		Very poor		1
		Don't know / not applicable		17
	Deliverable 4: Impact assessment including cost-benefit analysis	Base		23
		Very well		1
		Well		0
		Fair		3
		Poor		1
		Very poor		1
		Don't know / not applicable		17
	Deliverable 5: Preliminary recommendations for legislation and policy	Base		23
		Very well		2
		Well		5
		Fair		4
		Poor		0
		Very poor		2
		Don't know / not applicable		10
	Deliverable 6: Co-creation of Guidelines for the integration of formal and non-formal learning	Base		16
		Very well		2
		Well		4
		Fair		5
		Poor		1
		Very poor		1
		Don't know / not applicable		3
	Deliverable 7: Report from the piloting of the Guidelines	Base		16
		Very well		2
		Well		5
		Fair		2
		Poor		0
		Very poor		1
		Don't know / not applicable		6
	Deliverable 8: Final recommendations on legislation and	Base		16
		Very well		3
		Well		0
		Fair		3

	policy, and recommendations on implementation	Poor		0
		Very poor		1
		Don't know / not applicable		9
	Deliverable 9: Communication and outreach strategy	Base		16
		Very well		0
		Well		1
		Fair		3
		Poor		1
		Very poor		1
		Don't know / not applicable		10

Q9 Based on your knowledge, how well have the main risks to the project success been identified and addressed?	Insufficient quality of project deliverables	Base		23
		Very well		0
		Well		9
		Fair		4
		Poor		1
		Very poor		0
		Don't know / not applicable		9
	Failure to involve relevant stakeholders	Base		23
		Very well		2
		Well		9
		Fair		4
		Poor		4
		Very poor		1
		Don't know / not applicable		3
	Inability to organise project meetings and activities	Base		23
		Very well		2
		Well		12
		Fair		3
		Poor		3
		Very poor		1
		Don't know / not applicable		2
	Technical issues during the project meetings	Base		23
		Very well		8
		Well		8
		Fair		3
		Poor		0
		Very poor		1
		Don't know / not applicable		3
	External conditions that	Base		23
		Very well		6

	hamper the implementation of the project or the development of participatory actions (e.g. the COVID-19 pandemic)	Well		9
		Fair		3
		Poor		1
		Very poor		0
		Don't know / not applicable		4
	Lack of resources and/or personnel changes in the project	Base		23
		Very well		1
		Well		8
		Fair		5
		Poor		1
		Very poor		2
		Don't know / not applicable		6

Q10 The project relies on the coordination and cooperation between a range of stakeholders in Estonia. How well has the interaction with the main stakeholders been organised?	Base		23
	Very well		3
	Well		9
	Fair		8
	Poor		2
	Very poor		1
	Don't know / not applicable		0

Q11 How many stars would you give to the support provided by the contractor (ICF, in collaboration with Praxis, Tallinn University	Base		18
	1		0
	2		1
	3		3
	4		10
	5		4
	Mean		3.9444

and Civitta Estonia)?			

Q12 How coherent do you think the project is with other activities in non-formal and formal education in Estonia?	Base		23
	Extremely coherent		3
	Very coherent		5
	Moderately coherent		7
	Slightly coherent		6
	Not at all coherent		0
	Don't know / not applicable		2

Q13 What main added value of the project do you see? To what extent do you agree with the following statements	It has put the challenge of integrating non-formal and formal learning into the focus of the policy and stakeholder discussions	Base		23
		Strongly agree		7
		Agree		15
		Neither agree nor disagree		1
		Disagree		0
		Strongly disagree		0
		Don't know / not applicable		0
	It has provided a framework and plan of action to develop the concrete reforms	Base		23
		Strongly agree		7
		Agree		13
		Neither agree nor disagree		1
		Disagree		1
		Strongly disagree		0
		Don't know / not applicable		1
	It has provided external expert support to drive the reform plans	Base		23
		Strongly agree		6
		Agree		10
		Neither agree nor disagree		3
		Disagree		0
		Strongly disagree		0
		Don't know / not applicable		4
	It has provided more accountability	Base		23
		Strongly agree		2
		Agree		7
		Neither agree nor disagree		7

	to drive the reform	Disagree		2
		Strongly disagree		1
		Don't know / not applicable		4
	Other (please specify)	Base		0
		Strongly agree		0
		Agree		0
		Neither agree nor disagree		0
		Disagree		0
		Strongly disagree		0
		Don't know / not applicable		0