Executive Feedback

Title of the evaluation
“SCHOOL ATTENDANCE INITIATIVE” - SCHOOL PARTICIPATION CAMPAIGN IMPLEMENTED BY UNICEF ROMANIA. SUMMATIVE EVALUATION - FINAL REPORT

Sequence No 2018/003
Region ECAR
Office Romania
Coverage Romania

Evaluation Type Programme
Year of Report 2018

OVERALL RATING

[3 stars] Satisfactory

Meets UNICEF/UNEG standards for evaluation reports and decision makers may use the evaluation with confidence

SECTION A: BACKGROUND (weight 5%)

[3 stars] Satisfactory

The report does a good job of presenting a very complete description of the initiative, including a detailed account of the specificities of the intervention throughout different phases of the implementation period. Also, the report provides a complete description of UNICEF’s involvement in the area of strengthening school attendance by Romanian children over the last years. Similarly, target groups and their particular needs are duly discussed as well as the implementing partners with whom UNICEF collaborated and their respective roles. However, the specific financial contribution made by UNICEF is not discussed. The report provides a thorough overview of the socioeconomic, political, demographic, and institutional context in which the initiative took place. The report explains in detail the initiative’s intended results and a logical framework is presented (fig. 2.1). A ToC for each year of the initiative (Annex 8) is also presented but they do not include assumptions and risks associated to each level of the logic chain.

SECTION B: EVALUATION PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE (weight 5%)

[3 stars] Satisfactory
The report explains that the main purpose of the evaluation is to identify the impact of the School Attendance Initiative on dropout prevention and reduction as well as on reducing absenteeism rates in the communities where interventions were carried out. Also, the report explains in much detail what the evaluation intends to achieve, providing a thorough description of the summative nature of the evaluation as well as its intended use and primary end users. Also, the report presents some additional considerations regarding some aspects of the object of evaluation which are not included in the ToRs e.g. the incompleteness of some data and the existence of some distortions in the data collected in previous formative evaluations of SAI. The scope of the evaluation is provided in chronological, thematic and geographic terms, although this is discussed in the object of the evaluation and methodology sections rather than under the section on the scope of the evaluation. Additionally, justifications for the selected scope are not provided.

**SECTION C: EVALUATION METHODOLOGY (weight 15%)**

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<th>Highly Satisfactory</th>
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<td>The evaluation used the standard OECD/DAC criteria (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact, as well as coherence) and the report provides a justification for the inclusion of the latter. Also, the report does a good job at presenting in much detail the quantitative and qualitative methods and tools (i.e. interviews, observations, FGDs, etc. as well as the use of a control group of 29 schools not included in SAI) and thoroughly describes the data analysis and triangulation processes. Furthermore, the methodology section adequately discusses the sampling strategies used. In addition to this, the report is strong at identifying several limitations inherent to the data available for the conduct of the evaluation as well as from the primary data collected during the summative evaluation, and a set of mitigation strategies to these is presented. Finally, the report presents a complete description of the ethical safeguards used in the conduct of the evaluation, including a list of the ethical obligations of the evaluators as well as the evaluation's compliance with the basic principles of the UNICEF Procedures for Ethical Standards and with the UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation.</td>
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**SECTION D: EVALUATION FINDINGS (weight 20%)**

<table>
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<td>The report is strong at presenting robust evidence from different time series and corresponding to different levels to support the findings. Findings are first presented around thematic areas identified as pillars to the SAI where abundant evidence is provided, followed by a sub-section which is dedicated to addressing the key evaluation questions. The report explains the challenges in establishing causality relations between SAI and the outcomes observed. However, with that caveat in mind, it does provide some clues as to the extent to which the SAI contributed to the attainment or non attainment of results. Furthermore, the report provides some examples of negative unintended effects of the intervention but it does not present a full analysis of these. Positive unexpected effects are not identified. Finally, as per the ToRs, the report is strong at assessing the SAI's M&amp;E system and the way it informed and guided decisions made in regards to the implementation of the initiative.</td>
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### SECTION E: EVALUATION CONCLUSIONS & LESSONS LEARNED (weight 15%)

**Satisfactory**

Conclusions are correctly drawn from the findings and they provide a much needed summary of the main elements addressed in the findings section along with a deeper level of analysis that is forward-looking. Conclusions present both strengths and weaknesses of the SAI and also provide a set of foreseeable implications and opportunities for upscaling and replication. On the other hand, lessons learned are not correctly identified as they are embedded within the conclusions as opposed to being presented in a sub-section of their own. While some lessons learned are presented in the case studies (Annex 7), they are not correctly identified.

### SECTION F: RECOMMENDATIONS (weight 15%)

**Satisfactory**

Recommendations are correctly derived from the information presented in the findings and conclusions. They are organized according to the target group for action, i.e. national authorities, local authorities, etc., but the specific ministry or group of interest is not specified. Similarly, the priority level of each recommendation is not clearly indicated. Finally, even if the recommendations section includes a subsection on the process followed in developing the recommendations, this does not actually provide any description of the nature of such process and information such as the ways stakeholders participated in the formulation and validation of the recommendations is missing.

### SECTION G: EVALUATION STRUCTURE/PRESENTATION (weight 5%)

**Satisfactory**

The report conveniently presents the essential information in its opening pages such as the name of the object of the evaluation, names of the evaluators, the commissioning organization, as well as the time period covered by the evaluation and the submission date. Similarly, the annexes contain valuable information that contributes to increasing the credibility of the evaluation and includes information such as the ToRs, a list of people interviewed, additional information on the methodology, etc. On the other hand, the report is excessively lengthy (198 pages) which greatly hinders its usefulness by decision makers. Also, the Evaluation Matrix (Table 2.1) is presented in between the description of the object of evaluation and its context, which is odd.

### SECTION H: EVALUATION PRINCIPLES (weight 15%)

**Satisfactory**
The report is strong at discussing the initiative within a human rights framework and at referencing the CRC. Whereas the report provides an assessment of the way equity considerations guided the implementation of SAI, a similar assessment related to gender is less present in the report. Also, although the report does not provide a clear description of the ways the evaluation set out to collect GEEW-related data, some sex-disaggregated data is included in the analysis and some gender-specific questions are included. The methodology section states that gender was mainstreamed in the design of data collection tools and analysis but the specifics of this are not explained. While the final section of the report is dedicated to gender and human rights, gender is not consistently mainstreamed as a cross-cutting issue throughout the document and the GEEW dimension of the initiative is not adequately addressed. The report also does not explain in enough detail the level of participation of stakeholders in the conduct of the evaluation beyond their role as informants.

SECTION I: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (weight 5%)

Highly Satisfactory

The report includes an executive summary that is concise (5 pages) and presents the most important elements of initiative and the evaluation. It describes the end users, the initiative’s key implementing partners, the methodology used as well as the key evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations. Finally, the executive summary only includes information that is developed in detail in the body of the report.

Does the evaluation meet UN SWAP evaluation performance indicators?

4 Approaches requirements

Recommendations for improvement

This is a high quality report that contains a large amount of information and can be used with confidence by decision-makers. However, it is recommended that the Evaluation Manager set up an Evaluation Reference Group (ERG) or an Evaluation Steering Committee (consisting of key stakeholders) in order to provide the evaluators with guidelines and necessary feedback at key moments of the evaluation, e.g. when the evaluation matrix is developed, revision of draft findings and conclusions, and the development and validation of recommendations. This level of stakeholder engagement helps to ensure that the evaluation is accurate and useful. It is also advisable that the Evaluation Manager ensure that the evaluation report not exceed the 60 pages in order to maximize its usability. In the future, it would be advisable to either synthetize some of the information or include it within the annexes. The Evaluation Manager may also wish to consider providing more specific guidance to the evaluators around the extent to which gender equality considerations should be mainstreamed throughout the evaluation process and report since mainstreaming gender equality in evaluations is a priority for UNICEF and makes part of the GEROS standards.

Lessons for managing future evaluations:
Section A

It is important to provide a complete account of the role and contributions made by all key stakeholders, including financial contributions, in particular, those made by UNICEF. Also, the Theory of Change should ideally include the main risks and assumptions associated to each level of the logic chain which are essential to understanding any process leading towards a desired change.

Section B

It is good practice to not only outline the evaluation scope but to also provide a justification for why this scope was selected.

Section C

This section observes good practices. No further improvement is required.

Section D

It is recommended that a more complete analysis of the unanticipated effects of the intervention be presented, which should ideally include any positive unexpected results.

Section E

Lessons learned are understood as contributions stemming from the assessment of the object of evaluation to institutional knowledge. Correctly identified lessons learned indicate what wider significance and applicability these may have to other initiatives in different contexts. Lesson learned should be formulated as such as ideally presented within their own section.

Section F

Actionable recommendations should indicate the specific target group for action in each case, i.e. ministry, municipal or county level authorities, etc. and not only provide big labels such as "national" or "local authorities." Similarly, recommendations should be clearly prioritized by presenting the most urgent/important ones first or by numbering them when they are numerous. Finally, the process followed in developing and validating the recommendations as well as the rationale used for the level of stakeholder participation in this process should be described in detail so as to increase their usability and credibility.

Section G

It is good practice for an evaluation report to not exceed 60 pages in order to maximize its usefulness and effectively inform end users and decision makers. It is recommended that any extra information be included in the annexes in order to facilitate an easier navigation of the report. Also, the evaluation matrix should be presented in the section that covers the evaluation methodology.
Section H

GEROS standards require a full assessment of how gender equality considerations were considered in the design and implementation of the object of evaluation and evaluation methodologies need to be gender sensitive. This can be done, for instance, by using methodological tools that ensure that both the voices of women/girls and men/boys girls are captured within the assessment and by ensuring that the evaluation process consistently collects and presents sex-disaggregated data. Additionally, a gender analysis should cascade down through the findings, conclusions and recommendations. For more information on how to conduct gender sensitive evaluations, please visit: http://www.betterevaluation.org/en/resources/guide/gender-responsive_evaluation_handbook. Additionally, stakeholders should be engaged throughout the evaluation process, including its design and management to help guide the evaluators and ensure that the evaluation is accurate and useful. An effective way to do this can be through the establishment of an Evaluation Reference Group. To learn more about participatory evaluations, please see: http://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/participatory_evaluation

Section I

The executive summary observes good practices. No further improvement is required.