



THE
GOVERNANCE
GROUP

Extract of the
External Review of
the Nansen Dialogue
Center (NDC)
program in North
Macedonia

(2008-2019)



Executive Summary

The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NMFA) has continuously supported the Nansen Dialogue Centre (NDC) Skopje in North Macedonia since 2008 in the implementation of a number of projects focusing on education for integration and reconciliation. The projects have been implemented in the context of North Macedonia's efforts and challenges in recognising its cultural, ethnic and religious diversity whilst also ensuring peace and social cohesion. Over time, NDC has applied a methodology of integrated and intercultural education (NMIE) in 19 municipalities, involving 27 primary and secondary schools that organise parallel classes in two or more official languages. The joint classes between children of different ethnic groups, taking place once or twice a week in-between the school shifts, provide a unique space for interaction and learning together in two languages. The classes help to develop cooperation, constructive communication, respect and acceptance of diversity amongst one another, and foster logical, flexible and critical thinking. Teachers' capacities are built through an NDC Skopje managed Training Centre, co-founded by the Ministry of Education and Science. In August 2019, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NMFA) commissioned an external review of the entire NMIE programme (2008-2019) with the purpose of assessing whether the programme has achieved its objectives and to provide recommendations for further work. The review has been guided by the OECD/DAC criteria (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability). The review process included a desk-review of all policies and programme documentation, and a field mission with both in-person and distance interviews with more than 100 stakeholders in North Macedonia, the Western Balkans and Norway. The review finds that the NDC Skopje's NMIE programme has been highly relevant for the post-conflict and reforms context of North Macedonia and aligned with all NMFA priorities, country strategic priorities in education and social cohesion, and needs of the schools involved. The priority of intercultural education is recognised by the Macedonian government, educational authorities, donor community and CSOs, yet initiatives are highly dependent on external funding. The programme design and selected approach is found to be adequate and effective as it embeds NMIE in the regular educational process. This includes providing space for interaction of children who would otherwise not interact during their education which is divided along the line of language of instruction and corresponds to a large extent with the ethnic origin of the children. NDC Skopje provides high quality capacity building of teachers and school management for the implementation of NMIE followed by mentorship, workplans, toolkits for implementation for primary and secondary schools, and equipment and workshop materials. Unlike other programmes, NMIE has managed to support activities in the same schools for 5-6 years, due to continuous support from the NMFA. NDC Skopje has further supported text-book analysis on multiculturalism and interculturalism, revision of school curricula, and the development of policy papers on intercultural education. Whilst this activity has been completed, it has not, however, been implemented due to a lack of political support by the Ministry of Education and Science.

Other major projects on intercultural education in North Macedonia are being implemented by USAID and its partners, and the OSCE. There is currently no overlap or coordination between these activities and NMIE's. The review finds that synergy between programmes might benefit both and even eliminate political barriers. With regards to efficiency, there is open and frequent communication between NDC Skopje and the NMFA, and any deviations from the initial implementation plan have been agreed and approved. Overall, the NMFA has provided positive feedback on the project regarding the progress of the activities and quality of the reports submitted by NDC Skopje. The cooperation, according to the NMFA, has generally been both effective and efficient. Thanks to its long-term nature, NMIE has been able to provide indicators on the expected impact on the communities involved. Currently, this is mostly related to the school environment, while there exists individual examples of impact on interaction and organisation of free-time activities. An increase of intercultural activities in general, socialisation and interaction of children, interaction between children and teachers of different ethnic origin, preference of attending multilingual schools, participation of parents in intercultural activities, and reducing intolerance, enmity and violence have been registered. With regard to parents the NMIE has reduce their resistance to intercultural activities, which was found to be present at the beginning. While full attention has been paid to the quality of the educational programme and capacity building for its implementation, the sustainability of the programme, and particularly its policy and financial aspects, has not been prioritised in the design of previous projects. This has been partly compensated by various policy interventions during implementation. Building local ownership and accountability, including a funding plan, and exit strategy has never been systematically considered by any of the stakeholders involved. It is positive to note, however, that in dialogue on sustainability, the majority of respondents believed it would be possible to develop a financially sustainable plan, mobilise local and international resources, and gradually increase the sustainability of the programme.

2. Methodology and Limitations of the Review

The scope of the review covered the NMIE Programme in its entirety over the period 2008-2019, including all its components and geographical areas in North Macedonia. Additionally, in line with the Terms of Reference (ToR), the review looked into other integrated education practices in similar post-conflict contexts to assess whether integrated education works and what makes it sustainable as a model. The review was guided by the OECD/DAC criteria (Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Impact and Sustainability).

The inception phase involved a preliminary desk review of selected project documentation and initial interviews with the NMFA in August 2019 to familiarise with the projects, the intervention logic, identify the theory of change behind them and to fine-tune the review methodology. This was followed by further data collection through an in-depth desk review,

mission to North Macedonia and in-person and remote interviews with the Nansen Centre for Peace and Dialogue, NDC Skopje representatives, national stakeholders in the education sector and civil society, 9 primary and secondary schools where the NMIE has been applied (management, teachers, parents and children), international organisations and donors engaged in peacebuilding and education, and relevant organisations in the Western Balkans region as well as internationally. Semi structured questionnaires were applied in the interviews (comprehensive questionnaire) and focus groups (5 guiding questions on key aspects of the review). The review involved a total of 107 key informants, 77 female and 30 male. Gender disbalance is due to the involvement of a high number of teachers and school staff, which are professions primarily performed by women. Field visits to five locations in North Macedonia were organised bringing educational workers from an even larger number of surrounding municipalities and villages for interviews.

3. Key Findings

3.1 Relevance

3.1.1 Relevance for the country context, national educational priorities and NMFA programme priorities

The 2001 Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA) between the North Macedonian Government and ethnic Albanian representatives has, by and large, been successful with regards to the cessation of hostilities, voluntary disarmament of ethnic Albanian armed groups, reform of the government and the advancement of minority political and cultural rights. The OFA states that any language spoken by at least 20% of the population on a national level is considered an official language. Languages spoken by at least 20% of the population at municipal level are also considered official languages within that municipality. The OFA mandates availability of education in languages spoken by more than 20% of the population. Since then this has been integrated into national reforms, including educational reforms, and has become a usual part of political discourse on education. Providing cultural rights and the right to education on native languages to people living in North Macedonia brought another challenge – an increase in the number of monoethnic schools and division within multi-ethnic schools for the purpose of organisation of parallel teaching processes in various languages. Almost 100% of ethnic Macedonian children study in Macedonian, 98,3% ethnic Albanian children study in Albanian and 67,5% of ethnic Turks study in Turkish , while children of other ethnic groups (Roma, Serbs, Vlachs, Bosniaks) mostly enrol in education in Macedonian. Consequently, interaction and communication among children of different ethnic origin is challenged. Most of them have very limited knowledge of each other's language and, when communicating, they tend to use English

rather than any of the local languages . Divisions are further supported in some schools by the organisation of education processes in different languages in different shifts, organisation of separate excursions, and cultural activities etc. Monoethnic schools do not provide much opportunity for interaction. An analysis of the textbooks used in schools conducted by NDC Skopje experts showed textbooks do not often promote interculturality or multiculturalism and cooperation, and are rather neutral (such as in natural sciences), or they promote the culture and heritage of the ethnic group that will use them (in language/literature and social sciences). In art however, mostly Macedonian culture and artists are presented and books are translated into other languages with no adaptation.

A recent OSCE study on perceptions on interethnic integration in education in North Macedonia, highlights that there are generally positive perceptions, attitudes and opinions regarding inter-ethnic integration activities in education among school staff, students and parents. All express positive attitudes towards the idea of joint activities among students, however among all stakeholders from all ethnic groups, there is a negative attitude towards learning other local languages. The report calls for more opportunities for contact, particularly among the two most isolated communities (Macedonians and Albanians) and inclusion of Roma. The National Education Strategy and Action Plan 2018-2025 ⁷ focuses on the improvement of the quality of education, modernisation and adaptation to development trends, support to critical thinking in children and development of competencies for active and relevant participation in social life; investments in infrastructure, including building facilities, equipment and teaching and supportive technologies; and human resources in schools. The Strategy prioritises inclusiveness and interethnic integration in pre-school, primary and secondary education (Priority II under each pillar). Yet in the weak economic and fragile political environment, this Strategy, as well as the policy papers on intercultural and interethnic education that followed, lacks a clear financial plan for the implementation of identified measures. In such a context, NDC Skopje has been implementing the NMIE programme since 2008, providing the only frequent and continuous intercultural programme that extends over the entire school year.

The NMIE methodology has been applied in 19 municipalities up to now, involving 27 primary and secondary schools that organise education in two or more official languages (so called mixed or multiethnic schools). This has been done through joint classes with children of different ethnic groups in between the school shifts, providing a unique space for children for interaction and learning together in two languages once or twice a week. The joint classes develop cooperation, constructive communication, respect and acceptance of diversity among children, and foster logical, flexible and critical thinking. Schools are selected by a public call and demand for NMIE is larger than the existing funding can respond to. In addition to children, NMIE aims to affect teachers and parents as well. Content on diversity, gender and

marginalized groups is integrated throughout the NMIE curriculum. Through the NMIE Training Centre, established jointly by NDC Skopje and the Ministry of Education and Science, teachers have been provided with standardized practical and theoretical training, mentorship and annual work plans and toolkits for implementation for every grade of primary and secondary school. In addition, NDC Skopje provides schools with equipment and workshop materials (glue, papers, fabric, markers, colours etc.) for implementation of classes which schools in North Macedonia generally lack. Equipment is also used to modernize regular teaching in the schools involved. Unlike other programmes, the NMIE programme has managed to support activities in the same schools for 5-6 years, thanks to stable support from the NMFA. In addition to NMIE, NDC Skopje has supported text-book analysis on multiculturalism and interculturalism, revision of school curricula, and the development of policy papers on intercultural education. Although in existence, policy interventions of NDC Skopje are still at the level of conceptual discussions on the subject matter of intercultural education rather than operational and sustainability oriented and should be observed as such throughout the report. All key informants considered intercultural education highly relevant for the Macedonian context, while stakeholders in the education sector (Ministry of Education and Science and school management and employees), parents and children clearly indicated that, for the mixed schools, NMIE is the most relevant approach they have ever been involved in. The most important features that distinguish it from the other programmes implemented include: continuity and frequency of classes that provide opportunity for impact, a professionally developed programme adapted to children's needs and age, followed by curricula, class designs, manuals, tools, equipment and material for implementation. NMIE is also perceived as using a slow and in-depth approach that promises expected changes. All respondents emphasized the engagement of university professors for the development of policies, evaluation and delivery of some trainings which they saw as increasing the relevance of the support.

4. Efficiency

Efficiency has been observed through programme management, coordination of activities and cost-effectiveness of allocated resources. The cooperation with the NMFA, institutional and other stakeholders in North Macedonia for avoidance of duplication was observed. Analysis of the budgets and expenditures shows planned and real costs were reasonable and in line with the rates and local prices in North Macedonia and the context of operation (educational reform, running a training centre and programmes in schools). The costs were proportional to the level of effort required for the implementation of such a programme. Still, having identified insufficient engagement of NDC Skopje in advocacy for sustainability and building of national

ownership over the model and community outreach, as well as a high dependence of the organisation on NMFA funding, there is a space for enhancement of cost effectiveness. This primarily relates to internal reorganization and assignment of part of the existing staff to these other components that require attention in future, in addition to in-depth focus on implementation of the educational aspect of NMIE. With regards to implementation and overall progress, the last project had an initial delay of 9 months, which consequently caused a rescheduling of all planned activities. Prior to this there were usually minor gaps in between the projects which were overcome with no-cost extension approvals or other resources. There were no major deviations on the NDC Skopje side in the process of involvement of new schools, training of teachers and implementation of programmes and along the process the delay has mostly been compensated. The longer delay between the projects raised concerns among beneficiaries.

5. Impact

While NDC Skopje has continuously monitored and evaluated its NMIE activities, since the beginning of the latest contract it has invested in studying the multi-cultural situation in partner schools and the contribution of NMIE to the impact achieved. Baselines studies on the intercultural situation in five multi-ethnic schools have been conducted. At this stage, one comparative study is available for Primary School "Goce Delchev" in Gostivar, comparing the interethnic situation in 2017 and 2018. Aspects of: socialization between Macedonian and Albanian students, their joint activities, interest in learning the language and the culture of the other, willingness and interest in coexistence, intolerance and enmity, communication and cooperation, interculturalism in the teaching process, parental participation in intercultural school activities, cooperation with the professional service and intercultural dimension of the school space were observed. Positive trends can be seen in the increase of intercultural activities, socialization, preference of attending a multilingual school, participation of parents in intercultural activities, reduction of intolerance and enmity, etc. Many of the effects were linked to NMIE classes in the focus group that followed the survey. The review confirmed a similar impact of NMIE in all schools involved in the process¹⁷. Children know they go to the same school, interact more when they meet, there is less prejudice, tensions and violence in schools¹⁸, children are happy to celebrate holidays together and present their tradition and customs, know each other's traditional songs, and prepare cultural and dance activities for school patron's day etc. In schools where children are not separated by shifts, interaction and playing is evident during school breaks. Many respondents noted that children want to interact, but interaction is often in English only, as the level of adopted language of the other group is very basic. Interaction also happens between children and teachers of different ethnic origin. Teachers organized⁷ that NMIE provided an opportunity for children to learn by the model as well, seeing teachers communicating during and out of the classes. Both parents and teachers

often used the word “relaxed” in describing the interethnic situation in schools. In addition to improved interethnic relations, teachers reported more creative and critical thinking, self-esteem and self-confidence in children involved in NMIE which is evident even in regular classes. In parents, their understanding of the process of NMIE reduced their resistance to intercultural activities that was present in some of them at the beginning of the programme. There have been no drop-outs registered from NMIE classes except due to migration of families to another city or abroad. Other types of impact on parents, outside of just knowing each other, have not been reported. This corresponds to lower intensity of joint activities with parents. Some parents participated more intensively in the phase of introducing NMIE in schools in order for them to understand the concept. Impact is mostly seen in the school environment or field visits organized by schools. Very few examples have been identified in free-time activities. The few examples include instances of children engaging together in sport and game activities (supported by the fact that they live in the same neighbourhood) and one example of a child taking private Albanian language lessons due to spiked interest thanks to NMIE. Few parents showed interest for their children to learn Macedonian. No visits of children of different ethnicity to each other’s homes have been reported or linked to NMIE. Few examples of friendships and exchanges of social networks have been identified. Teachers reported that they have more self-respect and feel more respected and understood by parents after engaging in NMIE. This is thanks to the quality of delivery and effects of the classes, children’s satisfaction and equipment, and didactic and workshop materials that are usually not available in schools. They also reported increased interaction during working hours as well as in free time (socializing, coffee, interaction via social networks, etc.), particularly between teachers in tandems. NMIE has changed teachers’ interaction substantially – before teachers working in the same school for more than a decade had not known about each other at all. Teachers also reported cooperation related to exchanging ideas and experience on regular classes. The review identified that the potential of NMIE extends in schools where children are not divided in shifts based on the language of instruction and schools where there are other activities such as field trips and excursions organized jointly.

6. Conclusions

Relevance

- NDC Skopje’s NMIE programme (2008-2019) has been highly relevant for the post-conflict and reforms context of North Macedonia and aligned with all NMFA priorities, country strategic priorities in education and social cohesion and needs of the schools involved.
- The priority of intercultural education is recognised by the Government, educational authorities, donor community and CSOs, yet initiatives are highly dependent on external

funding. Several national policies prioritise intercultural education but are not followed by adequate performance management systems and budget allocations.

- The theory of change and programme design of NMIE and selected strategies, as presented and implemented, are coherent with respect to reducing the ethnic based segregation in schools involved and promotion of interculturalism in the communities.
- The theory of change fails to integrate building of local ownership and accountability of institutions for the educational reforms at all levels, management and funding, and neither takes into consideration other ongoing initiatives related to intercultural education.

Effectiveness

- In a setting of education divided along the language of instruction which usually corresponds with children's ethnic origin, NMIE is a unique model in North Macedonia that provides frequent and long-term space for the interaction of both children and teachers, embedded into each school's learning process.
- NDC Skopje effectively provides comprehensive teachers' training, follow-up advice and mentorship, annual programmes for NMIE for each grade to schools and involved teachers, toolkits for implementation, and contributes to the organisation of the intercultural setting in schools and provides necessary equipment and didactic and workshop material that schools usually lack.
- Although not many quantitative targets are set in the project document, the review collected enough evidence to conclude that the programme contributes highly to children achieving learning outcomes of NMIE classes, inter alia familiarisation with each other's language, culture, religion and customs, increases competencies for creative, critical, flexible thinking and problem solving. It has also resulted in the improvement of teachers' skills, teamwork of teachers of different ethnic origin and improvement of quality of regular classes as well.
- Other aspects of the project related to curricular reform and intercultural cross-curricular activities were of high quality, however, have not been implemented due to a lack of political will by the current Minister of Education.
- Other major projects in intercultural education are implemented by USAID and its partners and OSCE. While overlap is avoided in current activities, there is no coordination of these projects and NMIE. Coordination and synergy might benefit all programmes and contribute to elimination of political barriers.

Efficiency

- Key challenges faced by the project include the initial delay of 9 months which required significant rescheduling of activities. NDC Skopje seems to have managed to mostly catch up with plans.
- Another deviation from the plan relates to curricular reform and revision of textbooks. All necessary reviews, analyses and reports were completed, however after the change of Government political consent for this process was withdrawn by the new Minister.
- NMFA was regularly updated on the developments and approved these changes.
- Overall, the NMFA did not have any objections to the progress of activities and the quality of the reports submitted by NDC Skopje and cooperation was regarded as efficient.
- Some operational challenges appear occasionally in the application of NMIE in schools.
- The NMFA grant should be considered not only as a programme grant, but also as a core grant. Currently, a major aspect of NDC staff's work is focused on NMIE and curricular reform, where they provide high quality outputs and results. In terms of internal organisation, in a setting of weak sustainability perspectives and dependence on NMFA 30 funding, there is a need for internal reorganisation and (if necessary capacity building) to be able to address these challenges properly.

Impact

- Based on one comparative study for Primary School "Goce Delchev" in Gostivar, comparing the interethnic situation in 2017 and 2018 and the findings of the review, it can be concluded that there are indicators of achievement in particular areas of intended impact.
- There are positive trends in the increase of intercultural activities, socialisation and interaction during school breaks, interaction between children and teachers of different ethnic origin, preference of attending multilingual schools, participation of parents in intercultural activities, and reduction of intolerance, enmity and violence.
- For parents, understanding the process of NMIE reduced initial resistance to intercultural activities that was present in some of them at the beginning of the programme and there were no dropouts registered.
- Impact is mostly seen in the school environment or field visits organised by schools and very few examples were identified in free-time activities.

Sustainability

- Apart from integration of the model into educational process and capacity building of practitioners, NDC Skopje does not have a systematic approach for the development of NMIE sustainability. This particularly relates to the financial aspect and to some extent the policy aspect.
- An exit strategy and transfer or sharing of ownership was never considered by any of the stakeholders involved. On a positive note, most of the respondents believed it would be possible to develop a financial sustainability plan that would involve both local and international resources and gradually move towards it.
- NDC Skopje is engaged in dialogue with the Ministry of Education and Science but there is insufficient engagement with, and support of, other institutions and organisations in the education sector. Building a wider network of supporters is necessary in the highly turbulent political environment of North Macedonia, as the Government officials and senior officials get easily replaced as a result of internal political dynamics or external influences (e.g. recent failure of the EU members to agree on approval of formal accession talks). Diplomatic support from NMFA would also be welcome.