

Swiss-Estonian Cooperation Programme

Support Measure "Supporting Social Inclusion"

**Minutes of the Steering Committee meeting**

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| **Date**  **and time:** | | 11.11.2025  11:15–15:30 | |
| **Place:** | | Ministry of Education and Research  Munga 18, Tartu | |
| **Participants:** | |  | |
| Members with Voting Rights: | | | |
| Olga Gnezdovski | | Chair, Representative of the Programme Operator, Ministry of Culture |
| Evelin Liechti | | Swiss Contribution Office of the Swiss Embassy to Estonia |
| Ieva Junevičienė | | Swiss Contribution Office of the Swiss Embassy to Estonia |
| Helena Musthallik | | Representative of the National Coordination Unit, State Shared Service Centre |
| Members without Voting Rights: | | | |
| Kristi Lillemägi | | Representative of the Programme Component Operator (Component 1), Ministry of Culture |
| Ülar Vaadumäe | | Representative of the Programme Component Operator (Component 2), Ministry of Social Affairs |
| Taavi Kreitsmann | | Representative of the Programme Component Operator (Component 3), Ministry of Education and Research |
| Minna Harjo | | Representative of the Programme Component Operator (Component 4), Ministry of the Interior |
| Observers: | | | |
| Marili Anso | | Education and Youth Board |

**Agenda:**

1. [Opening remarks, introduction](#Item1)
2. [Progress of the Components](#Item2)
3. [Component 4: discussion on study/business trip requests, Swiss project relation to ESF+, and sustainability of lessons learned](#Item3)
4. [Discussion on Component 1 logframe indicators](#Item4)
5. [Discussion on Component 3 logframe indicators](#Item5)
6. [Presentation of general themes by PO (risks, spending of funds, cooperation with Swiss partner)](#Item6)
7. [Next SC meeting, AOB](#Item7)

**Item 1. Opening remarks, introduction**

The meeting was opened by Olga Gnezdovski, who welcomed the participants to the third meeting of the Steering Committee. She informed the participants that she will chair the meeting as the deputy member of Chair Kärt Kallion, since Kärt is ill. Olga Gnezdovski also informed the participants that the meeting would be recorded to facilitate the preparation of minutes.

Taavi Kreitsmann welcomed the participants to Tartu and to the Ministry of Education and Research, which is celebrating its 107th anniversary today.

Representatives of the Swiss Contribution Office (SCO) also addressed the participants with welcome remarks.

**Item 2. Progress of the Components**

Programme component operators presented the update on the implementation of the components.



Each presentation was followed by a short discussion.

Questions and discussion on presentations

1. Component 1.

The SCO enquired about the procurement that had to be repeated following the unsuccessful first round and asked whether the implementer had analysed the reasons for its failure. Kristi replied that one company had expressed interest, but it submitted its bid late. Olga Gnezdovski added that the low level of interest was probably due to the holiday period. **The** **SCO highlighted the importance of acting proactively and planning procurements properly (for example, avoiding the holiday period) to prevent future procurement failures.** Kristi added that INSA usually engages in lobbying potential bidders.

**The SCO expressed the desire to receive English summaries of the final reports and studies produced within the framework of procurements and projects.** Machine translation could be used for this purpose, or the requirement for English summaries could be included directly in the procurement specifications.

1. Component 2.

In his presentation Ülar Vaadumäe noted implementation delays caused by a change of project manager at the Social Insurance Board but confirmed that the implementation plan for next year is prepared and awaiting approval, with signature aimed by year-end. The programme to facilitate entry into labour market in social sector for people with different language and cultural background has been postponed to 2026, allowing the engagement of a social care institution, which trains specialists on site. Public awareness campaign procurement originally planned for early 2026 will be moved to the second half of 2026, with campaign rollout in 2027 to ensure demonstrable outputs from earlier activities.

The SCO asked whether these shifts would affect the final completion date. Ülar Vaadumäe replied that no impact on the final deadline is expected at the moment, but the need for very efficient delivery in 2026–2027 is acknowledged, as 2028 is reserved for closure. The **SCO stressed that any changes to the final deadline are possible, but they should be communicated well in advance.**

The SCO asked about the biggest challenge in this Component. Ülar Vaadumäe stated that securing the commitment universities and vocational schools to curriculum change is probably the most important action at the current stage. A joint meeting with them is planned for 28.11.2025. The SCO enquired whether the knowledge gained from the study trips to Switzerland, Finland, and Ireland could be integrated into the curricula. Ülar Vaadumäe promised to obtain input from specialists and send feedback. However, regarding the incorporation of Swiss experience, an online workshop focused on a practice-oriented social work curriculum has been scheduled for next year, as the Bern University of Applied Sciences has highly valuable expertise in practical workplace training.

There was also a question regarding the language of the podcasts. Ülar Vaadumäe stated that they are only in Estonian.

The SCO expressed concerns about turnover of project managers and recommended looking more closely at the situation in order to identify the reasons behind it. As an example, restructuring of roles might help in certain cases. Ülar Vaadumäe promised to pass these concerns on to the partners and to keep an eye on the situation.

1. Component 3.

Regarding challenges, Taavi Kreitsmann highlighted that one of the issues concerns preparatory studies. Preparatory studies are a new initiative in the Estonian education system, and the national curriculum framework is still being finalised. The state regulation is expected to be completed by the end of this year. Taavi explained that the regulation is linked to the increase in the school-leaving age to 18 years. The aim is to prevent young people from leaving the education system early and to improve their opportunities in the labour market. To achieve this goal, an additional year—referred to as preparatory studies—is provided for students who are not yet certain about their future educational or career path after completing basic school. During this year, students will participate in career guidance courses and other preparatory activities to help them choose further education or vocational pathways. A national curriculum framework for this additional year is being developed, which vocational schools and gymnasiums will use to design their specific school curricula.

The SCO asked how parents are targeted, noting that less active parents are harder to engage. Marili Anso explained that the Education and Youth Board has very strong cooperation with local governments and schools. Invitations reach all parents of schoolchildren through educational platforms, and endorsements from teachers help motivate participation. Taavi Kreitsmann added that one way to address this is by providing training in various formats, including video trainings, training programmes, and conferences.

The SCO recommended considering also English-language content to avoid excluding smaller cultural minority groups.

The SCO raised a question regarding the motivation of parents to attend courses, particularly where there is a lack of information relevant to them or potential concerns related to their children. Marili Anso explained that the Education and Youth Board conducts focused interviews annually to understand and to map the topics parents are interested in, where they obtain information, and which formats are most suitable for them.

1. Component 4.

The SCO inquired about the language of the podcasts and videos. Minna Harjo explained that the podcasts are currently available only in Estonian, but she will ask the implementer to consider producing some episodes in other languages (for example, in English and/or Russian). She added that adding subtitles to videos and the TV series could be considered feasible.

The SCO noted that in the future, for activities that could be effectively showcased—such as study visits—it would be beneficial to have English-language summaries or materials. This would help highlight the work carried out within the projects and demonstrate the value and impact of the cooperation also within Switzerland.

**Item 3. Component 4: discussion on study/business trip requests, Swiss project relation to ESF+, and sustainability of lessons learned**

Before the meeting, the file providing the background information for this agenda item was distributed to the members of the Steering Committee.



The key concern raised by the SCO is related to the financing and the sustainability of the National Foundation of Civil Society (NFCS). The SCO sought to understand the legal status of the NFCS, its main objectives and whether the Foundation has its own budget and why certain expenses are not covered by themselves, given that only a minor additional contribution is required.

Minna Harjo explained that the NFCS is established by the Ministry of the Interior. NFCS does have its own budget, but they are financed through various projects as well. Within the NFCS, a Competence Centre for Social Innovation is established. It includes experts working on ESF+ funded projects, Swiss project, and also smaller Ukraine-related projects. The community of practice itself is not a separate project but rather a cooperation platform initiated by ESF+ and bringing together experts, practitioners, and academics in social innovation.

Minna clarified regarding financing, that the logic behind using the Swiss programme’s study visit budget is linked to cost efficiency. Instead of bilateral visits, the NFCS participates in platform events where experts from multiple countries are already present, enabling wider networking opportunities at lower cost.

The SCO requested more information about the ESF+ community of practice, including its goals (whether a programme document exists), management (who holds overall responsibility for the platform and who maintains its information), time frame, and how it is related to the SSIP programme. **It was suggested that the NFCS could be invited to a future Steering Committee meeting or a separate joint meeting to present this information**. This would support a better understanding of the platform’s activities, its complementarities with the programme, and would help enhance potential synergies and collaboration between different projects and initiatives.

Regarding the study/business trip requests, **it was agreed that prior non-objection from the SCO for study visits/business trips under Component 4 is not required within the following limits:**

* the geographical scope is limited to European continent countries;
* the financial threshold per visit is 10 000 EUR of Swiss contribution;
* if the frequency, cost of visits, or the number of participants increases substantially, the SCO should be informed.

**Item 4. Discussion on Component 1 logframe indicators**

Before the meeting, the file describing the need to specify the sources and means of verification for indicators OCIN 1.1 and OCIM (b) 1.1 was distributed to the members of the Steering Committee:



**The Steering Committee agreed on:**

1. **the new wording of sources and means of verification for OCIN 1.1**, as presented in the file referred to above, i.e.:

Focus group discussion and/or self-evaluation feedback form reports approximately six months after participation in the activities, where applicable and feasible based on the nature of the activity and availability of participant contact information.

1. **the new wording of sources and means of verification for OCIM (b) 1.1**, as presented in the file referred to above, i.e.:

Focus group discussion and/or self-evaluation feedback form reports immediately after participation in the activities.

As described in the file distributed to the members of the Steering Committee before the meeting, the Estonian side proposed to agree that the results of Activity 2 (inclusion of volunteers in integration activities) under Component 1 will be reported only under Immediate Outcomes 1a and 1b, and not under Immediate Outcome 3, since the indicators for Immediate Outcome 3 refer exclusively to activities implemented within Component 4.

The SCO pointed out that although Outcome 3 is formally linked to Component 4, some contributions may also arise from Component 1. Therefore, the contributions from Component 1 should not be excluded from Outcome 3.

**Finally, it was agreed that Programme Operator will present a revised formulation for how the measurement of Outcome 3 will be handled, including the incorporation of any relevant linkages from Component 1.**

**Item 5. Discussion on Component 3 logframe indicators**

Before the meeting, the file describing and clarifying the need to change the target number of the output indicator OPI 2.12 was distributed to the members of the Steering Committee:



Taavi Kreitsmann recapped the information from the file, explaining that the change in the target number results from the methodology for counting participations, not from a reduction in the actual number of participants trained. He also clarified that participants may still attend multiple trainings on different topics over time, and each fully completed training programme counts as one participation.

**The Steering Committee agreed on the new target for OPI 2.12, as presented in the file referred to above, i.e.: 5500 completed training course participations**

In addition, the **SCO asked to resubmit the justification** in a shorter and more focused form, so they can include the relevant change with its justification in their database. It should also be presented more clearly that the target is composed of inputs from Component 2 (1500 participations) and Component 3 (4000 participations).

The SCO also reminded that the more detailed disaggregation of professionals should be done. Olga Gnezdovski confirmed that disaggregation along the sector would be done according to agreement made at the first Steering Committee meeting:

* Professionals in the field of child welfare
* Professionals in the field of social work
* Professionals in the field of education, with a further breakdown into specific groups such as teachers, support staff, youth workers, etc
* Gender

**Item 6. Presentation of general themes by PO (risks, spending of funds, cooperation with Swiss partner)**

Risks.

Olga Gnezdovski provided an overview of risks. She noted that, as briefly discussed during the last Task Force meeting in October, the highest risks currently remain related to timing and the procurement process. She added that a detailed reassessment of risks will be conducted during the preparation of the annual report at the beginning of the following year. To mitigate these risks, emphasis is placed on effective cooperation and information flow, regular monitoring through the Steering Committee, Task Force, and monthly meetings, and maintaining open communication between all partners.

Regarding procurements, the SCO inquired about additional measures to mitigate risks. Olga Gnezdovski noted that each organisation prepares procurement plans for the upcoming year. Some organisations make use of services provided by the State Shared Service Centre, such as preliminary guidance on procurements and/or assistance in organising the procurement process. She stressed that regular monitoring of activities through monthly meetings is essential. The SCO emphasised once again the importance of proactive action and proper planning of procurements—for example, avoiding the holiday period and conducting pre-market engagement—and highlighted the need to take into account comments previously provided by the SCO on procurements submitted for non-objection.

It was also noted by the SCO that certain procurements, such as language courses or locally based trainings, may not attract interest from Swiss companies. Therefore, completing the SIMAP form is not required for these procurements. Whether it should be completed will be decided in consultation with the SCO on a case-by-case basis.

Cooperation with Swiss partner.

Olga Gnezdovski provided an overview of cooperation with Swiss partner. Cooperation with Bern University of Applied Sciences has been strong. In 2025, 13 online workshops were conducted across programme components. These workshops enabled broad participation, provided insights into Switzerland’s general approach, and laid the foundation for more targeted expert exchanges in 2026. All workshops were well prepared and structured, showcasing interesting projects and organisations.

Highlights from 2025 include a study visit under Component 2, which was highly informative. A positive outcome was also that the visit helped to strengthen team spirit and to validate our own ideas.

In October, the Swiss expert participated in the Media Literacy Conference, giving a presentation and joining a panel discussion.

The action plan for the following year is being finalised. In 2026, the focus will be on targeted expert feedback on implementer-prepared documents, online workshops on specific topics, a joint study trip in April for Components 1 and 4, participation in conferences, and online co-teaching by the Swiss partner at Tallinn University. Students from Bern University of Applied Sciences will come to Estonia in September to visit selected projects and organisations (this visit will be mostly financed outside the programme budget).

Expenditures.

Olga Gnezdovski mentioned that current expenditures amount to approximately 1 million EUR, representing 4.4% of total budget. Major expenditures are expected in the following year and 2027, once procurement contracts are signed and activities commence. Additionally, since payments to universities under Component 3 are based on a unit-cost compensation mechanism, these expenditures will be recorded when universities begin issuing certificates for completed trainings.

The SCO reminded that all reimbursement requests should include updated procurement plan and financial forecasts (+1, +2 years) for planning purposes.

Mid-Term Evaluation.

Olga Gnezdovski informed that the mid-term evaluation of the sectoral development plan „Cohesive Estonia Strategy 2021-2030” is ongoing, with interim results expected in June 2026 and final by September.

As SSIP programme activities, particularly under Components 1 and 4, contribute to the strategy, the evaluation will also look at how these activities help achieve the objectives of the Integration Programme.

**Item 7. AOB, next SC meeting**

The SCO informed that, due to discussions related to Switzerland’s agreements with the EU, public and media interest has increased, including interest in the Swiss Cooperation Programme. **Therefore, it was proposed to review and, if necessary, update the joint discipline of language (for example by adding additional questions).**

In this context, the SCO also highlighted the importance of identifying and flagging potential success stories and cooperation examples involving Swiss companies and universities that could be of interest to Swiss taxpayers and parliamentarians. Increased attention should therefore be paid to the visibility of bilateral cooperation, including communication related to study visits. Olga Gnezdovski noted that a summary article for the current year is planned for publication on the Ministry of Culture’s blog, and that the Component 2 study visit could be included in this article.

Helena Musthallik informed that videos introducing the activities of the Swiss-Estonian Cooperation Programme are almost finalised and will be shared shortly.

Participants were informed about the appointment of the new Ambassador of Switzerland to Estonia, **Anja Zobrist Rentenaar**, who was accredited on the day of the meeting.

It was agreed that the next Steering Committee meeting will take place on **5 March in Pärnu**.

After the meeting, the Ministry of Education and Research and Youth Board was introduced to the Steering Committee.

Minutes secretary and Chair

(digitally signed)

Olga Gnezdovski

Coordinator of Estonian-Swiss cooperation programme