



Guidelines for  
**Education Sector**  
Plan Appraisal

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The **Global Partnership for Education (GPE)** is the only global multilateral partnership devoted to getting all children into school for a good-quality education. The Global Partnership for Education comprises nearly 60 developing country governments, as well as donor governments, civil society organizations, international institutions, teachers, private foundations, and the private sector. It provides funding to support the development and implementation of high-quality education sector plans in the world's poorest countries.

The GPE brings global and national leaders together in support of coordinated strategies that provide every child with the chance to learn in a safe and effective learning environment. By supporting development programmes to achieve a country's education goals – such as gender parity, quality learning outcomes, and universal access to primary school – the Global Partnership ensures that investments in education pay off. We have helped improve national education outcomes by bringing partners together to develop measurable quality education sector plans, by investing in underfunded and strategically important elements of the plan, and by mobilizing the expertise of country-level partners to leverage their comparative advantage.

The Global Partnership for Education has allocated US\$3.9 billion over the past decade to support education reforms in some of the world's poorest countries. Almost half of its funding in 2014 went to fragile and conflict-affected countries.

The UNESCO **International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP)**, created in 1963, supports governments in planning and managing education systems so that the latter can achieve national objectives, as well as internationally agreed development goals. IIEP develops sustainable educational capacity through:

- training professionals in educational planning and management through a wide range of approaches, from short-term intensive courses to long-term training; face-to-face, blended, and distance training; and tailored on-site training;
- evidence-based research that helps anticipate innovative solutions and emerging trends in the development of education systems;
- technical assistance to ministries of education and other institutions that enables countries to make the most of their own expertise, while minimizing reliance on external organizations;
- sharing knowledge with all actors in the education community, including IIEP's wide range of resources (1,500 books, manuals, policy briefs, and thematic portals on education issues).

Part of the United Nations system, IIEP functions routinely at the local, regional, and international levels, together with renowned public and private organizations, and actively participates in numerous networks to achieve its mandate and its missions.



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# Introduction

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At the World Education Forum, in Dakar in 2000, the international community pledged that *no country with a credible plan to achieve the Education for All goals would be thwarted by a lack of resources*. Since then, the development of an education sector plan (ESP) has become a priority in many countries. ESPs present the policies and strategies for national education reform, and are a powerful tool for coordinating partners and for mobilizing additional domestic and external resources. They have become a critical instrument for governments to signal to all potential investors that their education policies are credible, sustainable, and worthy of investment.

The consensus on the need for credible ESPs is strong. However, what does a credible plan require in terms of government leadership, knowledge and data, institutional and human capacities, and dialogue among the education stakeholders? What are the criteria that establish the credibility of a plan?

The purpose of these guidelines is to assist education stakeholders in appraising the soundness, relevance, and coherence that form the credibility of ESPs. The primary objective of an appraisal report is to support the finalization of a credible ESP. It provides a fair review of the ESP strengths and areas in need of improvement before the endorsement by partners which signifies their commitment to support the implementation of the ESP.

These guidelines<sup>1</sup> are meant to be adapted to national contexts and needs. The stakeholders should discuss the scope and the methodology of the appraisal to be used, and develop a common vision of the whole process. The appraisal process should be participatory, and grounded in the political and technical dialogue for ESP development. It should involve consultations, interviews with key stakeholders, and field visits, in addition to a desk review of the ESP and any other relevant documents. It is good practice to organize a validation workshop of the appraisal report's findings, conclusions, and recommendations to feed into the ESP finalization. The appraisal process should occur early enough in the ESP development process to allow time for decision-makers to open consultations on these conclusions and recommendations in order to improve the final version of the ESP.

The appraisal process should be independent of the actors who contributed to the education plan preparation. It should be conducted by external operators in order to avoid situations of conflict of interest involving the political decisions that have prevailed in the development of the plan and its future implementation. Appraisal involves the intervention of operators with sufficient expertise to develop a well-informed and objective opinion. The appraisal should be based on a number of key indicators on which all stakeholders agree. In relation to this, the appraisal exercise could be preceded or introduced by a first check of the key features that are considered as critical elements of a credible education plan. Such a pre-check matrix is proposed in the annex to this document. It can be used as an input from the local stakeholders in charge of the appraisal to inform the independent evaluators of the state of completion of the plan, and provide an objective basis on which to build a more qualitative assessment. If the initial check does not appear sufficiently conclusive, the development partner group could advise the government to continue the preparation work of the ESP plan before it is proposed for appraisal. The external evaluators would conclude the appraisal exercise with their own review of the matrix as a summary of their findings.

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1. This document is designed to be used with the *Guidelines for Education Sector Plan Preparation*, which describe the content of and the steps for developing an ESP. For GPE partner countries, the appraisal and endorsement process is developed in the *Country-Level Process Guidelines*.

The appraisal of an education plan should also be based on reliable information, which the experts will need to verify and cross-check. In addition to meetings, interviews, and consultations with stakeholders who participated in the development of the plan, the evaluators will review the documentation<sup>2</sup> that was the basis for the development of the plan.

The general questions the appraisal should seek to answer are:

- Has the plan preparation process been country-led, participatory, and transparent? (**leadership and participation**)
- Does the plan constitute a solid corpus of strategies and actions addressing the key challenges of the education sector? (**soundness and relevance**)
- Are the issues of equity, efficiency, and learning soundly addressed to increase sector performance? (**key issues of equity, efficiency, learning**)
- Is there consistency between the various components of the ESP? (**coherence**)
- Do the financing, implementation, and monitoring arrangements offer a good perspective for achievement? (**feasibility, implementability, monitorability**).

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2. Sector analyses and studies, evaluation reports of previous plans, joint sector review reports, budgetary documents, preparatory documents for plan development, general policy documents of the government, project/programme documents, impact evaluations, international literature on specific topics, etc.

# 1. Leadership and participation

*Has the plan preparation process been country-led, participatory, and transparent?*

## Leadership and ownership

*General question: To what extent is national leadership and partners' ownership reflected in the ESP?*

- To what extent do the planned objectives correspond to the priority objectives of national development, poverty reduction strategies, and the medium-term expenditure framework?
- Was there consistent leadership of a national team in developing and writing the ESP?
- What was the role of the local education group (LEG) members in the preparation of the plan?

## Participatory process

*General question: What is the level of involvement among the local stakeholders and development partners?*

- Was the sector diagnosis shared and discussed?
- Did the plan preparation process include a broad range of stakeholders, such as civil society organizations, teacher unions, decentralized levels of government, non-governmental education providers, and development partners?
- Were the consultations inclusive? Did they involve the units and persons responsible for programme implementation, particularly at the decentralized and school levels?
- Did other ministries participate in the plan preparation process?
- Was the ministry of finance consulted on the macro-economic financial assumptions and sector projections?
- Was the plan formally presented to and discussed with stakeholders?
- Are the outcomes of the stakeholder consultations adequately reflected in the ESP?

## Capacity development

*General question: To what extent was the plan preparation used as an opportunity to develop national capacities in education policy and planning?*

- Did partners provide technical support during the preparation process? If yes, what kind of support?
- How was the technical support provided by the partners coordinated?
- Was the plan prepared with the support of consultants? What support did they provide?
- Did national officers work closely with the consultants? To what extent was the transfer of techniques and competences effective?
- Which steps (sector diagnosis, programme design, scenario and costing, action plan, monitoring and evaluation [M&E] framework) were the most effective for capacity development?

## 2. Soundness and relevance

*Does the plan constitute a solid corpus of strategies and actions addressing the key challenges of the education sector?*

### Evidence-based education sector analysis

*General question: What empirical evidence was available and was it used effectively?*

- Has a recent education sector analysis been conducted?
- Does the sector analysis cover all subsectors?
- Does the sector analysis address all areas of access, internal efficiency, participation, equity, quality, management, costs, and financing? Are there some important challenges that are not identified or not analysed in the sector analysis?
- Is the sector analysis based on the last available and reliable set of data (including sex-disaggregated education data)?
- What other studies or analyses, including studies from civil society organizations, were used to prepare the plan?
- Does the education sector analysis identify the vulnerability of the education system to political, economic, social, and environmental risks (and if necessary, has a vulnerability analysis been conducted)?

### Relevance of policies and programmes

*General question: Do the proposed priorities and programmes form a relevant response to the challenges?*

- Are the strategic policies and plan priorities informed by the empirical evidence presented in the sector analysis (including gender analysis)?
- Is there a comprehensive knowledge base for each of the strategic priorities? Or is a process built into the ESP to address the data and knowledge gaps?
- Do the strategies take into account the lessons learned from past policies and implementation experience?
- Are the strategies and programmes based on an explicit causal chain?
- Is there evidence that the proposed strategies and interventions will have the expected impact?
- Are the strategies and interventions well defined and relevant to address the constraints in each of the priority areas (e.g. safety and security challenges to learning)?
- Do priorities take into account the risks and constraints faced by the education sector? Do the proposed strategies mitigate the vulnerability of the education system to political, social, and environmental impacts as identified in the sector diagnosis?

### Soundness of the financial framework

*General question: Is the financial framework adequate and credible?*

- Does the plan include a quantitative scenario? Was the scenario generated by a simulation model?
- Do the projections include all subsectors?
- Do the projections cover enrolment, human and physical resources, and financial requirements?
- Are the projections based on recent and reliable baseline data?

- Is the quantitative scenario consistent with the strategies, programmes, and targets?
- Are the financial projections based on clear and reliable assumptions of unit costs?
- Is the overall estimated cost of the ESP comprehensive, including the planned programmes and covering the full perimeter of the education budget (including recurrent costs such as salaries)?
- How realistic are the macro-economic assumptions made to project potential domestic resources? Were they validated by the ministry of finance?
- Is the funding gap clearly identified and reasonable?
- Is there an analysis of past and potential external funding?
- Are the financing options realistic?

### Soundness of the action plan<sup>3</sup>

*General question: Does the action plan provide a sound operational framework?*

- Is a multi-year action plan available? Is there a process in place for the subsequent preparation of annual action plans?
- Are the activities sufficiently comprehensive to attain the objectives?
- Is the action plan in line with the ESP policy and strategy choices modelled in the financing framework?
- Is the action plan structured in such a way that it can readily be cross-referenced with the national education budget and MTEF (medium-term expenditure framework)?
- Are the activities clearly identified, costed, and linked to results?
- Have resources been identified for all activities? For activities without an identified source of funding, is there a strategy for identifying additional funding sources?
- Are the volume and timing of the expected disbursements realistic relative to absorptive capacity (e.g. relative to recent experience, relative to plans to strengthen implementation capacity, and relative to the available capacity to manage higher expenditure, particularly in decentralized settings)?
- Are the indicators and target outputs described for each activity? Are they sex-disaggregated?
- Does the plan include consistent reporting/evaluation indicators that can be assessed during annual joint sector reviews?
- Do the institutional structures identified to implement the ESP include clearly designated responsibilities for results and mandates for each activity?

3 Or implementation plan or operational plan.

### 3. Equity, efficiency, and learning in basic education

*Are the key dimensions of equity, efficiency, and learning soundly addressed to increase sector performance?*

#### Robustness and relevance of the strategies

*General question: Are the designed strategies and programmes relevant to address the three key dimensions?*

- Does the sector analysis clearly identify the key issues relating to equity, efficiency, and learning?
- Are available data sufficient to assess: (a) internal disparities (geographical, income, gender, minorities, and disability); (b) the efficiency of the system (as the ratio of the outcomes to resources for the three dimensions); and (c) learning improvements (quality and availability of inputs, learning outcomes)?
- Does the sector analysis sufficiently include causal explanations or determining factors for these key issues?
- Are the underlying causes relating to the key dimensions of equity, efficiency, and learning properly addressed in the strategies and programmes?
- Do the strategies on the three dimensions take into account lessons learned from evaluation of past programmes and experiences, or build on international practices?
- Are there specific strategies for marginalized, disabled, and at-risk groups (such as underserved communities, girls, the poor, children with disabilities, orphans, children in hard-to-reach communities, ethnic minorities, refugee and internally displaced populations, and children affected by HIV and AIDS)? Do the strategies and interventions reflect an equitable distribution of the resources and inputs to the system?
- Are the issues of efficiency addressed in relation to access, quality, and learning outcomes? Is there evidence that the strategies related to equity and improved learning are cost-efficient and cost-effective? Do the strategies and interventions reflect an efficient deployment of the resources of public, private, and external development partners relative to impact? Were alternative strategies considered?
- Are there specific strategies to manage and remedy learning issues? To what extent can inputs related to learning (e.g. number of instructional hours, language of instruction, teaching and learning materials, qualified teachers) promote and incentivize improvements in student learning processes and learning outcomes?

## Change strategies

*General question: Are the strategies designed to introduce transformational changes?*

- Are the strategies based on a credible results chain?
- Do the programmes include innovative ways to address the key issues?
- To what extent can the planned programmes and actions be expected to have a leverage effect on the sector performances in terms of greater equity, efficiency, and improved learning?

## Results framework

*General question: Can the results framework be used to monitor improvements in the three key areas?*

- Are the programmes' expected results related to the three dimensions reflected in the M&E framework?
- Are they translated into relevant indicators to measure their impact?
- Are those indicators well defined?
- Are those indicators easily calculated on a yearly basis? Is there provision for making them available on a regular basis?

## 4. Coherence

*Does the plan constitute a consistent and coherent corpus of strategies and actions?*

### Coherence among the strategies, programmes, and interventions

*General question: Is there consistency between the various components of the ESP?*

- Are the strategic policies and plan priorities aligned with the empirical evidence presented in the sector analysis?
- Do strategies and programmes have a clear logical structure? Are they well organized?
- Is every strategy coherent with other strategies? Is there consistency between the strategies at different education levels?
- Are the proposed strategies and interventions sufficient relative to the targets set?
- Are clear descriptive or quantitative outcomes laid out for the planned strategies and programmes that demonstrate impact?
- Does the ESP clearly summarize or define the links among the planned inputs and the expected impact of the ESP over the medium term (e.g. in a logical framework or economic analysis)?<sup>4</sup>
- Is there strong consistency between the design of the ESP and the action plan?

### Comprehensive costing aligned with the budget

*General question: How consistent are the scenario and the costing with other parts of the ESP?*

- Is the quantitative scenario consistent with the strategies, programmes, and targets?
- Do the cost estimates cover all subsectors? Are the targets and costs of post-basic education described in the ESP reasonable in relation to the goals in basic education?
- Is the costing consistent with the targets set?
- Does the costing include all planned programmes and activities?
- Is the ESP action plan structured so as to be conversant with the budget classification?

### Coherence of monitoring and evaluation indicators

*General question: Are the M&E indicators consistent with the policy priorities and the planned programmes and activities?*

- Do the M&E key indicators properly reflect plan priorities and expected outcomes?
- Is the coverage of M&E indicators appropriate? Are there missing areas?
- Are the M&E indicators well defined?

4. *Inputs* are defined as the financial, human, and material resources required for implementation. *Outputs* are the products, goods, and services that result from the programme's interventions. *Outcomes* are the expected short- and medium-term effects of the programme. *Development impact* is its long-term social and economic effects.

## 5. Feasibility, implementability, and monitorability

*Do the financing, implementation, and monitoring arrangements offer a good perspective for achievement?*

### Financial feasibility

*General question: Is the financial plan adequate and realistic?*

- Does the funding gap remain at or below a reasonable level over the planned period?
- Do the domestic resources cover planned recurrent expenditure?
- If domestic financing is insufficient, are the needs for donor contributions quantified?
- How will development partners align their financial support with the ESP?

### System capacity

*General question: Does the plan identify and address capacity constraints that would affect plan implementation?*

- Is there an existing capacity development plan?
- Are the needs in personnel and skill development in central and decentralized administration sufficiently considered in the ESP and included in the budget?
- Does the ministry have clear definitions or job descriptions of the roles and responsibilities, and the corresponding profiles, of education personnel at various levels? If not, is there a plan to develop them?
- Are resource allocations to decentralized levels adequate in relation to their roles in implementing the ESP?
- How do other stakeholders such as universities, civil society, and non-governmental education providers plan to support the implementation of the ESP?

### Governance and accountability

*General question: Are there strategies in place to improve and establish good governance practices and management accountability across the system?*

- Is there a robust communication strategy (or are there plans to develop one) to help stakeholders at all levels understand the objectives, strategies, and activities of the plan, and the role of stakeholders in implementing them?
- If the plan foresees an increase in the transfer of resources to units and schools below the national level, does it indicate how this will be done, and has attention been given to ensuring equity, efficiency, accountability, and predictability?
- If gender imbalance in educational management has been identified as a concern, are there strategies in the plan to address this concern?
- In what ways does the ESP aim to strengthen accountability to beneficiaries? (For example, is there a set of service delivery standards that are monitored? Does the ESP propose instruments for community feedback?)
- To promote transparency, are there provisions for third-party evaluations, and disclosure of and easy public access to ESP monitoring, financial, and technical audit reports, data, and evaluations?
- Are effective strategies included to monitor education expenditure and leakage (e.g. through sector expenditure reviews and the expenditure tracking of resources distributed or disbursed to schools)?

## Risks to implementation and the mitigation of risks

*General question: Does the ESP design take into consideration possible risks and constraints in implementation?*

- Have potential risks in financial governance been sufficiently assessed and appropriate mitigation measures identified? Have all contextual (political, social, or environmental) risks associated with the implementation of the strategies been adequately analysed and addressed?
- Do the resources and incentives outlined in the ESP have the potential to support implementation and progress toward the expected results?
- Have implementation capacity constraints at all levels been assessed, and are appropriate strategies included in the programme to address these?

## Robustness of the monitoring and evaluation framework

*General question: Does the M&E system provide robust indicators based on valid and reliable data to monitor the progress toward the achievement of outputs and outcomes described in the results framework? Are the reporting, feedback, and consultation mechanisms transparent and adequate to maintain broad ownership during implementation?*

- Is there a results framework? Does the plan contain key indicators for M&E? Are all indicators disaggregated by sex and when relevant by socio-economic status?
- Are the M&E key indicators aligned with plan priorities and strategies?
- Are key outcomes included? Are there missing areas?
- Are the M&E output indicators aligned with the outcome indicators?
- Is the coverage of M&E output indicators sufficient to adequately monitor progress?
- Are there transparent arrangements and processes for stakeholders to review and validate the sector results and performances?
- Is there sufficient human resources capacity to implement the M&E arrangements?
- Are institutional responsibilities for reporting clearly identified?
- What is the role of the LEG in M&E arrangements?
- Is reporting during annual joint sector reviews planned?
- Does the M&E framework of the ESP include the monitoring of strategies to mitigate the vulnerability of the education system to political, social, and environmental impacts as identified in the sector diagnosis and programme design?

# Additional resources

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## Educational planning

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# Annex

## Key aspects of credible education sector plans

The questions listed in the table represent critical elements of a credible ESP. Please indicate whether these elements are present in the ESP (including the action plan) and provide any comments on the aspects that are missing or need to be improved.

Questions	Yes	No	Comments
<b>Sector-wide</b> 1. <i>Does the plan cover all subsectors including non-formal education, literacy, and higher education?</i>			
<b>Based on a sector analysis</b> 2. <i>Does the ESP summarize key results of the sector analysis and identify key challenges based on those results?</i>			
<b>Coherent and consistent strategies</b> 3. <i>Do the general objectives, specific objectives, and activities address the key challenges and their underlying causes?</i>			
4. <i>Are there any major inconsistencies in the presentation of general objectives, specific objectives, and activities across different sections of the ESP (e.g. narrative of the strategies, logic framework, action plan)?</i>			
<b>Sound cost framework</b> 5. <i>Has the plan been costed?</i>			
6. <i>Are the data presented by education level?</i>			



7. <i>Are the data presented by year?</i>			
8. <i>Does the cost framework specify the capital and recurrent expenditures as well as the staff salaries share?</i>			
<b>Sound financial framework</b> 9. <i>Is the financial framework based on official macro-economic assumptions?</i>			
10. <i>Does the financial framework specify the domestic and external resources allocated to the education sector?</i>			
11. <i>Does the financial framework specify the financial gap?</i>			
12. <i>What is the level of the funding gap as a percentage of the total resources available (including external aid)?</i>			
<b>Simulation model</b> 13. <i>Was a simulation model used for testing the policy targets and informing the policy dialogue?</i>			
14. <i>Was a simulation model used for devising the financing framework?</i>			
<b>Sound action plan</b> 15. <i>Does the action plan contain a precise timeline for each activity?</i>			
16. <i>Does the action plan contain a responsible authority for each activity?</i>			



17. Does the action plan contain the total cost and source of funding for each activity?			
<b>Monitoring tools and mechanisms</b> 18. Does the ESP contain a description of the monitoring tools and mechanisms that will be used to monitor progress, or mention a plan to develop them?			
<b>Clear roles and responsibilities</b> 19. Are there clear roles and responsibilities defined for the implementation and monitoring of the ESP?			
<b>Sound indicators</b> 20. Are most of the indicators well defined, meaning they contain a target, a timeframe, and are measurable?			
21. Do most objectives have corresponding outcomes, and do most activities have corresponding outputs?			
<b>Capacity development</b> 22. Does the ESP contain a programme on capacity development that is based on an assessment of capacities?			
<b>Strong government leadership</b> 23. Did the ESP's preparation process demonstrate strong leadership of the government?			
<b>Broad stakeholder participation</b> 24. Did the preparation of the ESP involve a participatory process that included a broad range of stakeholders: central government, decentralized levels of government, civil society, teacher unions, non-governmental organizations, and development partners?			







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