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Nordic Consulting Group

Evaluation of the project «A strengthened private sector and an improved functioning of the Employment Services in Belarus»

Final Report

Evaluation of the project «A strengthened private sector and an improved functioning of the Employment Services in Belarus»

**Final Report
November 2019**

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

Arbetsfoermedlingen	Swedish Public Employment Service
CV	Curriculum Vitae
DAC	Development Assistance Criteria
EQ	Evaluation question
EU	European Union
GD	Group discussion
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IL	Intervention logic
IPM	Institute for Privatization and Management
IT	Internet technology
LFS	Labour Force Survey
KI	Key Informant
MOLSP	Ministry of Labour and Social Protection
NEET	Not in Employment, Education, or Training
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PES	Public Employment Service
PWD	Person with Disability
SEK	Swedish Kruna
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
SME	Small and medium sized enterprise
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
VET	Vocational Education and Training

1 Introduction

This document represents the Final Evaluation Report of the Project “A strengthened private sector and an improved functioning of the Employment Services in Belarus” (hereinafter: the PES Project). The evaluation was conducted in the period October–November 2019.

1.1 BACKGROUND

In 2018, Belarus’s population was around 9.5 million. Since the 1990s the overall population of the country has declined by around 700 000 people. Furthermore, the share of youth in the general population has been declining and the age structure of the population is moving in the direction of ageing. A low fertility rate, corresponding to the level of those in EU countries, is one of the main demographic challenges facing Belarus. As of 1 January 2018, the number of young people aged 14–31 was 20.2 percent of the total population of Belarus. These demographic trends are likely to translate into new demands on the lifelong learning system and on employment policy.

The country is undergoing a process of urbanisation affecting all groups of the population, as the flows of internal migration are towards the cities, where industry and services are developing. In 2017, 77.6 percent of the population lived in urban areas. Integration agreements between Belarus and Russia envisage minimal barriers for Belarusians to be employed in Russia, as well as providing additional opportunities for the entry and exit of migrants. Belarus is classified by the World Bank as a higher middle-income country. During most of the 2000s, a combination of favourable external factors and loose macroeconomic policies boosted economic growth, with annual growth rates averaging 9 percent for the period 2002–2008. However, this strong growth was associated with increasing macroeconomic vulnerabilities and growing external imbalances. After a decade of strong economic growth, Belarus faced a period of macroeconomic turmoil, resulting in two crises, in 2009 and 2011. After several years of declining growth and increased macroeconomic volatility, the Belarusian economy entered recession in 2015, contracting by 3.9 percent in 2015 and 2.6 percent in 2016. In 2017, the economy started to recover, and GDP grew by 2.4 percent. In January–February 2018, GDP growth accelerated to 5.6 percent, with the main contributions coming from manufacturing (2.7 percentage points) and domestic trade (0.9 percentage points). Industrial output expanded by 10.3 percent in the first two months of 2018, up from 6.1 percent in 2017. Modest economic growth in Russia and a gradual increase in commodity prices contributed to a revival of production and exports of machinery and oil products¹.

¹ <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/belarus/overview#3>

Trade, services, and the industrial sector are the main sources of the country's economic development. The priority sectors include machinery and metalworking, oil refining, the chemical and petrochemical industries, electrical power, consumer goods and food processing, and the timber and woodworking industry. In 2016 industrial production amounted to 36.1 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), agriculture 7.9 percent, and services 56 percent.

The existing economic model has prioritised the development of state-owned enterprises. They continue to play an important role in the economy, benefiting from a preferential regime in terms of financial and other resources and limited regulatory obligations. In the past few years, the government has increasingly supported private sector participation in the economy and has taken steps to develop a comprehensive support policy for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Despite these developments, SMEs in Belarus still contribute little to employment and value added, compared with the contribution made by SMEs in the European Union (EU). Most Belarusian SMEs operate on a very small scale in traditional industries with low productivity, which in turn explains their limited contribution to total value added. While the gradual reform approach has helped Belarus to avoid the social costs of economic restructuring, the challenge for the country is to make the transition from economic growth that is focused on resources and low-cost labour and capital, towards a growth model based on a high rate of productivity and innovations.

The Belstat has been conducting the labour force survey (LFS) on a quarterly basis since 2012, but the distribution of data was highly restricted, and data was available only to selected government officials. This limitation adversely affected both the understanding and the comparability of data in the international context. However, in 2018, the Belstat released official LFS data for the first time, providing the data for 2017.

Unlike most other post-Soviet countries and transition economies, Belarus has maintained a high employment rate, and the structure of the labour market has remained virtually unchanged because of the high number of large state-owned enterprises, inefficient and unproductive industries, and slow development of the SME sector. The economic activity rate was 71.3 percent in 2017, close to the EU average of 73.3 percent. It was slightly higher for men (75.9 percent) than for women (67.1 percent). The employment rate is also high, and it increased slightly from 66.7 percent in 2016 to 67.2 percent in 2017. Good labour market outcomes are also reflected in the proportion of youth not in employment, education, or training (NEET). In 2017, the NEET rate was 7.3 percent, at the level of the highest-performing EU member states, and much lower than in other countries of the region.

For many years the official unemployment rate in Belarus has been very low, mostly around 1 percent of the working population. This is because it takes into account only

unemployed individuals who are registered with the PES. At the end of 2017, the official unemployment rate decreased to 0.5 percent². In 2017, the Belstat published for the first time an unemployment rate calculated according to LFS data. The unemployment rate was 5.8 percent in 2016 and 5.6 percent in 2017. The youth unemployment rate was higher, at 10.7 percent in 2016 and 9.3 percent in 2017. The long-term unemployment rate is low, at 1.4 percent in 2017, and the proportion of long-term unemployed out of the total unemployed was only 4.7 percent in that year.

The employment authorities report an increase in the available job vacancies in 2018 when compared to 2017, indicating an increasing demand in the labour market. The share of ‘blue-collar’ jobs among the vacancies increased from 52.6 percent to 59.5 percent in comparison to 2017³. However, most of the vacancies reported to employment services are not attractive to many job-seekers as they are mainly low-paid jobs requiring low-level qualifications.

A transformation is currently taking place in the sectoral structure of the employed population. The number of workers employed in the services sector grew from 56.7 percent in 2012 to 60.3 percent in 2017. In the same period employment in agriculture decreased slightly (9.6 percent in 2017), as it did in industry (30.1 percent in 2017). The public sector remains an important employer, absorbing around 40 percent of the workforce. Although employment has been steadily increasing in the private sector and decreasing in the public or state sector, the share of employment in the private sector is among the lowest in the region. According to the Belstat, in 2016 the private sector employed 57.3 percent of the workforce. However, data on private sector employment also include limited and joint stock companies, in which government ownership can reach 99 percent. Therefore, it can be concluded that employment in the public sector predominates in the Belarusian labour market, and the real share of private sector employment requires further research.

Incidence of self-employment is very low at 4.4 percent, indicating a high degree of formal employment in Belarus. There are no available estimates of informal employment, although there may be some categories of workers that can be related to informal employment, such as individual entrepreneurs and artisans.

Skills mismatch is becoming a growing concern in Belarus, with businesses reporting an inadequately educated workforce as an obstacle to their economic performance. More than half of Belarusian SMEs recognise an unskilled workforce as an impediment to their business, and a recent survey by the Institute for Privatization and

² http://www.mintrud.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/zanijatost-naselenija_2942/

³ <http://mintrud.gov.by/ru/sostojanie>

Management (IPM) Research Centre identified human resource factors, such as lack of motivation and skills, as the biggest barrier to business growth, after financial factors⁴.

The State Programme on Social and Economic Development for 2016–2020 defines the priorities, directions, and goals for the social and economic development of Belarus with the aim of increasing the country's competitiveness and improving the quality of life for Belarusian citizens. As one of these goals, the programme establishes an annual employment target of at least 50 000 people in newly created jobs. A long-term goal is to change the sectoral structure of the economy by reducing the proportion of high-energy and material-consuming production, replacing inefficient production with processes based on high levels of technology, innovations and new materials, as well as improving the effectiveness of labour resources and workforce competitiveness in the labour market.

The government continues implementing the State Programme on Social Protection and Employment Promotion for 2016–2020, which aims to develop a system of social protection of the population by enhancing the efficiency of employment policy, improving the conditions of labour protection, and ensuring the social integration of people with a disability as well as older citizens. The programme includes funding and measures relating to active and passive labour market policies, occupational safety and health, and specific measures targeting vulnerable groups, particularly people with disabilities, and their social inclusion.

In 2016, the Law on Employment of the Population was amended in order to reduce social dependency. The most important amendments included provisions establishing more responsibilities for unemployed individuals, including the obligation to search for a job; the amendments also reduced the maximum period an individual can be registered as unemployed from 36 to 18 months.

On 25 January 2018 Presidential Decree No. 1 was adopted. It revised the controversial Decree on the Prevention of Social Dependence (2015), which had been adopted to identify and reduce informal employment. The 2015 decree created public anxiety and provoked protests across the country, and in 2017 it was suspended for one year. The new title of the revised law is the 'Decree on Support for the Employment of the Population'. It aims to create optimum conditions for employment and establishes measures to stimulate employment and self-employment. Local authorities will play the most important role in implementing the decree. This

⁴ <http://eng.research.by/analytics/businessbook/15/>

law also emphasises an individual approach, which means providing help to every unemployed person according to individual needs through training or retraining, temporary work, or other mechanisms. From 1 January 2019, individuals who are able to work but are not economically active will have to pay for state-subsidised services at their full cost. The government will establish a specific list of such services.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MoLSP) is a central governmental body implementing public policy on labour relations, labour protection, employment, social security, and demographic security. It has a coordinating role on these matters with respect to other national government bodies, local councils, executive and administrative bodies, and public and international organisations. The Scientific Institute of Labour and Social Protection supports the MoLSP in data collection and analysis.

The organisational structure of the MoLSP includes structural units of the executive committees for the country's seven regions and Minsk city, which exercise public authority in the fields of labour, employment and social security. The regional Departments of Labour, Employment, and Social Protection currently employ approximately 800 staff, who perform the PES function. The PES registers unemployed persons and provides job search services for them. However, the number of beneficiaries of these services is rather low. Reluctance to register with the PES can be explained by the low level of unemployment benefits (currently EUR 10– 20 per month).

Since 2014 the PES has provided free access to the Nationwide Database of Job Openings (<http://gsz.gov.by/>). The database includes information on different occupations and on the opportunities available for obtaining relevant education. Users of the portal can subscribe to the regular circulation of job-seekers' CVs to potential employers, and to email notifications to job-seekers when a new vacancy is posted to the database. To improve the relevance of information in the database, amendments were made to the Law on Employment of the Population requiring employers to inform the PES about new vacancies within five days (previously 14 days), and to notify the PES when the vacancy is filled. The regional PES works actively with employers to inform them about changes in labour legislation and employment policies, and to ensure that timely and accurate information is provided about the availability of vacancies.

Intermediation services are also provided by private employment agencies, which mainly focus on the recruitment of middle-level personnel and specialists for the occupations that are most in demand in the labour market. As of 1 January 2017, all agencies that provide employment services to individuals must register with the

MoLSP. Once registered, they are added to the Register of Employment Agencies. By 1 January 2018, there were 105 employment agencies on the register⁵.

Legislation determines the procedure for reserving jobs for people who are in particular need of social protection and are not able to compete in the labour market on an equal footing. These people constitute about 20 percent of the total number of those who are registered as unemployed. The PES establishes quotas for employers (regardless of the form of enterprise ownership) with a view to securing employment for people in vulnerable groups. Every year the PES conducts negotiations with employers on the possibility of finding student work placements within the framework of the ‘Youth Practice’ programme, which offers young people an opportunity to obtain their first work experience. The PES also assists unemployed individuals to start entrepreneurial activity through consulting services, training, and financial support in the form of a subsidy, as well as organising paid public work providing job opportunities for those who do not have any other source of income and maintains the motivation to work among job-seekers.

The focus of this Evaluation is the project ‘A strengthened private sector and an improved functioning of the Employment Services in Belarus’ (hereinafter, PES project), which is funded by Sida and implemented in cooperation between the Swedish Public Employment Service (Arbetsförmedlingen), the Belarus Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, and the Committee of Labour, Employment and Social Protection of the Regional Executive Committees in Grodno, Vitebsk and the municipality of Minsk.

Sweden’s cooperation with the Republic of Belarus is governed by the ‘Results’ Strategy for Sweden’s Reform Cooperation with Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans and Turkey 2014-2020’. The PES project is aligned with this Strategy and contributes to Results’ Area 1 ‘Enhanced economic integration with the EU and development of market economy’, and Results’ Area 2 ‘Strengthened democracy, greater respect for human rights, and a more fully developed state under the rule of law’.

Arbetsförmedlingen has carried out externally funded projects (Sida and EU) since the end of the 1980s. The current project is a continuation of a similar, smaller in size

⁵ http://mintrud.gov.by/ru/reestr_po_tr

technical assistance project, which was a cooperation between Arbetsförmedlingen and the Municipality of Minsk between 2009-2011⁶.

The PES project was supposed to run for a period of 36 months from 1 January 2014 to 31 December 2016; however, the project actually started in May 2015 due to administrative reasons. The activity period of the project was until 15 July 2019, and the total amount of Sida's contribution constituted SEK 11,700,000. Therefore, the scope of the present evaluation is January 2014 (May 2015) - July 2019.

The project aimed to further improve the PES's services both to employers and job-seekers, and thus ensure better matching and better supply of trained and qualified specialists in the labour market, by way of guiding job-seekers to relevant VET training, etc. This in turn planned to contribute to a better business climate, increased levels of investment, sustained growth, and a stronger private sector, which is essential for the economic development in Belarus.

The project *beneficiaries* were existing/potential employers and job-seekers in Belarus, specifically employers in the private sector and job-seekers, experiencing difficulties in entering the labour market. Indirectly, the entire population of Belarus will benefit from a better functioning labour market and a vitalised business sector that provides job opportunities, higher return on investment and increased tax revenues.

The *target group* for the intervention was the management and staff members of the PES of Minsk and other regions in Belarus, in particular, those selected to participate in project activities. They were anticipated to acquire enhanced knowledge and awareness with regard to modern work approaches and methods for the delivery of services to employers, and job-seekers, as well as modern models in labour market training.

Other project *stakeholders* included the city planning authorities, private recruiting agencies, social protection organisations, trade unions and enterprise associations.

⁶ Background information: Two technical cooperation projects were implemented by the Department of Employment in Minsk together with Arbetsförmedlingen between 2009 and 2011, these were as follows: (1) Development of Improved Work Methods at the Public Employment Service in Minsk Project and (2) Introduction of Modern Methods and Labour Market Vocational Education and Training in Minsk Project

1.2 RECONSTRUCTED INTERVENTION LOGIC

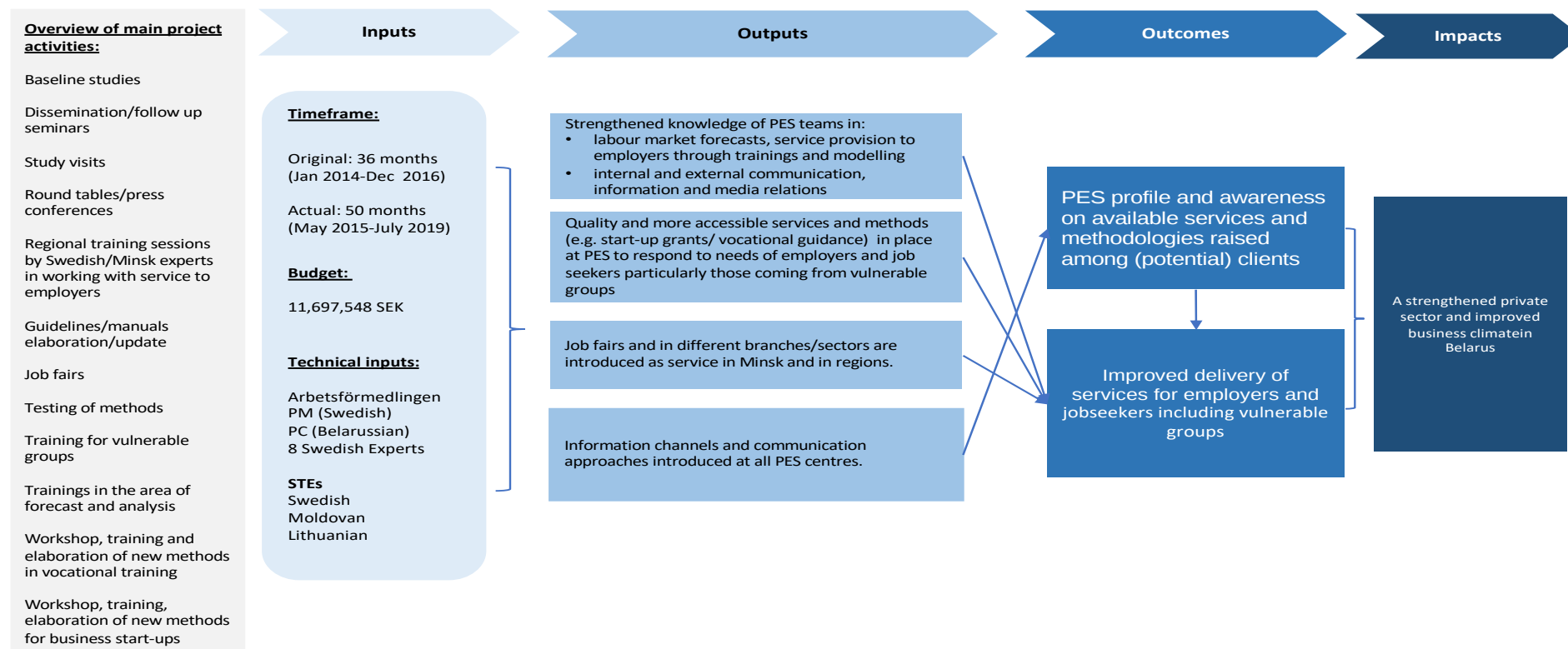
The Intervention Logic (IL) model is a means to visualise and understand how the activities of an intervention are expected to lead to desired results by showing the causal pathways of results at different levels (e.g. short- vs. long-term results) and the conditions under which the causal pathways are expected to work (links from inputs, outputs and outcomes to impact).

Within the evaluation inception phase and based on a desk review of the project documentation, the Evaluation team reconstructed the overarching IL for the Project, within the context of SIDA assistance to the private sector and labour market in Belarus. A first version of the diagram was shared with SIDA and the Swedish PES and the IL presented in the final Inception report include these initial comments from the client. The IL was used as a tool to better understand the Swedish PES and its local partners' contribution to sector and to guide the development of Evaluation Indicators listed in the Evaluation Matrix in Annex 1 of this Report. It is also envisaged as a tool which could support the planning of the next cycle of the Project. The IL is presented in Diagram 1 below.

Diagram 1. Project intervention logic

Project title: A strengthened private sector and an improved functioning of the Employment Services in Belarus

Rationale for Project engagement: Capacitate the Department of Labour to deal with the challenges on the labour market, enhance the social dialogue and strengthen the cooperation between stakeholders on the labour market including governmental agencies, employers, independent business and entrepreneurial organizations and social partners



Assumptions:

1. Commitment and participation of PES in Belarus as well as the Committee of Labour
2. Administrative and personnel resources at PES allocated
3. Administrative, financial and personnel resources at the Committee and local PES centres

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE EVALUATION

The objectives of the evaluation, as outlined in the Terms of Reference (ToR), are the following:

- To evaluate the sustainability of the project «A strengthened private sector and an improved functioning of the Employment Services in Belarus», and to elaborate recommendations on how to improve and adjust future implementation
- To evaluate the relevance and effectiveness of the project ‘A strengthened private sector and an improved functioning of the Employment Services in Belarus’, and to elaborate recommendations as an input, to be used in upcoming discussions, whether there will be funding of a new project in the area of employment services in Belarus by Sida;
- To clarify the interest and readiness of other donors to fund a project in the area of employment services in Belarus

The evaluation is forward looking in nature, hence it aims to provide a set of recommendations and priorities for further investment by SIDA, Swedish PES and their Belarusian partners towards further strengthening of the private sector and the employment service in Belarus.

The Evaluation was commissioned by Sida, and the intended users are Sida, the project beneficiaries and Arbetsförmedlingen. The evaluation results will serve as an input to the decision as to whether there will be funding for a new project in the area of employment services in Belarus by Sida.

2 Methodology and Approach of the evaluation process

2.1 OVERALL APPROACH

The evaluation methodology conformed to OECD/DAC's Quality Standards for Development Evaluation and was guided by the Norms and Standards of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) with application of qualitative data collection methods. The evaluation focuses on assessing the strategies applied in the current Project to identify its relevance, effectiveness, sustainability, also assessing through the gender lens. Furthermore, the evaluation gathers lessons learnt throughout this implementation to strategically plan for the next cycle(s) of implementation of a potential new project.

The evaluation involved key stakeholders from the Swedish PES and Sida in the process of evaluation design, validation of findings and development of recommendations for the continued implementation of the Project.

The evaluation utilised methods such as: stakeholder mapping; context mapping; in-depth and structured documentary review of the Project design, implementation approaches, results and processes; structured desk analysis of policy documents and legislative frameworks in Belarus with regards to employment and labour, analysis and testing of the Intervention logic; analysis of results from M&E systems and data at national and subnational levels; aggregation and analysis of data collected; contribution analysis to determine factors which promoted or impeded the progress against intended results and attribution analysis to the extent possible. Analysis of sustainability strategies and systemic barriers to sustainability was also conducted.

The evaluation team carried out in-depth interviews and group discussions; site observation during site visits to collect data from various sources. A mix of data-gathering tools ensured a wealth of data for triangulation to yield the most reliable and valid answers to the EQs.

The data collected from different sources was triangulated in order to ensure the **validity and reliability** of analysis. The extent to which the project managed to integrate gender in its design and implementation, as well as project's contribution to achievement of changes taking into account the gender dimension was also assessed.

2.2 EVALUATION PHASE

The evaluation was performed in three phases:

1. Inception phase
2. Field phase
3. Synthesis and submission of the Evaluation report

2.2.1 Inception phase

The Inception phase was conducted in October 2019 in order to create the foundations for the evaluation by familiarisation with the Project, designing the evaluation framework and approach. The Evaluation team conducted a comprehensive review of documents received from the PES as well as additional ones downloaded from internet (e.g. Studies dealing with employment and labour in Belarus, etc.)

2.2.2 Field work phase

- **Individual and group interviews** (face-to face, Skype and/or phone) with key informants (KIs). The Desk phase provided insight into the extent to which the PES Project engages with different partners from government, Belarusian PES offices as well as final beneficiaries and clients of PES. During the field work phase, the Evaluation team engaged with and interviewed a range of stakeholders including government partners; representatives of PES; and clients. The Evaluation team interviewed a total of 41 stakeholders (*See Annex 4 with the List of interviewees*)
- **Group Discussions (GD)** will be organized in order to allow participants to share opinions and ideas in the course of a discussion on a specified theme of relevance for the project. The ET conducted a total of 2 Group Discussions in Minsk and 1 Group Discussion in Grodno and 3 Group Discussions in Vitebsk.
- **Field site visit.** The Evaluation team visited Grodno and Vitebsk and conducted interviews and group discussions. A total of 9 persons (3 male and 6 female) took part in group discussions in Minsk; 11 persons (3 male and 8 female) took part in group discussions in Grodno; and 18 persons (3 male and 15 female) in Vitebsk.

2.2.3 Synthesis and submission of the Evaluation report

The review and analysis of the information and the formulation of conclusions and recommendations were based on collected documentation and its review, group discussions and interviews with a broad range of stakeholders. The evaluation matrix served as the foundation and framework for the analysis.

2.3 LIMITATIONS AND MITIGATION STRATEGIES

Table 1: Overview of limitations and mitigation strategies

Limitation	Mitigation strategy
Time constraints for consultations and discussions with relevant stakeholders during field missions. During the short timeframe (4 working days) available for the fieldwork, it was not possible to contact all project beneficiaries, which inevitably limited the quantity of data collected and the depth of analysis.	The field mission programme was composed in such way as to include all relevant project stakeholders and beneficiaries for each component.
While purposeful and non-random, the sample was identified and mobilized by the PES Project.	The team was able to review and comment on a draft list of informants; however, only topical input was provided. Nonetheless, it represents a potential risk for sampling bias.
Interviewees not available for face-to-face meetings	In addition to face-to-face interviews, telephone or Skype calls were conducted. A number of experts also sent in written responses to questions that were emailed to them.
Concerns related to the validity and reliability of interview data	The team applied the UNEG Ethical Guidelines and Code of Conduct, to ensure confidentiality and anonymity for all interviewees.

2.4 ETHICS AND PARTICIPATION

During data collection, attention was paid to ensuring that the evaluation process was **ethical** and that participants in the process could openly express their opinions, protecting the confidentiality of their answers. Overall, the UNEG Code of Conduct for Evaluation in the UN System (March 2008) was strictly respected, notably independence of judgement, impartiality, honesty and integrity, accountability, respect and protection of the rights and welfare of human subjects and communities, confidentiality, avoidance of risks, harm to and burdens on those participating in the evaluation, accuracy, completeness, and reliability of the report, as well as transparency. The Evaluation team was sensitive to beliefs, manners and customs and acted with integrity and honesty in their relationships with all stakeholders, ensuring that their contacts with individuals were characterized by respect, and protected the anonymity and confidentiality of individual information obtained. The Evaluation team paid attention to gender and other aspects (age, education, disability) that might affect equal access to and participation in the evaluation.

3 Key Findings

The PES Project includes a comprehensive set of interventions contributing to the improvement of the functioning of the employment service in Belarus, in terms of better matching and better supply of trained and qualified specialists in the labour market, by way of engaging with the private sector and guiding job-seekers to relevant Vocational Education and Training (VET), etc. This Chapter examines the PES Project's performance and analyses its work in terms of its relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability prospects, as well as gender. The consideration of these criteria is based on a set of evaluation questions and related evaluation criteria and indicators as detailed in the Terms of Reference and the Evaluation matrix, provided in Annexes 1 and 2.

3.1 RELEVANCE

The following is the analysis of the Project's relevance from the perspective of the demands for the improvement of the functioning of the employment service in Belarus and the response to the needs and priorities of beneficiaries, particularly vulnerable groups.

EQ 1. To what extent the objectives of the project are consistent with beneficiaries' requirements and the Republic of Belarus' needs?

Finding 1. The Project design and its objectives are aligned and respond to needs and priorities of its Belarusian partners and to the demands for improvement of the functioning of the employment service in Belarus. The project also offered relevant assistance towards building capacities of PES to engage with the private sector. However, the project did not have many interventions directly focusing on strengthening the private sector.

As discussed in the Background section of this report, the Belarusian PES has undergone significant structural changes undertaken within the reforms of the sector, resulting in significant cuts in PES structures, from over 2,000 PES staff across the country down to 800 employees, serving a population of 10 million inhabitants across the country. The Minsk region has, for example, reduced staff from 111 employees to 69. These cuts have been happening in times of changes in the Belarusian labour market, resulting in lay-offs of unskilled workers and an increasing demand for skilled and qualified labour. In recognition of the need to address issues of labour market and economic development, the government adopted the Programme and Plan of Social Economic Development of Regions and the Plan for Movement of Labour Force and Economic Activity. Many of the demands for changes in the Belarusian labour market, as well as the implementation of the government programme and plan

rely on the PES ability to offer modernised services to job-seekers and employers. However, downsizing brought about important limitations for the PES to engage deeply with employers or to address issues resulting from structural changes in the Belarusian labour market.

In recognition of the need to support PES in its reforms, the PES project has given continuous support, offering a stable partnership and support to PES and the Ministry of Labour. A review of the above-mentioned government's programme and plan shows that investment in better matching and better supply of trained and qualified specialists in the labour market, by way of guiding job-seekers to relevant VET training, etc. is a strong government priority. Hence, the project's focus on a better functioning labour market and a strengthened institutional capacity of the Employment Services, combined with better matching of supply and demand of skilled labour in the Belarusian labour market directly aligns with these government programmes. The PES project also starts from the premise that improved relations between the PES and the employers will improve access to labour market information. Hence, the project invests in building capacity within the PES in Belarus in analysing the labour market by engaging with employers, thus strengthening the links between these two sectors for the benefit of job-seekers in their choices of education and employment which would increase the chance of employers getting the skilled labour force that they need. The PES Project, and in particular its focus on improving the capacities of the PES to obtain extended labour market information, and investment in building new working methods at PES (e.g. work with vulnerable groups, career guidance, business start-up, etc.) has been relevant and has been an important investment, as was confirmed by all interviewed stakeholders. Document review and stakeholder interviews emphasise that the project objectives have been consistent with beneficiaries' requirements (PES, employers, job-seekers).

The project also helped to address the lack of communication and information between stakeholders in the labour market and the PES, including the overall low visibility and profile of PES in the public eye. This issue was tackled through training of PES staff in internal and external communication, information and media relations, development of a communication strategy on how to inform job-seekers and employers on PES services, elaboration of a manual on media relations and information materials, etc. Interviewed stakeholders across the spectrum of clients and PES employees emphasized that the PES was not seen as an actor in the labour market who can help enhance linkages between supply and demand, particularly among private sector companies. Rather the PES has been serving the unemployed, which was seen as still being very much isolated from the private sector and their needs. Hence, the project support through participatory methods to enhance labour market information (e.g. labour forecasting) and communication strategies has

provided relevant support to PES to build links with the private sector, while at the same time raising its visibility.

The project design also includes a focus on job-seekers, and the most vulnerable groups (youth, Persons with Disability (PwD), ex-convicts) in particular, through building capacities of the PES to offer relevant services to these groups. While the project did not work directly with job-seekers, it invested in building capacities of the PES to offer career guidance services (e.g. development of CVs, cover letters, workshops, training, elaboration of new methods in vocational training and for business start-ups). The PES stakeholders confirm strong relevance of such support, particularly as PES did not previously engage in such services.

The project also aligns with Swedish government priorities. The evaluation found strong alignment of the project with the *strategies of Swedish aid to Belarus and the EU Partnership Agenda for Eastern Europe. In particular, the project aligns with the Results strategy for Sweden's reform strategy cooperation with Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans and Turkey 2014 – 2012*", and in particular the priority for 1) Enhanced economic integration with the EU and development of market. The project is important for both Swedish and Belarussian partners and helps build bridges between the two countries based on shared knowledge and practices.

The gender perspective was integrated, albeit to very limited extent in the project design. During the project implementation, the Project assisted PES to tackle the gender dimensions of employment and the labour market, however, to limited extent, as discussed in detail in EQ 4 below.

3.2 EFFECTIVENESS

Effectiveness is a criterion that measures the extent to which the development intervention's objectives were achieved, or are expected to be achieved, taking into account their relative importance. Effectiveness is a qualitative measure of immediate and observable change as a direct result of project activities and the delivery of outputs. This section is organised in such a manner to provide responses to EQs relating to OECD DAC Effectiveness criterion.

EQ 2. To what extent the project's outcomes have been achieved so far?

Finding 2. The Evaluation findings as regards contribution to envisaged results are positive, overall, albeit with variations. Long-term cooperation between the Swedish and Belarusian PES, including bringing in the experiences from Lithuania and Moldova, as well as European practices has been an important driver of project effectiveness. The project main features, the trainings, expert visits, study tours and support to enhancement of IT

solutions succeeded to strengthen capacity of PES offices through increased knowledge, and improved PES practices in terms of labour market forecasting and services. However, the overall change in the way PES approaches client services has not materialised thus far. The changes in the manner in which PES understands and undertakes its roles and services are very incremental and slow, which makes investment in this field an ongoing need.

The project has encountered a number of setbacks during the initial phases, which have delayed achievement of results to large extent. While the project officially started in January 2014, the actual start of the project was delayed until May 2015 due to the delays with the signature of the memorandum of understandings between Arbetsförmedlingen (Swedish PES) and Belarusian partners. This was because the infrastructure of the Belarus PES is decentralised, with each region and its PES being independent, working under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection. There is no national employment agency overseeing the work of PES in the various regions in the country. This decentralised structure creates the need to have individual Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with each partner, the signing of which took time and efforts, and causing the above-mentioned delays. The city of Minsk signed the MoU in May 2016, the city of Vitebsk in October 2015 and in February 2016 the city of Grodno⁷. Further, the addendum to MOU with the region of Vitebsk was signed in June 2016 in order to reactivate the original MoU until December the 31st 2019.

The project had six components in the original project document. However, the business start-ups component was terminated after the initial three expert missions, due to the fact that Belarus had carried out reforms and in other ways had improved the business climate in the country that, as a result, had led to an improvement of the situation, thus making the project's envisaged interventions redundant. Hence, in agreement with Sida, this component was closed.

The project also encountered internal staff changes within the Swedish PES which further delayed some of the initial activities. Moreover, at the onset the project did not envisage having a local presence in Belarus which came to be recognized as a structural weakness, particularly after encountering difficulties to organize missions in Belarus and preparing Belarusian participants for study visits to Sweden as well as providing other forms of practical assistance. To overcome this difficulty, a local project coordinator was hired in June 2017, with 20 percent engagement in the project at the beginning of the contract. Due to a heavier workload than expected, this

⁷ Annual report for 2016, p. 19

engagement was increased to 25 percent from December the same year. The project has a Steering Committee with one contact person from the Belarussian side assigned for each region⁸. The staffing issues and the general budget cuts by Sida led to the postponement of a number of activities and, in particular, the engagement with employers. This affected the achievement of results in this area, as due to delays, the components started at different times. For example, components on forecasting, vulnerable groups and vocational guidance started in the spring of 2016, while the other two components started in 2017 and in 2018. In recognition of the overall delays and their consequences, the project was extended to the 31st of December 2019 and a budget addendum was agreed by Sida in 2017.

Overall engagement of the Project has been constructive and has led to a number of positive short and medium-term results. The long-term cooperation between the Swedish and Belarusian PES, including bringing in the experiences from Lithuania and Moldova, as well as European practices has been an important driver of project effectiveness. Across the three project components, a variety of trainings, expert visits, study tours and support to enhancement of IT solutions (e.g. e-job fair) have been organized with the aim to strengthen capacity, primarily of PES offices in the three regions, aiming to improve their services and raise their profile among employers, job-seekers and the public. The Evaluation found that these activities were useful to expand knowledge and understanding of reforms needed for the PES to respond adequately to the changing context of country's labour market. Stakeholder interviews point to very incremental and slow changes in the manner in which PES understands and undertakes its roles and services. The Project offered opportunity to the PES teams to be exposed to practices of other countries, which has been instrumental in raising knowledge and motivation of the engaged PES to take up new methods and approaches, particularly in engaging with employers and modelling services to respond to needs of job-seekers. Stakeholder interviews and document reviews reveal a number of positive practices that have been undertaken, such as more systematic engagement with employers, e-job fairs as complementary tools to job fairs organized by PES, and importantly, labour market forecasting as a basis for the development of services provided to job-seekers and employers. Resulting outputs have included increased knowledge, and improved PES practices in terms of labour market forecasting and services. The Project also contributed to enhancing PES ability to model more accessible services for job-seekers, including vulnerable

⁸ Background information: Chairman of the Steering Committee, director of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection Belarus, Chairman of the Committee on Labour, Employment and Social Protection of Minsk City Executive committee, Head of the Employment Committee of Labour Employment and Social protection in Minsk, PES in Grodno, PES in Vietbsk, PES Project Manager. Both short term experts and Belarus specialists, such as a legal specialist, took part when needed

groups, involving e-job fairs in six regions. The PES also increased understanding as to why communication is the key to improving PES profiling and providing quality services to their clients. Stakeholder interviews confirm positive progress in terms of achievement of all these above-mentioned outputs as envisaged in the project Intervention logic (See Diagram 1).

Nevertheless, the evaluation found limited evidence with regards to the level of achievement of desired outcomes, as laid out in the Project's intervention logic (see Diagram 1 above). While the PES has been investing in raising its profile, stakeholder interviews reveal that the change in terms of understanding of what PES may offer, particularly to employers, is still not materializing, except in a limited number of individual cases. The labour market forecasting process and e-job fairs have been opportunities to establish and nurture collaboration between PES and employers, but this collaboration is still in embryonic stage (Outcome 1 in the IL diagram). Employers still do not see the value added and appreciate the types of services that PES can offer to them, so the PES is still not perceived as a go-to partner for employers. Besides, while the evaluation found that certain services for employers and job-seekers (e.g. career guidance, VET courses, etc.) are available, there are still gaps in provision of services that would be needed across the spectrum of job-seekers (Outcome 2 in the IL diagram). The decentralized structure of PES in Belarus is not helpful to achieve more structural changes across the sector.

The following sections present assessment of project achievements within each individual component.

Contribution of the Project to the progressive improvement of labour market information in targeted PES

Finding 3. The project was very successful in improving the evidence and labour market information in targeted PES offices. The labour forecasting helped improving understanding of demand and supply needs in the labour market but also helped establishing linkages between the PES and employers, which was not in place before. Particularly valued are opportunities to see and learn about the ways of conducting such activities contributes to awareness raising on the changing role of PES within a changing labour market context in Belarus. Increased skills combined with the availability of devised methodologies and tools resulted in launching Labour market forecasts and professional barometers in all three regions, Minsk, Vitebsk and Grodno. Such supported processes raised awareness and skills of the PES to obtain extended labour market information through closer cooperation with the entrepreneurial sector. The outcome of this support is visible in change of thinking for PES of their role and service they can and should supply in the changing context in Belarus.

The central component in the project has been the development of an analysis and forecasts model to be applied in PES towards improving the evidence base for future labour supply and demand needs. An effective system for forecasting provides a better basis for planning of relevant education and training programmes adapted to the needs of the labour market. This knowledge is also essential for young adults who are to decide which career to pursue. As such, labour forecasting, particularly those engaging with the local business sectors were not conducted in Belarus before the project opened up this field. In order to respond to the need for better understanding of the local labour market supply and demand, the project engaged closely with Swedish and local PES experts in developing and adapting the Swedish and Lithuanian forecasting models to the Belarusian context. The Project engagement was organized in the form of expert missions and trainings by Swedish and Lithuanian experts, as well as study visits to Sweden and Lithuania to help share experiences and exposure to different practices. In particular, these offered space for Belarusian and international experts to finalise preparations of instruments for an employment survey in three regions in Belarus, specifically to the devise methodology and the approach to forecasting and analysing, the organisation of staff for the employer survey, finalization of questionnaires for the employers, the occupational barometer, instructions for the design of questionnaire, barometer and sample, the employer sample and the application used for entering data, etc. All interviewed stakeholders confirm that the opportunity to see and learn about the ways of conducting such activities has been important to contribute to a raising of awareness of the changing role of PES within a changing labour market context in Belarus and to develop skills and tools regarding how to conduct forecasting and barometers.

Thanks to increased skills combined with the availability of devised methodologies and tools, the Labour market forecasts, and professional barometers were launched in all three regions, Minsk, Vitebsk and Grodno in February 2018 and February 2019. Document review and stakeholder interviews note important results coming out of the surveys conducted, from two perspectives: understanding better the local labour market needs and gaps, but also the establishment of relations with the local business sector. Importantly, the forecasts showed that almost 60 percent of employers encounter shortages of skilled workers, detailing a number of reasons including low formal unemployment but also a mismatch in the Belarus labour market, where job-seekers' skills are often obsolete, i.e. not matching the needs of the business sector. Document review and stakeholder interviews confirm that these findings provided a critical evidence base for further work on reforming PES services to be better able to offer job-seekers the opportunity to have an appropriate career guidance and provide chances to learn new skills. The use of forecasts gave positive results in terms of helping to focus on those vocations in demand in the three regions. This is particularly important from the perspective of change of thinking and ways of approaching labour market services through collecting labour market information using not very effective tools, which resulted in a mismatch between supply and demand, with as a result, a workforce with an obsolete skill sets. As a consequence of

the project, the three regions now have an effective tool to plan labour market activities, such as vocational education and trainings. The long-term perspectives of introducing labour forecasting are important in terms of changing the education system, and in particular VET, towards ensuring that it meets the needs of the labour market. However, at the time of the evaluation, there is no clear evidence of changes in the educational sector that may have resulted from the forecasting. This is due to the fact that the PES has, up to today, conducted two forecasts and only in targeted regions, so there is no systematic new approach in this regard. The government is planning to introduce forecasting across the country and therefore, the lessons learned, and practices implemented will be useful, as was also confirmed by stakeholder interviews. The role of the Project in this is visible and positive, and confirmed the need for future and ongoing interventions.

Contribution of the project to the progressive strengthening of relations with employers, in particular the private sector

Finding 4. Engaging PES staff and representatives from big, small and medium sized employers, both private and public in dialogue resulted in creation of links between these parties, thanks to the project. The PES has started shifting their understanding of the need for nurturing links with employers. However, change is slow in terms of understanding of what PES may offer, particularly to employers, except in a limited number of individual cases. Employers still do not see the value added and appreciate the types of services that PES can offer to them, so PES is still not perceived as a go-to partner for employers. The evaluation found no evidence of concrete joint PES-business sector endeavours that would lead to better understanding of the changing roles of PES. Main limitation is found within PES structure and limited staff, which results in prioritising services to job-seekers, which are the usual duties of PES and resistance to investing additional effort in measures outside of PES 'comfort zone'. On the other side the project contributed significantly to improving the visual identity of PES offices through investment in capacities for external communication.

The project's main focus has been on building capacities of partner PES in the three regions, and in particular to help PES to overcome its isolation from the private sector. The private sector in Belarus has grown stronger since 2000, with 54 percent of workforce now employed in the private sector, versus 43 percent employed in the state sector⁹. The changes in the economic context in the country results in changing demands made on the labour force, in particular on qualified workers. This also

⁹ Project proposal "A strengthened private sector and an improved functioning of the Employment Services in Belarus", p.7

requires changing the way in which the PES engages to assist private companies to meet these demands, thereby reducing the transaction costs in the market, i.e. the time and resources used by employers to find suitable candidates for the vacancies. However, the PES has slowly reformed to respond to this need as a result of a number of slow incremental changes in PES business practices and approaches, which were also affected by significant staffing and budget cuts. In particular, the PES has been rather distant from the business sector, focusing on its regular duties rather than learning about and engaging with the private sector to explore and match their needs.

The Project approach to overcome this isolation was primarily through raising awareness of the PES on the need to take a more proactive role in this regard, specifically through building skills of the PES to obtain extended labour market information through closer cooperation with the entrepreneurial sector. As discussed in the subsection on labour forecasting above, this engagement built positive results in terms of better understanding of the labour market's supply and demand. At the same time, through applying participatory methods, the PES reported that the linkages and contacts with the business sector started to grow. The interviewed PES stakeholders shared the views that these interactions had the following two results: 1) for PES to get to know the labour market better and their role in it; and 2) for businesses to understand the role and potential of the PES to help with matching the demand and with the supply.

In addition, the Project also offered a number of capacity building activities to assist PES in the three regions to improve their services to employers, engaging with local experts and representatives from local employers to share best practice from Sweden on Arbetsförmedlingen's cooperation with employers. Trainings on business start-ups, job fairs, engagement between PES and employers, etc. were organized. Such trainings engaged both the PES staff in the targeted regions and representatives from big, small and medium sized employers, both private and public, with the aim to assist creating an efficient dialogue. Document review and stakeholder interviews emphasized positive experiences in dialogue between the PES and employers when it comes to opportunities to develop the cooperation further. Interviewed PES but also business stakeholders agree that this helped raise awareness, although it is yet to be seen how this will affect future PES operations. The evaluation did not find evidence of concrete joint PES-business sector endeavours that would lead to better understanding of the changing roles of PES. Overall, the evaluation interviews revealed that the PES succeeded in combining service to employers with the obligations of the employers. The result was beneficial for both employers and job-seekers. Main challenge that PES faces is the limited staff, which results in prioritising services to job-seekers, which are the usual duties of PES and do not require additional effort.

Within efforts to raise the profile and enhance cooperation between PES and employers, the Project supported capacity building of PES to enhance its external communication. Within these efforts, trainings on communication towards employees and public were organized in all three regions, including topics such as: communication with employers and job-seekers, communication with mass-media, promotion of services and brand communication, etc. Interviewed PES representatives regarded positively these trainings as opportunities to exchange experiences between experts from Sweden, Lithuania and Moldova and Belarus. The project also helped to develop a “brandbook” of PES at national level and a guide on how to communicate with mass-media. Most importantly, the project supported PES in developing and implementing communication for several e-job fairs, thus showing in practice how a communication activity is developed and organized.

One of the main results achieved by the project is the development and launch of the e-job fair platform, www.e-vacancy.by in December, 2018, based on models from the EU network of Public Employment Services (www.europeanjobdays.eu) and the Moldovan National Employment Agency (www.e-angajare.md). The e-job fair was based on the IT software that has been developed by a Belarusian IT company and has been placed on the server of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection with support of the project. Besides launching the portal, PES organized several e-job fair events in all three regions. The e-job fair is still in its testing phase as confirmed by stakeholders, so not yet widely or systematically in use across the country. Nevertheless, the stakeholder interviews strongly confirmed the utility of this tool as an innovative way to connect local demand and supply. At the time of the evaluation, the e-job fair was in use by employers and job-seekers, though interviewees raised the issue that it is still mainly posting jobs for lower or non-qualified workforce. There is a plan to expand the utility of the software across the system, which is regarded by interviewed stakeholders as an area where Swedish and other partner countries models and experiences are important.

Through capacity building and support, the project aimed at improving the visual identity of PES offices. This area of support is affected by a lack of systematic measures for the consolidation of the communication capacities of PES employees. Thus far, due to budget and staff cuts, PES has not managed to appoint/hire employees responsible for communication issues, while development of online services for job-seekers and employers has also been slow. The lack of an overarching communication strategy to increase the visibility of PES and its services is a hindering factor, which is not helped by the very incremental changes in the way PES works and also presents itself to the public.

Contribution of the project to improved services to job-seekers in terms of vocational training

Finding 5. Gaps remain in provision of services for job-seekers. Evaluation found limited results due to the fact that vocational guidance/counselling has a low priority status at the PES. In particular, while training delivered by the project were of good quality, PES has limited opportunity to apply the newly acquired knowledge in practice, particularly on topics such as preparing CVs and cover letters, as well as group counselling due to lack of demand. The evaluation found that modern self-directed search tool Vägvisaren (Orientation Tools) have been valued as most useful approach replicable to the Belarusian context. The main hindering factor for effectiveness is limited skill set and lack of willingness on the side of PES to apply the new approaches in their work, and the generally slow progress for change within the institution.

The evaluation interviews and document review showed that the project achieved limited results under this component. This is primarily since vocational guidance/counselling has a low priority status at the PES. The project provided a variety of capacity-building activities, as well as sharing experiences and case studies. All interviewed stakeholders confirmed that the trainings were of good quality and were conducted by professional experts (psychologist and employment officers). However, there is limited opportunity to apply the newly acquired knowledge in practice, due to a number of factors. This includes PES staff's limited skill set and their lack of willingness to apply the new approaches in their work, and the generally slow progress to change within the institution. For instance, interviewed experts engaged in the project mentioned difficulties in the use of interactive teaching methods due to the fact that it was difficult for the PES staff to engage in team exercises due to a lack of habit of teamwork.

The most useful approach shared by the project was a modern self-directed search tool Vägvisaren (Orientation Tools), which interviewed stakeholders found to be replicable to the Belarusian context. Stakeholder interviews reveal that the strength of the Orientation Tools is that these allow for the testing of different categories of job-seekers, thus building a better knowledge base of the PES clients' capacities. Specifically, for youth, the tools help to determine the important professional characteristics of this group. Before the project, PES used written tests which required 1,5 hours to complete, while the tools proposed by the project require just 30-40 minutes for completion of both tests. Stakeholders also mentioned weaknesses of the tools: (i) it is a paper version and it would be better to have it in the electronic form, as it would allow them to be accessible to more people; (ii) the adjustments to the local context was not very good as some professions did not match with Belarusian codification of professions, e.g. consultant on dependency, repair of mechanical objects; (iii) in case of the low score, these tests do not allow for a choice between several professions. For the purpose of using, the Arbetsförmedlingen has a contract with a private supplier for "vägvisaren" service in Sweden. The Arbetsförmedlingen managed to have an additional contract allowing us to translate

the documents into Russian language and print a certain number in of copies Belarus. However, the electronic version was not provided during this cycle of the project, which is a missed opportunity in the view of the Evaluation team. There are indications that this element will be integrated into a potential future project.

Less useful approaches in view of interviewed stakeholders were trainings on preparing CVs and cover letters, as well as group counselling. All these topics were interesting but have limited utility due to the lack of demand for such services (e.g. assistance with writing CVs and cover letters by job-seekers). The introduction of a tool such as group counselling remains as an area where further capacity building support is needed so that the placement officers and managers have a better understanding of the benefits of this tool.

3.3 SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability is usually assessed after project intervention since it measures whether the positive outcomes of the project are likely to continue after development assistance has been completed. The sustainability prospect is assessed against the Evaluation question as set out in the Terms of Reference for the Evaluation, so this evaluation question and associated evaluation indicators guide the analysis within this criterion.

EQ 3. What is the likelihood of long-term benefits (outcomes) from the project, and to what extent the benefits from the project will continue after project completion?

Finding 6. The sustainability of achieved results is weak. On the positive side, the government is planning to introduce forecasting across the country and therefore, the lessons learned, and practices implemented will be useful. Investment in capacity building of individuals, institutions, and organisations has a strong sustainability potential. However, there is a high turnover at PES, and changes are slow and incremental. Uptake of innovation in communication approaches are challenged by a lack of communications strategy or new communication staff, while new client-centered services are slowly taking place. Reforms of the PES are still unfinished business, affecting sustainability in the short to medium term.

The project has invested efforts in building the capacity of PES teams in the three target regions, at the same time assisting with building dialogue between PES and employers. From the point of view of the PES teams, the sustainability of acquired knowledge and skills is naturally high, as the majority of participants retain their skills and incorporate learned principles and knowledge into their jobs. For example, the Project's ongoing support of the entire process of the development and

implementation of the labour market forecasting survey has assisted the PES teams to acquire strong skills to do it themselves. This was confirmed by stakeholders who emphasise that they can make their own forecasts on labour markets using the databank created thanks to the project. PES and the Ministry of Labour representatives emphasised their readiness to continue with labour market forecasting on their own, also planning to conduct a country-wide labour market study. However, it seems that the turnover at PES is high, while also the reforms of the PES are still unfinished business, creating sustainability challenges in the short to medium term. The evaluation also found that changes in the way PES engages are extremely slow and incremental, and stakeholder interviews reveal that larger changes in terms of engagement, in particular with employers will take time. This is also the case as regards the uptake of innovation in communication approaches. The PES has not yet adopted a communications strategy; neither did it manage to hire new communication staff.

Training material, shared practices and guides developed by the project provide a good basis for further capacity building and enhancement of the material for wider use. However, the PES is highly decentralized which makes it difficult to implement innovative solutions, including the e-job fairs, systematically across all PES service centres in the country. The project has invested resources in raising awareness and knowledge, but it seems that the uptake and institutionalisation of new approaches will require more time and continued external support.

EQ 4. What is the level of project ownership, on side of the Republic of Belarus, and the readiness to build on project achievements and carry the process further onwards?

Finding 7. The evaluation found strong ownership over the project and its results by local counterparts, primarily the PES offices in the three target regions and also in the Ministry of Labour. However, limited geographic and thematic scope and limited no. of partners does not allow for the creation of a critical mass or a pool of experts who could replicate across all PES.

The evaluation found strong ownership over the project and its results by local counterparts, primarily the PES offices in the three target regions and also in the Ministry of Labour. There is strong interest and appreciation of what the project has to offer, particularly in terms of exposure to international practices and acquiring concrete tools and knowledge. Local stakeholders agree that the project-initiated changes in thinking about the PES role which has empowered them to put efforts into moving the process forward. A good example is the running of e-job fairs which, it is envisaged, will to continue to be conducted even if the project is not continued.

The Project is filling in the gap in donor support to PES. This is the only project that provides direct assistance to PES institutional development. At the time of the evaluation, the only other project that is implemented in the sector is the EU-funded Project on Employment and Vocational Education and Training in Belarus. Other donors are not active in this field.

Expected Outcome	Ownership	Sustainability	Explanations
EO1: Extended labour market information aimed at strengthening relations with employers, in particular, the private sector	medium-high	limited-moderate	The PES project supported the implementation of two labour forecasts in each target region; however, the data analysis was mainly done by the project's experts and the approach towards the analysis was not shared with PES staff in Belarus. Also, no software which could be easily used by the PES staff for data analysis of the data received in the course of conducting the labour forecasts, was developed. In addition, there is no formalised decision by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection that forecasts will be carried out every year. Therefore, it is questionable if the labour forecasts will continue to be conducted by PES in Belarus. In terms of job fairs, the project piloted and handed over the developed software to the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection; therefore, it has a good potential to be used further. In November 2019 (after the end of the project), all targeted regions held the second cycle of job fairs on their own.
EO2: Improved service to job-seekers including disadvantaged groups through the development of new working methods at PES	medium	limited-moderate	Although the project provided a number of training and organized exchange visits for PES staff on vulnerable groups as well as process mapping on procedures of work with job-seekers in Belarus. However, utilisation of the shared knowledge is limited due to the need to introduce system-level changes at national level with regards to PES services to ex-convicts, and other vulnerable groups. For instance, at the time of the evaluation, cooperation with prison and probation services is limited or non-existent about exchange information, and the provision of more tailored support for ex-convicts. Besides, the application of services such as assistance with writing CV and cover letters has limited sustainability because of the non-availability of sufficient PES staff to support

			this activity. There is also low motivation for PES to invest further in these services because employers do not necessarily require job-seekers to provide CVs and cover letters. On the other hand, orientation tools which were shared with PES staff have a high degree of sustainability and continue to be used by the PES staff. The brochure developed for working with job-seekers was handed over to the PES in printed form (1,000 copies for each region) as well as in electronic form and can be used further by the PES staff.
EO3: New information and communication strategy for PES developed and implemented	medium	moderate	Everything that the project has supported or done under this component has involved all parties from national and local levels, so that all have a common understanding of the problem and an acceptance of the solutions to these problems. Thus, all activities, tools and documents supported by the project were approved by the highest state authority in the area. However, the further usage of the developed brandbook of PES and the guide on how to communicate with mass media are likely to remain somewhat limited. This is because PES at regional level do not have dedicated Communication Officers and all PES staff have to do this type of work in addition to their main duties. To ensure a proper implementation of the new information and communication strategy further capacity building of PES staff on communication issues is required.

3.4 GENDER

EQ 5. What have been the project's positive effects on gender equality? Could gender mainstreaming have been enhanced during planning, implementation and follow-up?

Finding 8. The project focused on three vulnerable groups: youth, disabled and ex-criminals. These target groups were selected based on the interest expressed by the PES. However, the evaluation found very limited evidence in terms of the project's positive effects on gender equality with regard to vulnerable groups.

Gender analysis was conducted prior to the project start, but it was more of general nature and lacked specific analysis of vulnerabilities as experienced by vulnerable groups targeted by the project¹⁰. Gender equality was formulated as one of the objectives of the PES project with activities and resources (financial and human) linked to it, in particular improvement of services to job-seekers including vulnerable groups. However, in most of the project's components and activities, the gender perspective was not very visible throughout the intervention period. The Project Document includes one sentence with regard to gender mainstreaming, i.e. 'A gender perspective will be mainstreamed throughout the project activities'¹¹. However, no information is also contained in the project progress reports with regard to the project's influence on more effective distribution of resources to vulnerable groups, such as labour market programs and vocational training based on labour market needs in different regions. Interviews and group discussions with PES clients do not reveal much with regard to the improved gender focus of PES, and it seems likely that the project had very limited to no emphasis on the gender dimensions of the labour and employment market, as well as vocational training. The document review also demonstrated that the project did not present sex disaggregated data systematically, neither in its progress reports nor in its reports on capacity-building activities under each component. Moreover, the project's Logframe did not have specific indicators for gender that can assess the project's progress and achievements on promoting gender equality.

At the same time, the project did make sure that gender equality approaches were integrated into its management practices. The vast majority of project experts were women and the project's Steering Committee was well balanced with two men and three women, plus one representative from each region of Grodno and Vitebsk.

¹⁰ Note: No specific analysis of existing types of employment inequalities, labour market segregation, gender pay gap, working conditions, how specific groups, such as women, youth, disabled, ex-criminals faring in the labour market were included in the ProDoc.

¹¹ Project proposal "A strengthened private sector and an improved functioning of the Employment Services in Belarus", p. 7

4. Conclusions and recommendations

The following sections of the report present sets of cross-cutting conclusions and recommendations derived from the findings and answers to the EQs.

4.1 CONCLUSIONS

4.2.1 Relevance

Conclusion 1. *The Swedish PES project aligns with needs for improvement of the labour market and employment measures undertaken by the Public Employment Service and also the Ministry of Labour. It also aligns with the Swedish Sida cooperation objectives. It remains continuously relevant to the context and is responsive to the needs of the PES but also to employers and clients of the PES.*

The PES project has been designed and implemented in close consultation and partnership with the Public Employment Service and the Ministry of Labour, with ample opportunities for local partners to raise their needs and priorities for further project support in different areas. The project offered its partners relevant thematic and technical interventions in alignment with and positively influencing by national priorities. The project was designed as a demand-driven intervention, strongly rooted in the needs of its partners, which helped increase ownership over results. Importantly, the project serves as an important connecting point between the Swedish and Belarusian partners, helping also to recognise the importance of Swedish support to the reform processes in the country.

4.2.2 Effectiveness

Conclusion 2. *In general, the Project demonstrated good achievements towards reaching the anticipated results, despite a challenging environment. The Project was effective in the achievement of its desired outputs. It has succeeded in achieving most of its outcomes, although variations are visible.*

The PES project has formulated a rather realistic set of objectives to be achieved within the contextual framework of the PES work in Belarus. This has helped significantly in the achievement of results that have been both relevant but also reasonable from the perspective of incremental changes of the PES that are possible in the short to medium term. Nevertheless, the project encountered a number of setbacks, relating to staff changes, budget cuts, and delays; although these did not affect the project negatively in terms of achievement of results. Throughout the implementation of the Project, partners delivered significant results, including establishing comprehensive evidence base on the labour supply and demand collected

through the labour forecasting. Thanks to project interventions, the PES teams in the three regions but also employers engaged in the project, have acquired skills and knowledge; moreover, employers increasingly enter into dialogue on issues of labour markets and employment. The project support was also favourable for building PES skills in terms of communication and changing the mindsets towards opening the Service to more engagement and dialogue; both with employers and with clients, including vulnerable groups. As such, increased knowledge offers a direct contribution to improved planning and prioritization of services that PES can offer to both employers and its clients towards closing the gap between labour supply and demand. However, contribution to long-term results varies. In general, effectiveness is higher in terms of strengthening PES skills to conduct labour forecasting and engaging in dialogue with employers. However, less visible results are found in improved employability of vulnerable groups, inter alia, as a result of the project. There is inconclusive evidence regarding the extent to which the short-term results achieved to date are sufficient to secure the continuation and institutionalisation of reforms. The changes in PES are very slow and susceptible to staff changes and reluctance to commit to innovative approaches to employment services.

4.2.3 Sustainability

Conclusion 3. *The project does not have a strong phase-out strategy developed in a participatory way with partners. The sustainability of many achieved effects and benefits remains fragile.*

The PES Project, with support from Sida, has invested considerable efforts in developing the PES capacities to engage more closely with its clients, primarily vulnerable groups and employers, based on evidence collected through labour market forecasting. The project shared best practices, innovative methods, practices, methodologies and tools. However, there is a threat to the sustainability of increased institutional capacities due to the potentially high turnover of staff. The long-term sustainability of many interventions is threatened by a number of factors, many of which are outside of Project control. For example, the role and services that PES can provide are still not so widely understood, mainly due to the fact that the visibility of PES is very low.

4.2.4 Gender

Conclusion 4. *The PES project did not have an explicit gender strategy and gender issues have not been mainstreamed into the project's awareness-raising activities.*

The project has had no real focus on gender, and this is the single most important weakness of this intervention. It provided very little effort beyond the absolute minimum to integrate and mainstream the gender dimension across its activities and results. Therefore, the evaluation concludes that the gender balance was not achieved by the PES project.

4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations derive from extensive consultations with key stakeholders across the evaluation process, analysis of documentation, and the findings and conclusions of this evaluation. The ET used interviews and GDs to generate ideas for the potential next cycle of support. The Evaluation recommendations were further presented and validated through interactive discussions with the Project and SIDA stakeholders during the de-briefing meeting held in November 2019.

Recommendations are divided into two categories, as follows:

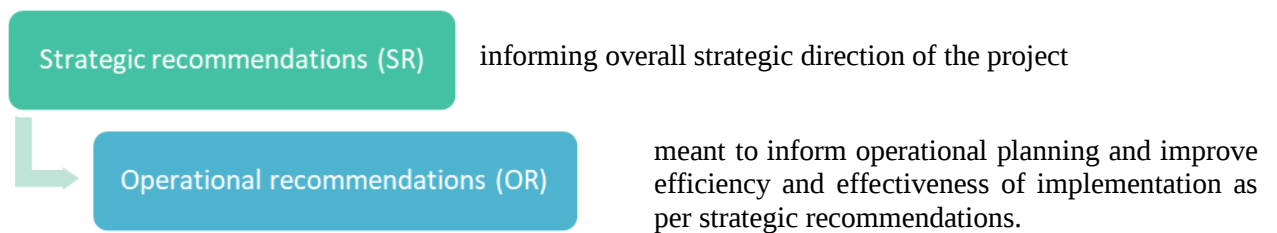


Table 3. Table of recommendations

Recommendation	Responsibility	Timeframe
Strategic recommendations		
SR 1. Sida and its implementing partners should consider extending the project to support system level changes and coverage of the PES across the entire country. The new cycle of the project should be built on best practices and on the lessons learned from the support provided to the three targeted PES. The Project partners gathered a number of best practices and innovative functional models across all components. Sharing these models and raising capacities regarding how to apply them would be extremely beneficial to the other PES offices across the country, which in turn would result in more systematic and strong contributions made to matching labour demand and supply. Partners agree that a follow-up project, expanding the reach to all PES offices, would be beneficial and would profit from drawing on the existing partners from the original three PES offices as peer educators for others, along with the Swedish, Lithuanian and Moldovan experts. Moreover, the PES project touched a lot of strategic points and aspects of legal acts which cannot be changed at the regional level and it will therefore be more effective if the project becomes one which is nation-wide rather than just operating at regional level.	Sida and Arbetsförmedlingen	2019-2020
SR 2: Consider partnering with BEROc in implementation of the next phase of the project BEROC could be very good partner particularly in the area of socio-economic analysis and vulnerability analysis and macro-economic analysis for forecasting and regional context analysis (Belarus relations with other countries).	Sida, Arbetsförmedlingen, BEROc	2019-2020
Operational recommendations		
OR 1. Ensure full-time in-country staffing In case that the PES project is continued (see SR 1), it is advised that a project representative is engaged at least for 70 percent of the time, and preferably 100 percent of the time on the project. This is particularly necessary if the next cycle of the project will engage with PES across the country.	Arbetsförmedlingen	2020
OR 2. Strengthen gender mainstreaming of the project Evaluation found very limited to no focus of the project on gender. It is advised that the gender dimension of the project is enhanced through: (i) conducting of a proper gender analysis (i.e. analysing the gender equality situation in the labour market of Belarus and	Arbetsförmedlingen	2020

identifying the expected results in terms of strengthened gender equality in each target region); (ii) targeting specific issues in addition to specific groups (vulnerable groups) through special interventions, putting more focus on women; and (iii) fostering dialogue with partners on gender sensitive issues and aspects. Consider the introduction of the requirement to report on gender in progress reports (annual and final)		
OR 3. Strengthen the results framework Ensure that future projects have a results framework structured as a management tool, which enables the measuring of the project's impact at the outcome level. Relevant quantitative output level indicators need to have the established baselines and targets, and indicators for outcome level should allow for assessment through a mix of qualitative as well as quantitative methods.	Sida and Arbetsförmedlingen	2019-2020
OR 4. Develop a more systematic approach for measuring training outcomes. Closely related to OR 2, the Evaluation Team advises that a systematic approach to measuring training outcomes for PES be developed. A Kirkpatrick's training assessment model may be considered as a tool which allows measuring the efficacy of the trainings on the level of reaction, knowledge and behavioural change. More attention should be given to measuring training outcomes 3 to 6 months after training and the application of new learning and skills by trainees. In order to achieve this, the allocation of sufficient budget for monitoring of capacity building activities needs to be ensured (10 percent-15 percent of the total training budget).	Arbetsförmedlingen	2020
OR 5. Strengthen and upgrade the existing interventions In case of continuation of the project, it is recommended to focus on the following aspects: 1. The project should analyse feasibility of developing labour forecasts for 2-year periods. This would allow for a better matching between skills and jobs. Labour forecasts should be focused, i.e. sectorial (trade, industry, etc) and would allow for cross-regional and cross-city analysis. 2. Raise knowledge of Belarusian PES on how to make electronic registration of the unemployed and how to develop the distance Employment Service Centres as well as methods and approaches which are used for stimulation of employment of PwDs. 3. Draw on international experience regarding the work with	Sida and Arbetsförmedlingen	2020

such vulnerable groups as people of pre-retirement age¹² and youth up to 21 years old as those groups are the largest groups in number and require the most assistance. 4. Organize special courses on how to work with mass media for staff of regional PES.		
OR 6. Project design should integrate a process approach In future projects which involve institutional development and are implemented in a complex environment, the “process” approach should be applied for project design as it offers more flexibility in its choice of objectives, means, and priorities. It is deliberately designed to build and maintain ownership among participants, to emphasize learning and capacity building, and to cope with changes in the operating environment¹³.	Sida and Arbetsförmedlingen	2020
OR 7. Facilitate the development of a comprehensive capacity development training strategy for the Public Employment Service (PES) in Belarus The Strategy should include standards and monitoring mechanisms for all aspects of services provided, including evaluation training, materials development and dissemination, and services support such as for information systems. The Strategy should contain a clear Theory of Change to enable full understanding of desired change and measures that will contribute to such change.	Arbetsförmedlingen	2020
OR 8. Integrate the IT component into the next phase of the project. Sida and Arbetsförmedlingen should consider integrating IT component in the next phase of the project towards improvement of the labour market information system through support to software solutions and supporting the architecture of this software. In particular, areas to explore are digital services (e.g. distance learning, electronic services).	Sida and Arbetsförmedlingen	2020

¹² Background information: In accordance with Articles 11-13 and 15 of the Law of the Republic of Belarus “On Pension Provision”, retirement age has increased in Belarus. Men will go on pension in the age of 63 years old, and women at 58 years old by 2023. Now the retirement age is 61.5 years for men and 56.5 years for women

¹³ For more details about this approach please see: Brinkerhoff, DW & Ingle, MD (1989) “Integrating blueprint and process: a structured flexibility approach to development management” in Public Administration and Development 9, 487-503

5. Lessons Learned

The following lessons learned have been identified during this project evaluation, which can contribute towards establishing good practices when designing and implementing projects to support Employment Services. The lessons must, in principle, be taken into regard during the design stage in order to improve project implementation while supporting transparency and accountability.

Capacity building and training	Strengthening the capacity of government in policy and service delivery is a valuable and necessary objective but, in itself, is unlikely to result in any fundamental reform of structures, systems and procedures without system level engagement. Embedded technical assistance can be a useful supplementary mechanism for promoting and helping to establish such change along with the re-engineering of standard operating procedures and systems. Training should also be delivered as part of a staff development and appraisal system to ensure the adequate matching of training provision with need and demand. In order to ensure sustainability and scale-up, structured Training of Trainers programmes can be of greater benefit than one-off trainings.
Performance monitoring	In the absence of robust and verifiable indicators at the outcome and impact level, projects will tend to gravitate towards activity monitoring. Whilst this will provide project management with information on the quantum and coverage of activities and outputs, it will not yield sufficient information on the quality of outputs and/or the degree of achievement towards the desired level of change. In the absence of such indicators, it will not be possible to measure progress. Project with strong capacity building and organizational change orientation need to ensure that the results framework contains robust indicators and realistic targets that should be periodically reviewed in terms of achievement and relevance.
Planning for sustainability	Even in the short-term projects, institutional capacity of relevant entities needs to be conducted at the onset of intervention to ensure that project interventions bring sustainable results. Sustainability needs to be considered and ingrained as a component of any given activity.

Annex 1 Evaluation Matrix

	Judgement indicators	Sources of information	Data collection methods
Relevance			
1. To what extent the objectives of the project are consistent with beneficiaries' requirements and the Republic of Belarus' needs?	Evidence of alignment of strategies implemented by the Project with recognized needs for improving capacities of a) the civil society organisations b) professionals and institutions to integrate mechanisms for democratisation of the <i>spatial planning processes</i> c) professionals and institutions to apply cadastral valuation system for the purposes of real property taxation and tax control within the real property sector	• Project documentation • Workplans, Progress and Performance reports • Research, studies and publications on context and issues pertaining land administration and urban development in Belarus • External documents analysing contextual changes and priorities of the governments' land administration and urban development system • Government and PES strategies and action plans • Key Informants (KI)	○ Systematic documentary review applying structured tools and comparative analysis focused on strategies and activities implemented by Project and alignment with needs ○ Semi-structured interviews with: ○ Lantmäteriet ○ NGO Land Reform ○ professionals ○ Representatives of development partners (TBC) ○ SIDA • Group discussions with: ○ Civil society actors
	Evidence of alignment of Project strategies with recognized needs of CSOs to be more active in land administration and urban development policies in Belarus Evidence of alignment of Project strategies with recognized needs of government institutions dealing with land management and urban planning	• Project documentation • Workplans, Progress and Performance reports • Research, studies and publications on context and issues pertaining land administration and urban development in Belarus • External documents analysing contextual changes and priorities of the governments' land administration and urban development system • Government and PES strategies and action plans • Key Informants (KI)	○ Systematic documentary review applying structured tools and comparative analysis focused on strategies and activities implemented by Project and alignment with needs ○ Semi-structured interviews with: ○ Lantmäteriet ○ NGO Land Reform ○ professionals ○ Representatives of development partners (TBC) ○ SIDA • Group discussions with: ○ Civil society actors

ANNEX 1 EVALUATION MATRIX

	Judgment indicators	Sources of information	Data collection methods
Effectiveness			
2. To what extent the project's outcomes have been achieved so far, and what the likelihood is that they be fully achieved, and why?	Contribution of the Project to the progressive improvement of democratisation of spatial planning processes (<i>none/modest/significant</i>) Contribution of the Project to the progressive strengthening of cadastral valuation system and real property taxation and tax control within the real property sector (<i>none/modest/significant</i>)	• Project documentation • Workplans, Progress and Performance reports • Research, studies and publications on context and issues pertaining land administration and urban development in Belarus • External documents analysing contextual changes and priorities of the governments' land administration and urban development system • Government and PES strategies and action plans • Key Informants (KI)	○ Systematic documentary review applying structured tools and comparative analysis focused on strategies and activities implemented by Project and alignment with needs ○ Semi-structured interviews with: ○ Lantmäteriet ○ NGO Land Reform ○ professionals ○ Representatives of development partners (TBC) ○ SIDA • Group discussions with: ○ Civil society actors
	Evidence of improved capacities of civil society organisations in terms of: ○ Sustainable performance • Transfer of competence and extended international network	• Project documentation • Workplans, Progress and Performance reports • Key Informants (KI)	○ Systematic documentary review applying structured tools and comparative analysis focused on strategies and activities implemented by Project and alignment with needs ○ Semi-structured interviews with: ○ Lantmäteriet ○ NGO Land Reform ○ professionals ○ Representatives of development partners (TBC) ○ SIDA • Group discussions with: ○ Civil society actors

ANNEX 1 EVALUATION MATRIX

	Contribution of the Project to strengthening the influence of civil society in the area of land administration and urban development, improvement of the system of mass formation and mass valuation of real property for the purpose of real property taxation, improvement of the procedures for real property taxation and the system for tax control and improvement of urban spatial planning.	• Records on degree of inclusion of civil society in land administration and urban development processes • Research, studies and publications on context and issues pertaining land administration and urban development in Belarus • Key Informants (KI)	○ Systematic documentary review applying structured tools and comparative analysis focused on strategies and activities implemented by Project and alignment with needs ○ Semi-structured interviews with: ○ Lantmäteriet ○ NGO Land Reform ○ professionals ○ Representatives of development partners (TBC) ○ SIDA • Group discussions with: ○ Civil society actors
Sustainability			
3. What is the likelihood of long-term benefits (outcomes) from the project, and to what extent the benefits from the project will continue after project completion?	Project Partners can offer examples of ways in which they are sustaining programmatic activities.	• Key Informants (KI)	○ Semi-structured interviews with: ○ Lantmäteriet ○ NGO Land Reform ○ professionals ○ Representatives of development partners (TBC) ○ SIDA • Group discussions with: • Civil society actors
	Evidence of: • Concrete changes in national/local/institutional policies, regulations, and plans that can sustain the project results and strategies. • Scaling-up of pilot interventions • Adoption of lessons and good practices that lead to changes in the strategic and organisational direction of the Government institutions.	• Project documentation • Workplans, Progress and Performance reports • Government and strategies and action plans for urban planning and land management • Key Informants (KI) •	○ Semi-structured interviews with: ○ Lantmäteriet ○ NGO Land Reform ○ professionals ○ Representatives of development partners (TBC) ○ SIDA • Group discussions with: ○ Civil society actors

ANNEX 1 EVALUATION MATRIX

	• Additional allocations of national budget and/or other donor resources • Institutional capacity in place to sustain levels of achievement		
4. What is the level of project ownership, on the side of the Republic of Belarus, and the readiness to build on project achievements and carry the process further onwards>	• Ownership over the different project areas and correspondent results by national/local stakeholders	• Project documentation • Workplans, Progress and Performance reports • Key Informants (KI)	• Systematic documentary review applying structured tools and comparative analysis focused on strategies and activities implemented by Project and alignment with needs • Semi-structured interviews with: ○ Lantmäteriet ○ NGO Land Reform ○ Professionals
Gender			
5. Has the project had any positive effects on gender equality, assessing, if gender mainstreaming could have been improved in planning, implementation or follow-up?	• Evidence of gender awareness in project planning and implementation and follow-up • Degree to which the project considered and integrated gender dimension in planning, implementation and monitoring?	• Project documentation • Workplans, Progress and Performance reports • Operational Plan for gender analysis • Key Informants (KI)	• Systematic documentary review applying structured tools and comparative analysis focused on strategies and activities implemented by Project and alignment with needs • Semi-structured interviews with: ○ Lantmäteriet ○ NGO Land Reform ○ Professionals

Annex 2 Terms of Reference

Reference number:

13/000462

Terms of Reference for the evaluation of the project «A strengthened private sector and an improved functioning of the Employment Services in Belarus»

Date: 06 September 2019

1. Evaluation object and scope

a. Evaluation object

The Evaluation object is the project «**A strengthened private sector and an improved functioning of the Employment Services in Belarus**», funded by Sida.

The project is implemented in cooperation between the Swedish Public Employment Service (Arbetsförmedlingen), the Belarus Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, and the Committee of Labour, Employment and Social Protection of the Regional Executive Committees in Grodno, Vitebsk and the Municipality of Minsk.

Sweden's cooperation with the Republic of Belarus is governed by the «Results' Strategy for Sweden's Reform Cooperation with Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans and Turkey 2014-2020». This project is aligned with this Strategy, and contributes to Results' Area №1: «Enhanced economic integration with the EU and development of market economy», and Results' Area №2: «Strengthened democracy, greater respect for human rights, and a more fully developed state under the rule of law».

Arbetsförmedlingen has carried out externally funded projects (Sida and EU) since the end of the 1980s. The current project is a continuation of a similar, smaller in size project, which was a cooperation between Arbetsförmedlingen and the Municipality of Minsk between 2009-2011.

The current project started on 1 January 2014 and ends on 31 December 2019. The activity period is until 15 July 2019, and the total amount of Sida's contribution is SEK 11,700,000.

b. Overall objective of the project

The overall objective of the project is to contribute to:

- A strengthened private sector and an improved functioning of the employment service in Belarus

The Public Employment Service (PES) will further improve its services both to employers and job-seekers, and thus ensure better matching and better supply of

trained and qualified specialists on the labour market, by way of guiding job-seekers to relevant VET training, etc. This will contribute to a better business climate, increased levels of investment, sustained growth, and a stronger private sector, which is essential for the economic development in Belarus.

The project *beneficiaries* are existing/potential employers and job-seekers in Belarus, specifically employers in the private sector and job-seekers, experiencing difficulties in entering the labour market. Indirectly, the entire population of Belarus will benefit from a better functioning labour market and a vitalised business sector that provide job opportunities, higher return on investment and increased tax revenues.

The *target group* for the intervention is the management and staff members of the PES of Minsk and other regions in Belarus, in particular those selected to participate in project activities. They will acquire enhanced knowledge and awareness with regard to modern work approaches and methods for delivery of services to employers, job-seekers, as well as modern models in labour market training.

Other project *stakeholders* include city planning authorities, private recruiting agencies, social protection organisations, trade unions and enterprise associations.

c. Outcomes of the project

The project is divided into three main outcomes:

Expected Outcome 1: Extended labour market information, aimed at strengthening relations with employers, in particular within the private sector

Outputs:

- Assessment of current status and development of the model for forecast and analysis, and the results of the implementation of the model. Follow-up of results from the preceding project
- Assessment of current status of the relations with employers and the implementation of the new working-methods in the employment offices
- Dissemination of preceding results (developed model for forecast and analysis) from the preceding projects to the regions)
- Dissemination of preceding results (modern methods in dealing with the employers) from the preceding projects to the regions.
- Meeting, workshops, trainings on further development of employer contacts, focus on private employers
- Meeting, workshops, trainings, aimed at deepening analysis of the forecast results in order to meet employers' demands
- Study visits in order to exchange experience and best practice with regard to labour market forecasts
- Staff training, aimed at deepening the understanding and knowledge among PES personnel on occupations/branches and the occupational barometer
- Training in methods for deepening knowledge with regard to different branches of the economy

- Increase the number of sector-job fairs to meet the specific needs of employers, and increase knowledge in specific branches of the economy

Expected Outcome 2: Improved service to job-seekers, including vulnerable groups, through the development of new working-methods at PES

Work with vulnerable/marginalised groups

Outputs:

- Analysis of existing methods and measures to work with marginalized groups in Belarus
- Meetings, workshops, trainings, aimed at developing new methods and guidelines for dealing with marginalised groups
- Study visits and training sessions in Sweden, Russia and Lithuania. aimed at studying methods and services to marginalised groups
- Training in modern methods, measures and services in working with marginalised groups
- Training on attitudes towards employers and job-seekers in working with marginalised groups
- Elaboration of a manual/handbook on new working-methods with marginalised groups
- Introduction and dissemination of these methods in PES in Minsk/Belarus

Vocational/career guidance

Outputs:

- Workshops/seminars/trainings on PES methods of vocational guidance
- Elaboration of new methods on vocational guidance
- Elaboration of guidelines/manuals on the new PES methods for vocational guidance
- Trainings in new methods on vocational guidance
- Testing of further developed PES methods of vocational guidance at the PES centres in Minsk/Belarus

Support and possibilities for entrepreneurs to start up business entities

Outputs:

- Assessment of current methods in working with start-up grants
- Workshops, meetings on different models/methods on how to address the issue of entrepreneurship, and how to support potential entrepreneurs
- Identification of eventual partnership in working with support to job-seekers in the field of entrepreneurship
- Development and implementation of the service to support potential entrepreneurs
- Testing of methods on identified job-seekers from the vulnerable groups

Expected Outcome 3: New information and communication strategy for PES developed and implemented

Outputs:

- Assessment of current information channels and communication strategies at the PES in Minsk
- Workshops on how to use communication channels for clients' services, provided by PES, as well as communication strategies
- Workshops and trainings in internal and external information, and communication
- Development and implementation of a communication strategy for different target groups
- Development of a manual on media relations
- Elaboration of information material with a cohesive graphical form and graphical templates for material, such as leaflets brochures and postures
- Staff training on communication and information, according to developed material, manuals and strategies

2. Description of the assignment (evaluation criteria and questions)**(i) Evaluation objective**

The evaluation objective is to:

- evaluate the sustainability of the project «**A strengthened private sector and an improved functioning of the Employment Services in Belarus**», and to elaborate recommendations on how to improve and adjust future implementation
- evaluate the relevance and effectiveness of the project «**A strengthened private sector and an improved functioning of the Employment Services in Belarus**», and to elaborate recommendations as an input, to be used in up-coming discussions, whether there will be funding of a new project in the area of employment services in Belarus by Sida
- clarify the interest and readiness of other donors to fund a project in the area of employment services in Belarus

(ii) Evaluation issues

The evaluation issues include to assess:

Relevance

- to what extent the objectives of the project are consistent with beneficiaries' requirements and the Republic of Belarus' needs

Effectiveness

- to what extent the project's outcomes have been achieved so far

Sustainability

- the likelihood of long-term benefits (outcomes) from the project, and to what extent the benefits from the project will continue after project completion
- the level of project ownership, on side of the Republic of Belarus, and the readiness to build on project achievements and carry the process further onwards

Gender equality

- the project's positive effects on gender equality, and whether gender mainstreaming could have been enhanced during planning, implementation and follow-up

It is expected that the evaluation issues will be developed in the tender, submitted by the tenderer, and further elaborated during the Inception Phase of the Evaluation. The tender should include interpretation services in Belarus (English-Russian).

(iii) Evaluation approach and methods for data collection and analysis

It is expected that the evaluator will describe and justify an appropriate evaluation approach/methodology and methods for data collection, intended to be used, in the tender documentation. It is assumed that evaluation design, methodology and methods for data collection, as well as analysis approach, will be fully developed and presented in the Inception Report, and that there will be a clear distinction between evaluation approach/methodology and methods used.

Sida's approach to evaluation is utilisation-focused, implying that the evaluator should facilitate the *entire evaluation process*, taking into consideration, how measures applied will affect the implementation of the evaluation process. It is therefore expected that the evaluators in their tender will present: (i) how intended users will participate in and contribute to the evaluation process; and, (ii) how methodology and methods for data collection used will contribute to reflection, discussion and learning between the intended users of the Evaluation.

Evaluators should take into consideration the need to take appropriate measures with regard to data collection in cases, where sensitive or confidential issues are addressed, and avoid presenting information that may be harmful to some stakeholder groups.

(iv) Organisation of evaluation management

The Evaluation is commissioned by Sida, and the intended users are Sida, the project beneficiaries and Arbetsförmedlingen. Furthermore, the Evaluation results will serve as an input to the decision, whether there will be funding of a new project in the area of employment services in Belarus by the Commissioner (Sida). The Commissioner and Arbetsförmedlingen have contributed to the current Terms of Reference, and will be provided with an opportunity to comment on the Inception Report, as well as on the Final Report, but will not be involved in the management of the Evaluation. Hence, the Commissioner will evaluate tenders, approve the Inception Report and the Final Report of the Evaluation. The start-up meeting and the debriefing/validation workshop will be held with the Commissioner only.

(v) Evaluation quality

All Sida's evaluations shall conform to OECD/DAC's Quality Standards for Development Evaluation¹⁴. The evaluators shall use the Sida OECD/DAC Glossary of Key Terms in

¹⁴ DAC Quality Standards for development Evaluation, OECD, 2010.

Evaluation¹⁵. The evaluators shall specify how quality assurance will be handled by them during the evaluation process.

(vi) Time schedule and deliverables

It is expected that a time- and work-plan will be presented in the tender, and further detailed in the Inception Report. The Evaluation shall be carried out and presented during the period September-November 2019. The timing of any field visits, surveys and interviews need to be settled by the Evaluator, in dialogue with the main stakeholders during the Inception Phase.

The table below lists key deliverables for the evaluation process. Deadlines for the Final Inception Report and the Final Report must be kept in the tender, but alternative deadlines for other deliverables may be suggested by the consultant and negotiated during the Inception Phase.

Deliverables	Participants	Deadlines
1. Start-up meeting (some participants by video conference)	Evaluation team Sida Arbetsförmedlingen	Tentative: 30 September 2019
2. Draft Inception Report		Tentative: 7 October 2019
3. Inception meeting (some participants by video conference)	Evaluation team Sida Arbetsförmedlingen	Tentative: 14 October 2019
4. Comments from intended users to evaluators		Tentative: 18 October 2019
5. Final Inception Report		Tentative: 23 October 2019
6. Debriefing/validation meeting	Evaluation team Sida Arbetsförmedlingen	Tentative: 29 October 2019
7. Draft Evaluation Report		15 November 2019
8. Comments from intended users to evaluators		22 November 2019
9. Final Evaluation Report		27 November 2019

¹⁵ Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management, Sida in cooperation with OECD/DAC, 2014.

The Inception Report will form the basis for the continued evaluation process, and shall be approved by Sida before the evaluation proceeds to implementation. The Inception Report should be written in English, and cover evaluability issues and interpretations of evaluation issues, present the evaluation approach/methodology, and methods for data collection and analysis to be used, as well as the full evaluation design. A clear distinction should be made between evaluation approach/methodology and methods for data collection. A specific time- and work-plan, including planned number of hours/working-days for each team member for the remaining part of the Evaluation, should be presented. The time-plan should contribute to reflection and learning between the intended users of the Evaluation.

The Final Report shall be written in English, and be professionally proof-read. The Final Report should have a clear structure, and follow the report format in the Sida Decentralised Evaluation Report Template for decentralised evaluations (see Annex C). The executive summary should be no longer than three pages. The Evaluation approach/methodology and methods for data collection used shall be clearly described and explained in detail, and a clear distinction between the two made. All limitations to the methodology and methods shall be made explicit, and the consequences of these limitations discussed. Findings shall flow logically from the data, showing a clear line of evidence to support the conclusions. Conclusions should be substantiated by findings and analysis. Recommendations and lessons learnt should flow logically from the conclusions. Recommendations should be specific, directed to relevant stakeholders and categorised as short-term, medium-term and long-term. The Report should be no more than 35 pages, excluding Annexes (including Terms of Reference and Inception Report). The evaluator shall adhere to the Sida OECD/DAC Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation¹⁶.

The Evaluator shall, upon approval of the Final Report, insert the Report into the Sida Decentralised Evaluation Report for decentralised evaluations, and submit it to «Nordic Morning» (in pdf-format) for publication and release in the Sida publication data-base. The order is placed by sending the approved report to sida@nordicmorning.com, not omitting to send a copy to the back-stopping Sida Programme Officer, as well as Sida's Chief Evaluator's Team (evaluation@sida.se). «Sida decentralised evaluations» should be indicated in the **e-mail** subject field, and include the name of the consulting company, as well as the full evaluation title. For invoicing purposes, the evaluator needs to include the invoice reference "ZZ610601S," type of allocation «sakanslag», and type of order «digital publicering/publikations-databas».

(vii) Evaluation team qualification

¹⁶ Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management, Sida in cooperation with OECD/DAC, 2014

In addition to the qualifications, already stated in the Framework Agreement for Evaluation Services, the Evaluation team shall include the following competencies:

- Knowledge and experience from development of the public employment service (PES) sector, particularly labour market information, service to job-seekers and communication strategy for PES

It is desirable that the evaluation team includes the following competencies:

- Experience from work with projects in the Republic of Belarus

A CV for each team member shall be included in the call-off response, containing a full description of relevant qualifications and professional work experience.

It is important that the competencies of the individual team members are complimentary. It is highly recommended that local consultants are included in the team.

The evaluators must be independent from the evaluation object and evaluated activities, and have no stake in the outcome of the evaluation.

(viii) Resources

The maximum budget amount available for the evaluation is 400,000 SEK.

The contact person at Sida is Rolf Büchel, Programme Officer at Unit «East», Department «EuroLatin». The contact person should be consulted, should any problems arise during the evaluation process.

Relevant Sida documentation will be provided by Rolf Büchel, Programme Officer at Unit «East», Department «EuroLatin». Relevant documentation will be provided for before the start of the evaluation.

Contact details of intended users (cooperation partners, Swedish Embassy, other donors, etc.) will be provided for by Arbetsförmedlingen, Department of International Affairs.

The evaluator will be required to arrange necessary logistics, incl. interpretation services, connected with preparation of the interview programme, including security arrangements.

3. Annexes

Annex A: List of key documentation

- «Results' Strategy for Sweden's Reform Cooperation with Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans and Turkey 2014-2020»
- Project document: «A strengthened private sector and an improved functioning of the Employment Services in Belarus»
- Inception report and progress reports for the years 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018

Annex B: Data sheet on the evaluation object

Information on the evaluation object (i.e. project or programme)	
Title of the evaluation object	«A strengthened private sector and an improved functioning of the Employment Services in Belarus»
ID no. in PLANIt	55030089
Dox no./Archive case no.	13/000462
Activity period (if applicable)	2014-01-01 – 2019-07-15
Agreed budget (if applicable)	SEK 11 700 000
Main sector ¹⁷	Democracy, human rights and gender equality
Name and type of implementing organisation ¹⁸	Public sector institutions
Aid type ¹⁹	Project type
Swedish strategy	«Results' Strategy for Sweden's reform cooperation with Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans and Turkey 2014-2020»

Information on the evaluation assignment	
Commissioning unit/Swedish Embassy	Sida, Department «EuroLatin», Unit «East»
Contact person at above-indicated unit	Rolf Büchel, rolf.buchel@sida.se
Timing of evaluation	September-November 2019
ID no. in PLANIt (if other than above).	

¹⁷ Choose from Sida's twelve main sectors: education; research; democracy, human rights and gender equality; health; conflict, peace and security; humanitarian aid; sustainable infrastructure and services; market development; environment; agriculture and forestry; budget support; or other (e.g. multi-sector).

¹⁸ Choose from the five OECD/DAC-categories: public sector institutions; NGO or civil society; public-private partnerships and networks; multilateral organisations; and other (e.g. universities, consultancy firms).

¹⁹ Choose from the eight OECD/DAC-categories: budget/sector support; core contributions/pooled funds; project type; experts/technical assistance; scholarships/student costs in donor countries; debt relief; admin costs not included elsewhere; and other in-donor expenditures.]

Annex 3 List of Documents Reviewed

ProDoc

Project proposal “A strengthened private sector and an improved functioning of the Employment Services in Belarus”, Original

Annex 1. Logical Framework Matrix, September 01, 2013

Annex 2. Project proposal: Budget, 2013

Annex 3. Project proposal: Results summary, October 25, 2013

Project Budget 2014-2016

Work-plan until June 2019

Activity plan 2018-2019

Activity plan 2016

Agreement

Service Purchase Agreement No 140002I6 dd January 10, 2014

Amendment to the Agreement on Service Purchase between Sida and Arbetsförmedlingen No 17000235 dd January 12, 2017

Amendment to the Agreement on Service Purchase between Sida and Arbetsförmedlingen No 17006763 dd July 25, 2017

Memorandum of Understandings

Memorandum of Understanding between the Committee on Labour, Employment and Social Protection of the Minsk City Council and Arbetsförmedlingen, the Swedish Public Employment Service, 2015

Memorandum of Understanding between the Committee on Labour, Employment and Social Protection of the Vitebsk Region Council and Arbetsförmedlingen, the Swedish Public Employment Service, 2015

Progress Reports

Annual reports for 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017

Semi-annual report, spring 2014

Semi-annual report, autumn 2015

Semi-annual report, autumn 2017

Semi-annual report, spring 2018

Semi-annual report, autumn 2018

Financial Reports

Financial reports “A strengthened private sector and an improved functioning of the Employment Services in Belarus” for 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017

Financial report “A strengthened private sector and an improved functioning of the Employment Services in Belarus”, October 2018 – March 2019

Labour Forecasts

Forecasts Minsk 2018 and 2019

Forecasts Vitebsk 2018 and 2019

Forecasts Grodno 2018 and 2019

Other project documents

Agenda, study visit Lithuania

Statistics of e-job fair 2019

Contextual documents

Alex Kremer, Country Manager for Belarus, Europe and Central Asia, World Bank, ‘Has Belarus really succeeded in pursuing gender equality?’, August 7, 2018

<https://blogs.worldbank.org/ru/europeandcentralasia/has-belarus-really-succeeded-pursuing-gender-equality>

Global Gender Gap Index 2018

http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2018.pdf

National Action Plan on Gender Equality of the Republic of Belarus for 2011-2015

<http://www.mintrud.gov.by/system/extensions/spaw/uploads/files/nacionalnyj-plan-dejstvij-pobespecheniyu-gendernogo-ravenstva-v-rb-na-2011-2015-gody.pdf>

State Program for the Promotion of Employment for 2013

<http://pravo.newsby.org/belarus/postanovsm0/sovm816.htm>

Irina Vashko and Daiga Ermsone, Youth transition to work in Belarus, ETF, 2018

<https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2018-12/Youthpercent20transitionpercent20Belarus.pdf>

Annex 4 List of Interviewees

	Name	Position and Organization	Gender	Location
1.	Per Lindberg	Project Manager	M	Stockholm
2.	Christina Johannesson	Ambassador of Sweden to the Republic of Belarus	F	Minsk
3.	Natalia Belous	Project Coordinator, PES Project	F	Minsk
4.	Tamara Evgenevna	PES		Minsk
5.	Natalia Vascchilo	PES		Minsk
6.	Aleksei Ananich	Deputy Minister, MOLSP	M	Minsk
7.	Olga Veramei	Head of the Department, IRUP	F	Minsk
8.	Alexander Kuirhuyk	Director of IRUP	M	Minsk
9.	Pavel Daneyko	Administrative Director, Belarusian Economic Research and Outreach Centre (BEROC)	M	Minsk
10.	Alexander Chubrik	BEROC	M	Minsk
11.	Lea Orro	EU-funded Project on Employment and Vocational Education and Training in Belarus	F	Minsk
12.	Niljole Dilbiene	EU-funded Project on Employment and Vocational Education and Training in Belarus	F	Minsk
13.	Valery Golubovskiy	Rector, Republican Institute for Vocational Education (RIPO)	M	Minsk
14.	Anna Ivanova	Vice-head of the International Cooperation, Republican Institute for Vocational Education (RIPO)	F	Minsk
15.	Alena Durov	RIPO staff	F	Minsk
16.	Elena Kasyanik	RIPO staff	F	Minsk
17.	Oleg Tokun	Head of Unit, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection	M	Minsk
18.	Tatjana Kudevich	Head of the Department of Employment	F	Minsk
	Myasnikov Sergey Ivanovich	Acting Head of the Committee, Committee for Employment and Social Protection of Grodno Regional Executive Committee	M	Grodno
19.	Sobolev Aleksandr Ivanovich	Head of the Department of Employment, Committee for Labor, Employment and Social Protection of the Grodno Oblast Executive Committee	M	Grodno
20.	Goryacheva Victoria Vladimirovna	Deputy Head of the Department of the State Employment Service of the Committee for Labour, Employment and Social Protection of the Grodno Oblast Executive Committee	F	Grodno

	Name	Position and Organization	Gender	Location
21.	Gavrilyuk Anna Leonidovna	Chief Specialist of the Committee on Labour, Employment and Social Protection of the Grodno Oblast Executive Committee	F	Grodno
22.	Batukevich Galina Viktorovna	Head of HR Department, Belkard OJSC	F	Grodno
23.	Tavel Olga Vitalievna	Specialist of the personnel service of JSC Grodno Meat Processing Plant	F	Grodno
24.	Aismont Andrey Kazemirovich	Deputy Director of UGP "Grodno Trolleybus Management"	M	Grodno
25.	Bochko Inna Fedorovna	Deputy Director for educational and production work of the educational institution "Grodno State Vocational and Technical College of Public Utilities"	F	Grodno
26.	Flerko Oksana Mikhailovna	Deputy Head of the Office for Labor, Employment and Social Protection of the Grodno City Executive Committee	F	Grodno
27.	Yurkova Svetlaga Mikhailovna	Head of the vocational training sector of the Office for Labor, Employment and Social Protection of the Grodno City Executive Committee	F	Grodno
28.	Kostechko Larisa Aleksandrovna	Head of the software and information support department of the Office for Labor, Employment and Social Protection of the Grodno City Executive Committee	F	Grodno
29.	Priymak Ruslan Alexandrovich	Head of the Office for Labor, Employment and Social Protection of the Grodno City Executive Committee	M	Vitebsk
30.	Budkevich Marina Viktorovna	Deputy Head of the Office for Labor, Employment and Social Protection of the Grodno City Executive Committee	F	Vitebsk
31.	Hatkevich Inessa Viktorovna	Head of the Department of Labor, Employment and Social Protection of the Grodno City Executive Committee	F	Vitebsk
32.	Koroleva Svetlana Viktorovna	Head of the Department of Labor, Employment and Social Protection of the Grodno City Executive Committee	F	Vitebsk
33.	Rusakovich Nina Egorovna	Head of the Department of Labor, Employment and Social Protection of the Grodno City Executive Committee	F	Vitebsk
34.	Moskalev Gennady Ivanovich	Director of the Adult Further Education Institution "Vitebsk Regional Center for Continuing Education of Leading	M	Vitebsk

	Name	Position and Organization	Gender	Location
		Workers and Specialists of Housing and Communal Services”		
35.	Petrovsky Mikhail Gennadievich	Acting Director, "Center for Training, Continuing Education and Retraining of Workers" of the Committee on Agriculture and Food of the Vitebsk Regional Executive Committee	M	Vitebsk
36.	Stepushenok Olga Mikhailovna	Methodologist of UO "Vitebsk Regional Center for Advanced Studies of Leading Workers and Specialists of Housing and Communal Services"	F	Vitebsk
37.	Inga Glushonok	Head of Unit, Committee for Labour, Employment and Social Protection Committee for Labour, Employment and Social Protection of Vitebsk Regional Executive Committee	F	Vitebsk
38.	Vaida Kamandulienė	VET Expert	F	skype
39.	Elisabeth Lindström	Expert on Vocational Guidance	F	phone
40.	Cristina David	Communications Expert	F	email
41.	Torbjörn Israelsson	Forecasting Expert	M	email
42.	2 persons supported with business start up		1 M, 1 F	Minsk
43.	1 person with Law degree supported with job search		F	Minsk
44.	3 persons supported with job search and re-qualification		2 M, 1 F	Minsk
45.	2 people studying at the hairdresser		F	Vitebsk
46.	2 people studying for masters in manicure and masters in pedicure		F	Vitebsk
47.	2 people studying for a trolley bus driver		F	Vitebsk
48.	3 employers		F	Minsk

Annex 5 List of main findings and conclusions

- Finding 1. The Project design and its objectives are aligned and respond to needs and priorities of its Belarusian partners and to the demands for improvement of the functioning of the employment service in Belarus. The project also offered relevant assistance towards building capacities of PES to engage with the private sector. However, the project did not have many interventions directly focusing on strengthening the private sector.
- Finding 2. The Evaluation findings as regards contribution to envisaged results are positive, overall, albeit with variations. Long-term cooperation between the Swedish and Belarusian PES, including bringing in the experiences from Lithuania and Moldova, as well as European practices has been an important driver of project effectiveness. The project main features, the trainings, expert visits, study tours and support to enhancement of IT solutions succeeded to strengthen capacity of PES offices through increased knowledge, and improved PES practices in terms of labour market forecasting and services. However, the overall change in the way PES approaches client services has not materialised thus far. The changes in the manner in which PES understands and undertakes its roles and services are very incremental and slow, which makes investment in this field an ongoing need.
- Finding 3. The project was very successful in improving the evidence and labour market information in targeted PES offices. The labour forecasting helped improving understanding of demand and supply needs in the labour market but also helped establishing linkages between the PES and employers, which was not in place before. Particularly valued are opportunities to see and learn about the ways of conducting such activities contributes to awareness raising on the changing role of PES within a changing labour market context in Belarus. Increased skills combined with the availability of devised methodologies and tools resulted in launching Labour market forecasts and professional barometers in all three regions, Minsk, Vitebsk and Grodno. Such supported processes raised awareness and skills of the PES to obtain extended labour market information through closer cooperation with the entrepreneurial sector. The outcome of this support is visible in change of thinking for PES of their role and service they can and should supply in the changing context in Belarus.
- Finding 4. Engaging PES staff and representatives from big, small and medium sized employers, both private and public in dialogue resulted in creation of links between these parties, thanks to the project. The PES has started shifting their understanding of the need for nurturing links with employers. However, change is slow in terms of understanding of what PES may offer, particularly to employers, except in a limited number of individual cases. Employers still do not see the value added and appreciate the types of services that PES can offer to them, so PES is still not perceived as a go-to partner for employers. The evaluation found no evidence of concrete joint PES-business sector endeavours that would lead to better understanding of the changing roles of PES. Main limitation is found within PES structure and limited staff, which results in prioritising services to job-seekers, which are the usual duties of PES and resistance to investing additional effort in measures outside of PES ‘comfort zone’. On the other side the project contributed significantly to improving the visual identity of PES offices through investment in capacities for external communication.

- Finding 5. Gaps remain in provision of services for job-seekers. Evaluation found limited results due to the fact that vocational guidance/counselling has a low priority status at the PES. In particular, while trainings delivered by the project were of good quality, PES has limited opportunity to apply the newly acquired knowledge in practice, particularly on topics such as preparing CVs and cover letters, as well as group counselling due to lack of demand. The evaluation found that modern self-directed search tool Vägvisaren (Orientation Tools) have been valued as most useful approach replicable to the Belarusian context. Main hindering factor for effectiveness is limited skill set and lack of willingness on the side of PES to apply the new approaches in their work, and the generally slow progress for change within the institution.
- Finding 6. The sustainability of achieved results is weak. On the positive side, the government is planning to introduce forecasting across the country and therefore, the lessons learned, and practices implemented will be useful. Investment in capacity building of individuals, institutions, and organisations have a strong sustainability potential. However, there is a high turnover at PES, and changes are slow and incremental. Uptake of innovation in communication approaches are challenged by lack of communications strategy or new communication staff, while new client centered services are slowly taking place. Reforms of the PES are still unfinished business, affecting sustainability in the short to medium term.
- Finding 7. Evaluation found strong ownership over the project and its results by local counterparts, primarily the PES offices in the three target regions and also in the Ministry of Labour. However, limited geographic and thematic scope and limited no. of partners does not allow for the creation of a critical mass or a pool of experts who could replicate across all PES.
- Finding 8. The project focused on three vulnerable groups: youth, disabled and ex-criminals. These target groups were selected based on the interest expressed by the PES. However, the evaluation found very limited evidence in terms of the project's positive effects on gender equality with regard to the vulnerable groups.**

Conclusions

- Conclusion 1. The Swedish PES project aligns with needs for improvement of the labour market and employment measures undertaken by the Public Employment Service and also the Ministry of Labour. It also aligns with the Swedish Sida cooperation objectives. It remains continuously relevant to the context and is responsive to the needs of the PES but also to employers and clients of the PES.
- Conclusion 2. In general, the Project demonstrated good achievements towards reaching the anticipated results, despite a challenging environment. The Project was effective in the achievement of its desired outputs. It has succeeded in achieving most of its outcomes, although variations are visible.
- Conclusion 3. The project does not have a strong phase-out strategy developed in a participatory way with partners. The sustainability of many achieved effects and benefits remains fragile.
- Conclusion 4. The PES project did not have an explicit gender strategy and gender issues have not being mainstreamed into the project's awareness raising activities.



Evaluation of the project «A strengthened private sector and an improved functioning of the Employment Services in Belarus»

Final Evaluation of the Project “A strengthened private sector and an improved functioning of the Employment Services in Belarus” (hereinafter: the PES Project) was conducted in the period October-November 2019. The evaluation was commissioned to respond to accountability requirements and to provide an in-depth overview based on an independent assessment for the use of different stakeholders, while at the same time being forward-looking and aiming to take stock and learn from the work done thus far to inform the preparation of the potential next cycle of Sida support. The evaluation methodology conformed to OECD/DAC’s Quality Standards for Development Evaluation and was guided by the Norms and Standards of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) with the application of qualitative data collection methods, primarily key informant interviews and group discussions in the Minsk and in two regions targeted by the project.

The evaluation found that the project aligned and responded to needs for improvement of the labour market and employment measures undertaken by the Public Employment Service and the Ministry of Labour. It also aligns with the Swedish Sida cooperation objectives. It remains continuously relevant to the context and is responsive to the needs of the PES but also to employers and clients of the PES.

The Swedish support has been continuous and stable, targeting multidimensional problems and demands for improvement of the functioning of the employment service in Belarus. The project also offered relevant assistance towards building capacities of PES to engage with the private sector.

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