



► Guidance Note 2.4: Thematic evaluations

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This guidance note is part of Pillar 2 ► *Types of evaluation*

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Thematic evaluations assess specific aspects, themes and processes of ILO's technical work, and may also focus on particular departments, issues, or approaches. Thematic evaluations provide the means for ILO technical programmes to explore the effectiveness and impact of particular approaches in depth. These evaluations can draw from lessons learned at project level, both inside and outside the ILO, and emphasis on themes that have significance beyond a particular project.

The focus of thematic evaluation on effectiveness implies that this evaluation type is typically used towards the end of interventions. ILO technical programmes conduct thematic evaluations, with support from EVAL, and are fully responsible for resourcing. Thematic evaluations can also be initiated by EVAL, Departments, regional or country offices with specific purpose of learning or future programme development or simply to review progress on a given area of organisation's work. All share responsibility for dissemination and follow-up.

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► 1. PURPOSE OF THEMATIC EVALUATIONS

According to the ILO Evaluation Policy Guidelines, the main purpose of thematic evaluations is to develop cross-cutting lessons, including success stories to innovate and feed into departmental / regional learning on specific technical interventions and strategies

In the ILO, themes that would be very amenable to evaluation include, apart from technical areas of ILO's work, the four cross-cutting policy drivers – international labour standards, social dialogue, gender equality and non-discrimination, and a just transition to environmental sustainability.

Aspects of the five flagship programmes: Better Work, Building Social Protection Floors for All, International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour and Forced Labour, Jobs for Peace and Resilience, Occupational Safety and Health – Global Action for Prevention would also be amenable to thematic evaluation. Thematic evaluations also need to be seen in the context of the new emphasis being place on strategic, clustered evaluation. Many of these take a thematic approach in assessing the evaluation that can be conducted, in a given cluster (see [Guidance note 3.3: Strategic cluster evaluation to gather evaluative information more effectively](#)).

► 2. THEMATIC EVALUATION DESIGN

The ILO Evaluation Office considers the design of a thematic evaluation to consist of the following elements: scoping, criteria and questions, the approach, data collection/analysis and the deliverables. Below are comments and observations on each element of evaluation design.

2.1 SCOPING

The special nature of thematic evaluation requires extra attention to scoping to make sure that all projects and programmes relevant to the theme are included in the study. The scope, of course, is the boundaries around the object of evaluation.

Boundaries can be delimited by time, geography, structure, or sequence. For example, an evaluation could study aspects of the project during certain years or in a specific location. It could examine sub-components or the entire project. It could also analyse the project by programmatic phase (e.g. studying all phases or only a selected phase.)

2.2 CRITERIA AND QUESTIONS

The ILO evaluations usually focus on the relevance to beneficiary needs, the validity of the design, the efficiency and effectiveness, the impact of the results and the potential for sustainability. Because there is no common results framework, it may not always be possible to use the standard OECD DAC criteria

Alternative or additional criteria might examine the integration of the theme into interventions or, as in the case of gender, mainstreaming. The evaluation could also focus on the effectiveness and impact of mainstreaming and integration.

For each criterion, the evaluation manager should include two or three specific evaluation questions that can potentially give strategic feedback on the given theme. The main source of these questions is the initial consultation with the tripartite

constituents, partners and stakeholders. These are the questions about the theme that the clients want the evaluation to answer.

Further guidance:

- [Guidance note 3.1: Integrating gender in monitoring and evaluation of projects](#)
- [Guidance note 3.2: Integrating social dialogue and ILS in monitoring and evaluation of projects](#)

2.3 APPROACH AND METHODS

The methodologies used for thematic evaluations can be very different, depending on the evaluation topic and other factors. For this reason, EVAL recommends using a mixed methods approach to addressing the criteria and questions that might include: document analysis, interviews, direct observation and surveys—or some combination thereof. The advantage of this approach is that it permits findings derived from one method to be verified using a different method. This ensures valid findings.

The approach for thematic evaluations should consciously build analytical frameworks that would allow providing feedback at a higher (strategic level). For instance, how well did the ILO use its technical expertise and comparative advantage to position a certain theme as a national priority?

2.4 DELIVERABLES

Deliverables can include verbal and written reports, executive summaries, press releases, photographic compilations, and audio or video documentation. The choice of outputs depends on many factors including target audience and budget. Thematic evaluations should follow the guidance in EVALs checklists related to report writing and preparation.

Further guidance:

- ✓ [Checklist 4.2: Preparing the evaluation report](#)
- ✓ [Checklist 4.4: Writing the evaluation report summary](#)
- ✓ [Checklist 4.9: Rating the quality of evaluation reports](#)

► 3. IMPLEMENTATION

In this section of the Guidance Note, implementation will be addressed by examining: who does what, when and who pays.

3.1 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The ILO technical programmes or regional and country offices have responsibility for drafting the Terms of Reference (TOR), assembling the evaluation team, participating as a full member of the evaluation team, circulating the evaluation report and

managing the follow-up process. If a thematic evaluation is clustering a number of mandatory, project evaluations the normal process, including approvals for standard evaluations need to be followed (see [✎ Guidance note 3.3: Strategic cluster evaluation to gather evaluative information more effectively](#)).

The departments and country offices that have administrative responsibility for the projects and programmes to be included in the study should be consulted regarding the purpose, scope and methodology of the evaluation. EVAL should be consulted in order for it to be able to provide direct support to all phases of the evaluation.

3.2 TIMING AND FINANCING OF THEMATIC EVALUATIONS

Thematic evaluations can be conducted any time, however, they should be coordinated with the ILO Evaluation Office (EVAL) to make sure that there are no conflicts with scheduled project, Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP) evaluations, Country Programme Review (CPR) or joint evaluations. The cost of the thematic evaluation should be paid by the sponsoring ILO Technical Programmes. Such evaluations can also be funded through other sources such as RBSA/OBF resources if the mandate and subject of the evaluation qualifies to be covered through such resources.