



▶ Workflow 3.1: Implementation of the Criteria-Based Evaluation Planning System (CIEPS)

▶ Date: November 2023



This workflow is part of Pillar 3 ▶ *Planning and designing evaluations*

▶ INTRODUCTION

Evaluation is a crucial tool for accountability, project improvement, and organizational learning in the International Labour Organization (ILO). It assists ILO constituents and staff in supporting decent work and social justice. Evaluation is a fundamental component of results-based management. It informs decision-making, generates knowledge and learning, and provides evidence of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability.

The Independent Evaluation of the Evaluation Function in 2022 and the 2023 Biennial EVAL workshop identified certain obstacles that hinder the uptake and use of evaluation results. Some of these barriers relate to the enabling environment, while others are due to the high number of evaluations triggered by the ILO's current evaluation policy. This can lead to work overload for ILO staff and evaluation fatigue on the part of its constituents, as well as sub-optimal use of human and financial resources.

The new Evaluation Strategy 2023-25 reflects this reality and calls for a Criteria-based Integrated Evaluation Planning System (CIEPS). The CIEPS aims to go beyond the “financial threshold-based system” currently in place, to become a more-efficient, non-mechanical process for selecting and implementing evaluations and generating relevant evaluative evidence. It is expected to better address the ILO knowledge requirements that can be met from evaluations. This should theoretically lead to fewer but more strategic evaluations, which can provide new insights regarding ILO's specific mandates and contribution to Decent Work, with the aim of promoting clustered evaluations whenever possible¹.

This document presents guidance to operationalize the CIEPS. It is based on a review and synthesis of documents related to the CIEPS, including some related to the pilot exercise with the Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP) as well as discussions with colleagues in EVAL and members of the evaluation network in the field.

1. Reference to Output 2.1.1 in 2023-25 Evaluation Strategy.

► CIEPS PRINCIPLES AND PRECONDITIONS

The CIEPS considers the knowledge requirements and evidence gaps of regions and departments to determine which evaluations are most important and essential. In this way, the ILO can be more deliberate in selecting when individual evaluations should be undertaken, and when they could be waived and/or replaced by other evaluative outputs, such as internal or self-evaluations, cluster evaluations, synthesis reviews, or other products. The larger objective is to move away from a project-based decentralised evaluation approach which generates large volumes of mandatory evaluations, to a more strategically oriented approach, with increased clustering of evaluations to draw lessons and good practices from interventions linked by their themes or regions, and fill gaps in knowledge.

Regions and departments can request waivers of evaluation requirements based on a set of pre-determined criteria, to reduce the number of evaluations conducted and enable a more targeted and systematic use and reflection of evaluation outputs. The Evaluation Strategy 2023-25 has not modified the financial threshold that triggers specific evaluation requirements. Instead, it has made the process more flexible.

The figure below shows key pre-conditions and principles linked to the CIEPS. The last two boxes go beyond the scope of EVAL's responsibilities but are essential to implementing the CIEPS effectively.

PRE-CONDITIONS

- Financial thresholds continue to apply and will be a first trigger for evaluations to be included in the planning process.
- Donors have explicitly indicated in agreements or ad-hoc that they will comply with a more strategic approach to evaluations (including clustering), in line with ILO's Evaluation Policy and Strategy.
- Continued pursuit of more integrated programming and flexible funding as enablers for maximum efficiency of integrated evaluation planning.

CONDITIONALITY AND FLEXIBILITY

- Based on project history and certain criteria, there is flexibility to waive or modify evaluation requirements.
- Cluster and joint evaluations should be explored as primary modalities to promote more strategic evaluations and improved integration in and across regions and themes.

USE OF NEW/ALTERNATIVE METHODS

- Depending on the situation, and if strong evaluative evidence based on the OECD/DAC criteria exists, evaluations may not need to cover all of these criteria again.
- Other methodological approaches (lighter process) for evaluation outputs, including synthesis reviews, evaluative research, good practice case studies, self-learning, etc.
- Use of longitudinal/ex-post/impact studies

LEARNING AGENDA AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- Evaluations for accountability and as part of an explicit ILO Learning Agenda
- This is subject to regions and departments being clear about their evidence and knowledge gaps, and understanding what evaluations can contribute.
- Requires collaboration and alignment with other providers of knowledge products.

ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

- Support and inputs from responsible entities (PARTNERSHIPS, FINANCE, PROGRAM, etc) are required to improve the enabling environment required in the ILO to undertake evaluations in an effective and efficient manner.

► CIEPS CRITERIA

A set of criteria has been developed to justify requests for waiving evaluations. In all cases, decisions to waive prevailing evaluation requirements need to be justified and documented as part of the process for documentary evidence and to ensure consistency and rigour in the process.

Figure 1. Criteria to be applied to waive prevailing evaluation requirements during the annual evaluation planning process

Waiving the Evaluability Assessment (EA)	Waiving the MTE / Interim Evaluation	Waiving MTE or Final Evaluations
• Presence of a solid monitoring and reporting mechanism review process may eliminate the need to undertake an EA assessment.	• In cases where a solid EA was conducted and provides evidence that will likely be covered by an MTE • Existence of an external MTE process (joint or donor-led) that would pass ILO evaluation quality standards • Substantial delay in independent MTE (not due to poor planning) reducing the time to the final independent evaluation to less than 1 year • An M&E Officer is embedded in project to conduct quality internal evaluation (only for projects above USD 5 Million)	• Donor-managed evaluation / external process planned or undertaken • Low learning potential (to be duly justified) • Existing evidence base of project is already strong through other exercises (provide evidence) • Other (to be explained)

In certain contexts, there may be a need to apply criteria to go above prevailing evaluation requirements, to ensure that an independent evaluation is conducted, despite being under the financial threshold or meeting some of the above criteria.

This includes:

- New donors and/or partners requesting independent evaluations regardless of size;
- New intervention models – such as innovative designs or untested theories;
- Intervention upscaling or launch of a major next phase.

It has been ascertained that the ILO’s annual evaluation planning exercises needs to be more frequent and criteria-based, focusing on knowledge gaps and strategic needs², leading to an improved balance between learning and accountability. However, this requires the identification of knowledge gaps, awareness of, and alignment with other knowledge-generating products.

For regions and departments to be able to determine to what extent, and how, knowledge gaps can be addressed by evaluations, they need to understand the purpose and objectives of different evaluative outputs. The purpose of each type of evaluation in the ILO is described in [the ILO’s Policy Guidelines for Results-Based Evaluation \(4th ed\)](#).³

2. Reference to Output 1.1.1
 3. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_mas/---eval/documents/publication/wcms_571339.pdf

Type of evaluation product	Type of knowledge generated	Description
Evaluability review (assessment of feasibility)	Evaluability reviews focus on determining whether an intervention is ready and suitable for a more extensive evaluation.	Evaluability reviews assess the readiness of an intervention for evaluation and identify any potential challenges or issues. They help determine whether the intervention’s objectives are clear, the data is available, and the evaluation can be conducted effectively. They also identify any changes required to improve M&E components for enhanced effective performance.
Self / internal evaluations	Self- and internal evaluations provide knowledge primarily for internal use and improvement.	Self-evaluations are conducted by the program or project team itself, while internal evaluations usually include project management and an external consultant. They typically focus on assessing the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and broader impact of an intervention, using internal data and perspectives. They help determine the appropriateness of design to ILO’s strategic and national DW programme frameworks. The knowledge generated helps the teams make informed decisions for program improvement.
Mid-Term independent Evaluations	Mid-term evaluations aim to assess the continued relevance of an intervention and progress made towards achieving its planned objectives.	These evaluations are conducted by external experts and provide insights into how well an intervention is performing in terms of achieving its goals. They help identify areas for mid-course corrections and potential challenges that need to be addressed.
Final independent Evaluations	Final independent evaluations assess the achievement of outputs and outcomes of an intervention, and generate lessons learned and good practices for future interventions or phases.	Final independent evaluations are conducted by external consultants. They are comprehensive assessments of an intervention’s achievement of objectives. They provide knowledge on the ultimate effects of the intervention, its sustainability perspectives, and lessons learned and good practices for future initiatives.
Project evaluations provide crucial information, which when aggregated, offer insights into strategic-level progress made towards these key policy outcomes		
Impact evaluations	Impact evaluations focus on assessing the impact of an intervention on target beneficiaries and the extent to which it has achieved its development goals. Impact evaluations are part of the knowledge base of effective policy solutions by providing empirical documentation for an intervention.	Impact evaluations aim to assess the “positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended” (OECD/DAC 2002). A key feature of IEs is that they use rigorous methodologies to assess the contribution or attribution of a specific intervention or set of interventions (policy or other form of implemented intervention) to an identified outcome or effect on the ultimate beneficiaries or target groups.
Thematic evaluations	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 and to foster learning. They can be used to examine ILO work across contexts, identifying key lessons learned that may be more generally applicable than those that emerge from single project evaluations

Longitudinal studies		
(Long-term trends and changes)	Longitudinal studies track changes and trends over an extended period of time, often involving repeated data collection and analysis	Longitudinal studies provide insights into how programme impacts evolve over time, looking at immediate effects, as well as how these effects change as the circumstances of beneficiaries evolve.
Ex-post evaluations (retrospective assessment)	Ex-post evaluations involve looking back at completed projects to assess their long-term impact and outcomes.	Ex-post evaluations provide knowledge on the lasting effects and sustainability of projects, shedding light on whether initial project goals have been achieved and how outcomes persist after project completion. They can be part of strategy/policy, thematic or country programme evaluations that also consider the linkages between different interventions and longer-term development outcomes.

The checklist in Figure 2 provides a list of questions to consider when deciding whether an evaluation should take place and under what form (independent evaluation, self-evaluation, other evaluative outputs, etc). It covers some of the criteria listed above, as well as other concerns that may be useful to consider during discussions, including learning potential, knowledge gaps, complexity, strategic needs and stakeholder involvement, among others. The idea is to take a more mindful approach to conducting evaluations, while aligning with the ILO’s evaluation policy, and to see how to maximize synergies in terms of generating lessons and knowledge from evaluations, to increase their uptake and utilization, rather than conducting evaluations in a systematic, mechanical manner. Different topics in the checklist hold different weights when deciding whether an evaluation should be waived, and discussions should take this into account.

Figure 2. CIEPS discussion checklist

DONOR REQUIREMENTS

- Are there specific donor or partner-funding requirements that make an evaluation mandatory? -> no waiver
- Is the project funded by a new donor/partner? -> no waiver
- Is the donor / partner open to the idea of clustering evaluations?
- Has the donor conducted or are they planning to conduct their own evaluation?
- Can ILO negotiate the timing, scope or type of evaluation to optimize resources?

LEARNING POTENTIAL

- Will an evaluation offer the potential to generate valuable insights, lessons learned, and good practices?
- Does the project have an untested design, include innovations or face specific challenges that could provide valuable learning opportunities?
- Will an evaluation fill specific knowledge gaps?
- Is there already a solid evidence-base through other exercises?
- Does the project have particular strategic relevance?

COMPLEXITY

- Is the project particularly complex, warranting an in-depth evaluation, even if this is not a mandatory requirement based on the ILO Evaluation Policy?

PREVIOUS EVALUATIVE WORK / FREQUENCY AND TIMING

- How recently was the last evaluation conducted for this intervention?
- Is the timing appropriate for another evaluation? Could a different type of evaluative exercise be conducted?
- Have lessons learned from previous evaluative exercises (EA, MTE) influenced the decision to conduct this evaluation?
- Can insights from previous evaluations or research be incorporated to make the suggested evaluative exercise more focused and effective?
- Is there a solid monitoring and reporting mechanism review process? (may eliminate the need for an EA)
- Is there an M&E officer embedded in the proejct, who can conduct quality internal evaluation?
- Was a solid EA conducted, providing evidence that an MTE would have covered?
- Has an external MTE process been conducted, that would pass EVAL’s quality standards?

IMPACT ON DECISION-MAKING

- Will the evaluation findings inform important decisions, such as program adjustments, resource allocation, or planning of a future phase?

RESOURCE ALLOCATION

- Are resources being allocated in a way that reflects the strategic importance of the project?
- Is there enough data available to allow for a complete evaluation to take place?

CLUSTER POTENTIAL

- Is project theme or topic closely related to other ongoing ILO projects? If YES, then consider for cluster evaluation
- Are there several evaluations in the same region that could be linked? If YES, consider for cluster evaluation

PROJECT CYCLE

- Is project likely to ask for / obtain a no-cost extension? IF YES, then flag for more in-depth follow-up
- Is project experiencing delays in implementation, reducing the time to the final evaluation to less than 1 year?

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

- Have relevant stakeholders been engaged in the decision to conduct, cluster or waive the evaluation?
- Do key stakeholders perceive the evaluation as particularly relevant to their interests and concerns?
- Are there any potential overlaps or clashes in the evaluation timeline that could lead to stakeholder fatigue?

IMPLEMENTING THE CIEPS

Implementing the CIEPS requires adjustments to ILO’s annual evaluation planning exercises. Comprehensive data⁴ capture is a prerequisite for proper integrated planning.

Challenges to data capture were identified during a pilot exercise with ROAP and ROAF. In particular, the internal planning of regions is continuous, as they are constantly updated based on new information, such as no-cost extensions, which can affect a significant portion of planned evaluations (over 50 per cent for ROAS). This creates challenges when planning evaluations to cluster, for example, as the uncertainty in timing is often a reality.

This divergence in terms of the timing of updates leads to discrepancies between the files used by EVAL for the roundups and those used by the Regions and departments for planning and monitoring purposes. Furthermore, there are discrepancies in the different files used, with some evaluations absent from the EVAL database, or not associated with the right region / department, and different meta-data used in each file. Reconciling these planning documents has been identified as an important obstacle to integrated planning.

To address these challenges related to data capture, a more dynamic worksheet in the form of a CIEPS Excel workbook with multiple worksheets for regions and departments has been created. These worksheets can be updated on a regular, fixed basis within specified one-month windows, and feed into a master worksheet. This allows EVAL (and others) to have an overview of all planned and ongoing evaluations in an updated manner.

The new CIEPS worksheets include columns for Themes, CPOs, P&B Outcomes and Flagship Programmes. This aims to promote a stronger, integrated planning process⁵, and facilitate the identification of potential clusters by linking evaluations to CPOs. This is already done in LAC.

A business workflow for the CIEPS is presented in the next page. The first round may be linked to the annual pre-planning process, while the following rounds are updates. It is suggested to conduct this planning exercise every four months, with a window of one month for users to make modifications and approvals, as needed. This would lead to three rounds of updates per year/cycle.

Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
		Open window for changes / approvals				Open window for changes / approvals				Open window for changes / approvals	

4. Sources of this data would include approval minutes, extension minutes, annual workplans, and voluntary exercises.

5. Link to O. 3.1.1 in Evaluation Strategy 2023-25

