



OSCEval News is the evaluation newsletter of the Office of Internal Oversight.

Its aim is to provide insights into the OSCE's work in evaluation, by sharing key evaluation findings and conclusions, as well as new developments regarding the OSCE's overall evaluation culture.

Evaluation is a management tool that contributes to decision-making, strategic planning, and organizational learning.



This edition of OSCEval News is dedicated to the

Evaluation Synthesis 2017-2020

This synthesis was commissioned and managed by the Office of Internal Oversight (OIO) and conducted by an external consultant in 2020.

Purpose

Evaluations provide evidence-based insights about the relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability of the OSCE's work. They inform about achievements, point to areas where improvement is needed, and provide essential inputs that inform decision-making, policy development and programming by management. As such, they are not only indispensable for the successful implementation of the OSCE's mandate today, but also help the organization remain relevant in the future.

To support learning from evaluations, OIO commissioned an evaluation synthesis, which included a total of 47 evaluations from the period 2017-2020, 15 of them OIO-conducted and 32 decentralised evaluations managed by OSCE executive structures. The majority of the interventions evaluated pertained to the Human Dimension.

Methodology

Evaluations were analysed according to a structured analytical framework, oriented to the six OECD DAC Evaluation Criteria (relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability). Gender was also included, along with other key themes identified during the analysis. The synthesis describes performance in these areas, extracts lessons, and proposes areas for OSCE future consideration.

Key Findings

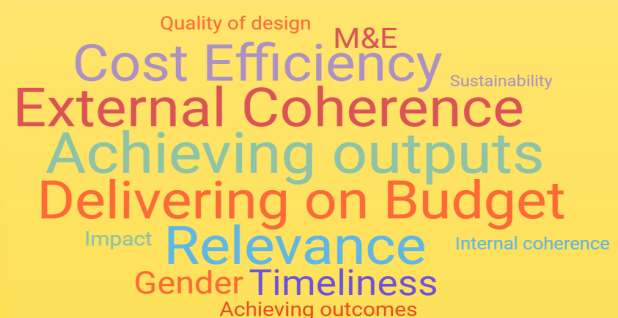
Evaluations presented a mixed picture of the OSCE's performance in the various areas analysed. For instance, evaluations reported very positive results with regards to the **relevance** of the OSCE's interventions. The vast majority of the evaluations analysed found OSCE interventions fully or mostly responsive to national/regional needs, policies and priorities. This included strong alignment with national or regional policy priorities or plans and/or relevance to OSCE goals/policies. Relevance was, however, constrained to some extent by poor quality intervention designs. Flaws included a short-term vision, weak analytical basis, and interventions being spread too thinly.

With regards to **coherence**, most evaluations that reported on it, found strong **external coherence** of the OSCE's activities with the interventions of partners. This was being supported by investing substantial efforts in donor co-ordination, and by assisting national coalitions/movements on specific issues. Weaknesses were observed in the OSCE's **internal coherence**, i.e. with regards to the coordination of interventions within the organization. Specific weaknesses included reactive/needs-based co-ordination between field operations and the Secretariat; and largely personalised contacts, rather than systematic or institutionalised engagement between field operations and Secretariat structures.

Evaluation findings related to **effectiveness** were also mixed. The majority of evaluations found that interventions had fully or mostly achieved their intended **outputs**. These included enhanced public knowledge of an issue; improved capacities and awareness of local stakeholders, including local authorities, civil society, national governments and politicians; as well as data generation and the creation of tools. Evaluations observed weaker results with regards to the achievement of longer term objectives.

Only a little over one third of the evaluations reported that **outcomes** had been fully or mostly achieved.

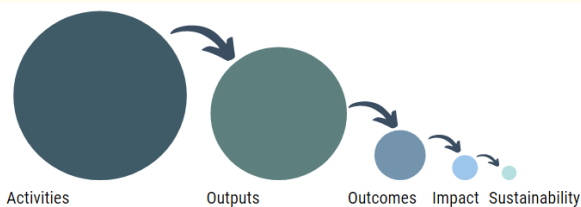
Word cloud on main strengths and weaknesses identified by evaluations. Large letters indicate strengths, small letters indicate weaknesses.



Most observed outcomes were related to improved policy frameworks; enhanced institutional governance/practice; and strengthened political participation. Results at the **impact** level were even harder to discern. Only two of the evaluations found that the OSCE had made a significant contribution to higher-level results.

Overall, this shows that in OSCE interventions, demonstrable results become progressively weaker as they move up through the results chain, and effectively dissipate by the impact level. It comes as no surprise then, that many evaluations, including a recent OIO evaluation on Results Based Management in the OSCE, identified gaps in terms of results measurement. These included a focus on activities and outputs, rather than on outcome monitoring, and a weak or limited use of monitoring and evaluation systems overall.

This synthesis revealed positive results related to the **efficiency** of the OSCE's interventions. Most evaluations that reported on **economic efficiency** found strong financial management, with OSCE initiatives having delivered within or below budget and/or monies spent within timeframe, as well as good results in terms of their cost-efficiency. Findings were split in terms of **timeliness**. Half of the evaluations found that interventions were delivered on time, while half encountered delays, caused by factors including slow donor disbursement and late national approvals/endorsement.



Sustainability of the OSCE's interventions was identified as one of the weakest areas, with less than 20 percent of the evaluations having identified strong potential for the sustainability of the interventions. Almost half of them found little or no potential for sustainability. Shortcomings that hampered sustainability included a short-term vision and approach; no exit or transition strategy; standalone activities rather than national ownership/integration into national systems; insufficient attention paid to building political commitment and ownership of an issue; emphasising individual, not institutionalised, change; and limited scope for replication.

With regard to the implementation of the OSCE's 2004 Action Plan for the Promotion of **Gender Equality**, around half of the evaluations found interventions fully or mostly gender mainstreamed, while the remaining were either partly gender-mainstreamed, or had little to no gender mainstreaming at all. The main weakness was a focus only on 'women's inclusion' in interventions, rather than adopting more progressive or structural approaches. Other constraints included limited gender analysis in design; unsystematic approaches to gender mainstreaming across activities, and lack of gender-sensitive data collection.

The evaluations included in this synthesis also identified five **comparative advantages** of the OSCE in terms of its strategic and operational positioning and approaches. These were *intellectual leadership*, including acting as a 'thought leader' in many thematic areas; the OSCE's *professional credibility* as a regional security organization in providing both an entry point for engagement and a legitimisation for activities; its *political neutrality*, permitting (often unique) engagement in sensitive areas such as anti-corruption, freedom of religion and belief, or electoral and wider political reforms; the organization's *convening power*, which enabled it to bring stakeholders together and create synergies around sensitive issues; as well as its *cross-dimensional assistance*, which allowed the OSCE to work on issues which cover inter-related and mutually reinforcing themes.

Implications for the future

Based on the evidence, the synthesis identified eight lessons and operational implications for the OSCE's programming and practice going forward. They are summarized below, with more details in the full report. It is in this context important to note that overall, this synthesis found similar weaknesses to those previously reported in a meta-evaluation published by OIO in 2018, which had analyzed 46 OIO evaluations from 2010 – 2017 for recurring themes and issues. This shows that while efforts to improve the OSCE's work were made over the past years, many fundamental issues have so far not been resolved at the level of the organization. Addressing these once and for all will require a concerted and organization-wide effort that takes the lessons of this synthesis into account, and pays particular attention to:

- 1) **Building stronger designs of OSCE interventions** by strengthening their analytical basis through analysis of needs, gender and stakeholders' capacities; gearing them to a common higher-level goal; and enhancing gender mainstreaming .
- 2) **Planning interventions with a view to the medium term and embedding sustainability planning from the outset**, including by anchoring activities in national systems and structures, rather than as standalone interventions; building political momentum; engaging in communication and visibility-raising exercises; ensuring ongoing organizational learning, and planning for exit and handover as part of project design and implementation.
- 3) **Strengthening results based management and performance monitoring** by setting clear higher-level and medium term goals to which the interventions will contribute as well as a clear logical framework, and assessing progress regularly, particularly against outcomes and for contributions to impact.
- 4) **Improving internal coherence of the OSCE's interventions and learning within and across executive structures** by opening up activities to greater internal review and exchange, in order to benefit from wider institutional experience and support and help build a less silo'd, more open, and ultimately more informed organizational culture.

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