



Economic Cooperation and Development WE

Evaluation Policy

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All staff of the division Economic Cooperation and Development (WE)
Members of the External Evaluation Committee
External evaluators engaged in evaluation activities for the division

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Abstract

This policy indicates the key purposes of evaluation at the division for Economic Cooperation and Development of SECO. It indicates the different categories of evaluations and reviews used by the division and the respective responsibilities of all involved actors and in particular of the Evaluation Unit. The policy also outlines the role of the External Evaluation Committee, which provides oversight to the evaluation activities of the division. Lastly, the policy indicates how the division maintains transparency about its evaluations and guarantees access to information.

Table of Contents

0	Introduction.....	3
1	Purposes and Principles of Evaluation	3
2	Categories of Evaluations and Reviews	4
3	Roles and Responsibilities.....	5
3.1	Sections with Operational Activities.....	5
3.2	Evaluation Unit.....	6
3.3	Senior Management of the Division.....	7
3.4	External Evaluation Committee	7
3.5	External Evaluators.....	8
4	Independence of Evaluation	8
5	Contribution of Evaluation to Knowledge Creation and Management	9
6	Transparency and Communication.....	9
7	Final clause.....	10

Abbreviations

DAC	Development Assistance Committee of the OECD
EAER	Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PM	Project or Program manager
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SECO	State Secretariat for Economic Affairs
SEVAL	Swiss Evaluation Society
ToR	Terms of Reference
WE	Division of Economic Cooperation and Development within SECO

0 Introduction

The State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) > Economic Cooperation and Development division (thereafter referred as “*the division*”) administers public resources to promote sustainable economic development in partner countries around the world. This creates opportunities and prospects for people in these countries and reduces global risks. *The division* pursues this goal via effective partnerships across the Swiss Administration, with partner governments, multilateral organizations, the private sector, civil society organizations, and with the broader community of donor and technical agencies.

Evaluation is the systematic and objective assessment of a (or several) on-going or completed project, program or policy, its design, implementation and results. Through evaluation, SECO aims to determine the relevance and fulfilment of objectives, development coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. An evaluation is expected to provide information that is credible and useful, enabling the incorporation of lessons learned into the decision-making process of both recipients and SECO, as well as SECO’s implementing partners.

Evaluation is, next to monitoring, a key element of *the division’s* learning system. Monitoring and evaluation are mutually interdependent. With careful monitoring, important data on project or program progress can be collected, and the availability of quality monitoring data is necessary for good evaluation. In turn, evaluations provide lessons for improving the design and implementation of the monitoring systems and processes of *the division*.

This policy aims at providing clarity to SECO’s staff, partners, and stakeholders about the purposes of evaluation, the governance guiding evaluation, the types of evaluations and the approach of conducting, disseminating, and using evaluations.

This policy draws essentially on the evaluation principles and guidance developed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) > Development Assistance Committee (DAC) > Evaluation Network (EvalNet). In addition, the policy is consistent with the evaluation standards of the Swiss Evaluation Society (SEVAL) and is based on Article 170 of the Swiss Federal Constitution¹, which stipulates that federal measures have to be evaluated with regard to their effectiveness.

1 Purposes and Principles of Evaluation

Evaluation serves three primary purposes:

LEARNING – Evaluation shall contribute to the continuous improvement of the economic cooperation measures, instruments and approaches.

ACCOUNTABILITY – Evaluation shall provide the Parliament, the public and other interested stakeholders information on the results achieved with the resources allocated to economic cooperation measures.

STEERING – Evaluation shall support evidence-based decision-making at project/program or division level in a targeted way (in addition to regular project monitoring).

¹ Art. 170 of the Federal Constitution of 18 April 1999 of the Swiss Confederation (CC 101), <https://www.admin.ch/ch/e/rs/c101.html#a170>

Learning, accounting for resources, as well as supporting steering imply that evaluation is a matter embodied in the work processes, culture and ethic of the organization. It requires intentional actions by senior management to foster a culture of accountability and learning, and to provide appropriate incentives (and minimize disincentives) for staff at all levels. Evaluation is there to contribute to an informed decision-making process and to foster continuous improvements.

Credibility and effectiveness of evaluation imply the following principles:




- Clear governance (roles and responsibilities) including an independent oversight of the evaluation activities.
- A sound system of independent evaluations.
- Integration of evaluation results in knowledge management processes.
- Transparency with regards to the results of evaluations.

2 Categories of Evaluations and Reviews

The *division* distinguishes three different types of evaluations or reviews²:

- **Independent Evaluations** are decided by the External Evaluation Committee (see chapter 3.4), are commissioned and managed by the Evaluation Unit (see chapter 3.2) and are executed by External Evaluators (see chapter 3.5).
- **External Evaluations** are decided by the Head of an operational section (see chapter 3.1), are commissioned and managed by the Project or Program manager in charge and executed by External Evaluators.
- **Internal Reviews** are initiated by the Head of an operational section and are executed by the Project or Program manager in charge. They usually take the form of a project completion note.

Figure 1 – Types of evaluations and reviews

	Independent Evaluations	External Evaluations	Internal Reviews
Focus and scope	External evaluation of a thematic area at portfolio level	External evaluation at project or program level	Self-assessment at project or program level
Oversight (principal)	External Evaluation Committee	Head of Operational Section	Head of Operational Section
Commissioning (managed by)	Evaluation Unit	Project or Program Manager in charge	n.a.
Execution (evaluator)	Independent External Evaluator	Independent External Evaluator	Project or Program Manager in charge
Degree of independence			

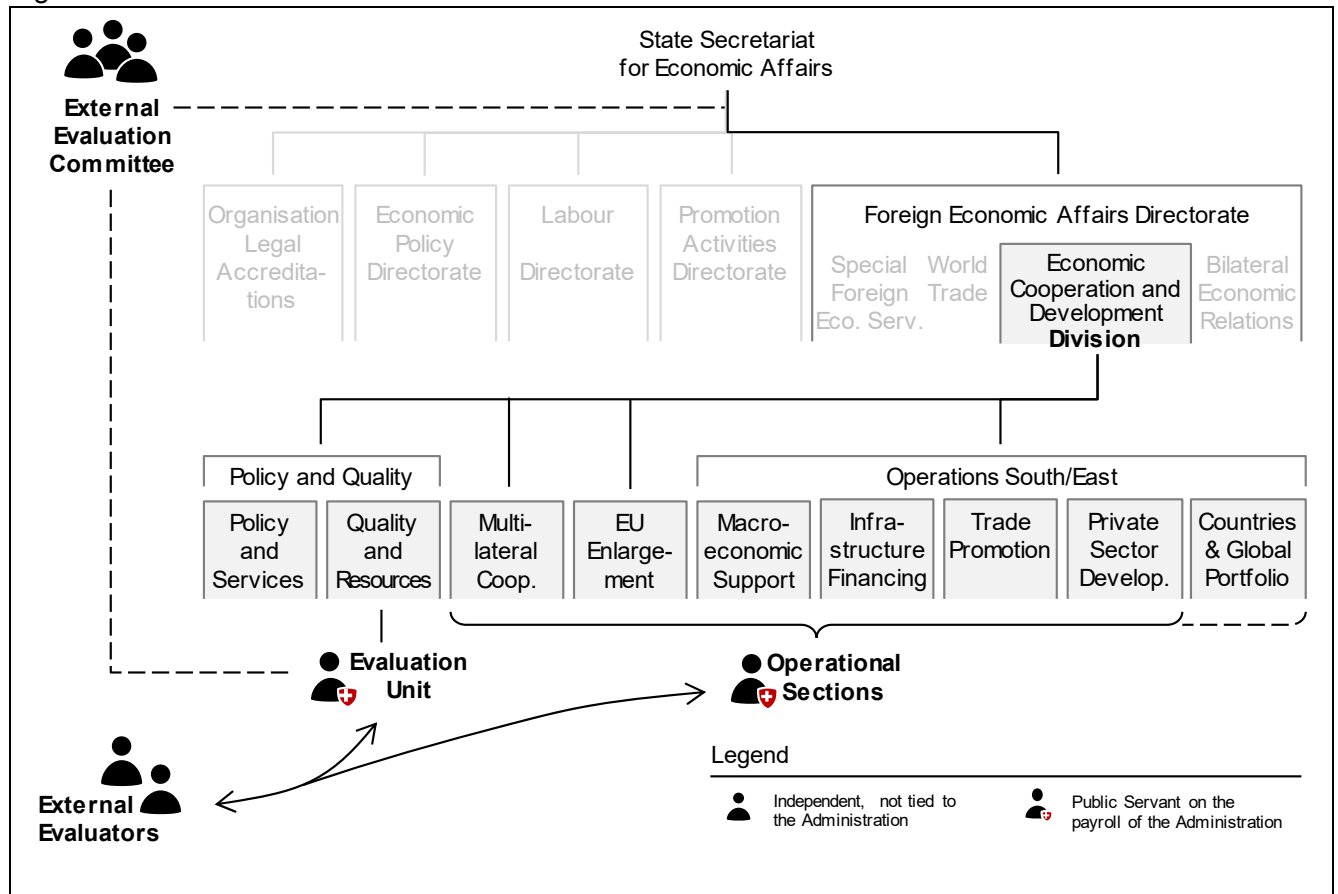
² For the purpose of this policy, reviews or evaluations cover the same ground, but are distinguished by their degree of independence and by the responsibilities of those initiating and managing them.

For each project or program with a budget of more than one million Swiss francs, an Internal Review is required³.

3 Roles and Responsibilities

Responsibility for evaluation, and the most effective use of it, is shared at all levels of the organization as well as with the independent external parties involved. The main responsibilities are attributed to the roles as described below and illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2 – Governance chart for evaluation



3.1 Sections with Operational Activities

Sections with operational activities (ultimately through the section Head) are responsible for:

- Identifying an evaluation point of contact (usually the focal point controlling). The designated individual is responsible for ensuring compliance with the Evaluation Policy across the breadth of the section's projects.
- Planning their annual program of external evaluations and internal reviews, taking into account their operational and strategic objectives, with due consideration given to learning, accountability and steering. Providing this information at least once a year to the evaluation unit for integration in the Evaluation Registry.

³ For projects and programs with a budget of less than one million Swiss francs, an Internal Review or an end-term External Evaluation may also be required if the project or program addresses a major or far-reaching topic or issue that should be kept in the institutional memory. If a project or program represents the next phase (or the continuation) of one or more previous projects or programs and the cumulative budgets over the last five years reach one million Swiss francs or more, an Internal Review or an end-term External Evaluation is also expected.

- Integrating lessons learned from evaluations in the strategic reflections of the section on instruments and approaches.
- Ensuring that staff is informed about the evaluation standards by attending the introductory evaluation course and periodic targeted courses.

At the project/program level and in collaboration with the relevant partners, sections with operational activities are furthermore responsible for:

- **Creating enabling conditions for evaluation**

This involves specifying in the design of the operations the results expected in terms of output, outcome and impact. A log-frame is required for development interventions exceeding one million Swiss francs. A monitoring system shall be established to provide periodic and relevant information with regard to the expected results, including baseline information at the beginning of the intervention. Early discussions should take place with the program/project partners on expected reviews or evaluations, the standards to be followed, the organization of the evaluation, including the participation of partners, the financial resources set aside for the evaluation as well as the publication of the reports.

- **Commissioning external evaluations consistent with SEVAL and DAC standards**

External evaluations shall be executed in line with SEVAL and DAC standards; internal reviews shall refer to these standards to the extent that they are relevant or appropriate for the objective pursued by the internal review.

- **Ensuring an adequate follow-up of evaluations**

This involves preparing a management response to external evaluations, sharing and disseminating evaluation results with interested stakeholders and partners and ensuring that relevant findings and recommendations of evaluations are implemented.

3.2 Evaluation Unit

The evaluation unit of *the division* is embedded in the section Quality and Resources. The positioning of the evaluation unit in this section aims at ensuring a close collaboration within *the division* and at facilitating the integration of evaluation findings and recommendations in the daily work of *the division*.

The section is responsible to appoint the evaluation unit team. The time allocated to the function of evaluation officer should be commensurate with the size of the evaluation portfolio of *the division*.

The evaluation unit is headed by the Lead Evaluation Officer and is responsible for ensuring compliance with the Evaluation Policy across *the division*, especially:

- **Proposing and commissioning independent evaluations**

The evaluation unit proposes and commissions one or more independent evaluations per year. Independent evaluations are proposed by the evaluation unit based on consultations with the heads of sections and the senior management of *the division*. In line with our commitment to the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness⁴, the evaluation unit also takes into account the evaluation program of other donors and explores opportunities to undertake joint evaluations. Independent evaluations are focused on a portfolio of projects, country assistance strategies, crosscutting issues or themes, economic cooperation instruments and impact evaluations. Independent evaluations must respect SEVAL and DAC standards. The External Evaluation Committee approves the program of independent evaluations.

⁴ The Declaration of Paris on Aid Effectiveness was adopted on 2 March 2005 during the High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness. It gives a series of specific implementation measures and establishes a monitoring system to assess progress and ensure that donors and recipients hold each other accountable for their commitments.

- **Consolidating the program of evaluations at corporate level**

The evaluation unit consolidates the medium-term evaluation program of *the division*. This multi-year program includes independent evaluations, external evaluations and internal reviews. It is based on the programming of operational sections and of the evaluation unit. It has to take into account the strategic and operational needs of *the division* and ensure a balance between accountability, lesson learning and support for strategic steering. In its biannual report, the evaluation unit reports on the overall balance achieved by the programming of evaluations.

- **Reporting on the results of evaluations**

The evaluation unit reports on the evaluation results on a biannual basis. The report assesses the success rate of development interventions based on mid-term, final and ex-post external evaluations and internal reviews. The report gives an assessment of the overall quality of evaluations based on an assessment of individual evaluations by means of a standard framework. The report also provides the status of the implementation of key evaluation recommendations and aims to identify trends in lessons learned from evaluations.

- **Disseminating the results of evaluations**

The evaluation unit maintains an evaluation registry that documents external evaluations and internal reviews undertaken within *the division*. The unit also ensures timely publication of independent evaluations as well as any relevant information in relation to evaluation.

- **Organising and providing training and support to operational sections**

Provision of training and support includes the following: (i) regular update of the guidance on external evaluation and internal reviews; (ii) organization of training on evaluation, including an introductory course and targeted courses for the operational sections and (iii) depending on the capacities of the evaluation unit, selective support to sections with operational activities on specific evaluations.

- **Contributing to the reporting on the effectiveness of Switzerland's international cooperation**

The evaluation unit contributes to the preparation of this report and is responsible for ensuring appropriate involvement of other sections.

The biannual report of the evaluation unit presents the medium-term evaluation program, the evaluation results as well as any other relevant information regarding evaluation, including the implementation of this policy.

3.3 Senior Management of the Division

The senior management of *the division* is responsible for:

- Promoting a work culture and ethic geared towards organizational learning and accountability and providing appropriate incentives (and minimize disincentives) for staff at all levels.
- Responding to and requesting from the sections with operational activities to prepare management responses on the findings and recommendations of evaluations.
- Ensuring that decision-making takes results from evaluations into account.
- Allocating sufficient financial and personnel resources for evaluation.

3.4 External Evaluation Committee

An independent External Evaluation Committee (thereafter referred as "*the committee*") provides oversight of the evaluation activities and reports to the State Secretary (SECO Director). Members of *the committee*, external to the Swiss Federal administration, include representatives with evaluation or development expertise from different areas (civil society, business, academia, international and Parliament). The SECO Director appoints the members. The Chair of *the committee* is elected by *the committee* members.

The tasks and responsibilities of *the committee* include:

- Approving the program of independent evaluations.
- Commenting the independent evaluations and related management responses.
- Commenting other publications and reports of the evaluation unit and related management responses.
- Reviewing and commenting the biannual report of the evaluation unit.
- Providing advice to ensure the quality of evaluation activities.
- Recommending to the management of *the division* the allocation of additional budget resources to strengthen evaluation within *the division*.

The management of *the division* is invited to attend the meetings of *the committee* as observer or knowledge source. It presents its position on the different topics under discussion. In addition, if agreed by the Chair of *the committee*, the management of *the division* and *the evaluation unit* may present to *the committee* external evaluations or studies of particular interest for the assessment of results or lessons learned within *the division*.

The committee usually meets two to three times a year. The evaluation unit acts as the secretariat for *the committee*. In consultation with the Chair of *the committee*, the evaluation unit prepares the agenda of *the committee* and summary of discussions.

3.5 External Evaluators

External evaluators are experts who are independent of the Swiss Federal Administration and of all agencies implementing any of the measures being evaluated. Their selection is made on the basis of a public procurement procedure – preferably a competitive bidding – following the Swiss legislation on public procurement. The lead evaluator is responsible for:

- Carrying out the evaluation according to the terms of reference and contractual terms.
- Making every effort to formulate recommendations that are practical and achievable.
- Ensuring the overall integrity of the team's performance, by making sure that the members of the team possess a mix of evaluation skills and technical or sectoral/thematic knowledge relevant to the particular evaluation⁵.

4 Independence of Evaluation

Independence is key to the credibility of evaluation. For *the division*, this independence materializes by means of a clear governance and careful processes, in particular:

- an oversight function of the evaluation unit (the External Evaluation Committee) not tied to the federal Administration, which oversees the budget allocations for independent evaluations and any other measures aiming at strengthening evaluation
- an evaluation unit which, although integrated in *the division*, nevertheless benefits from a large degree of independence and ensures a rigorous selection process for external evaluators.

The independence of the evaluation unit is further strengthened by:

- Integration of the evaluation unit in a section with no operational activities.

⁵ Wherever possible and appropriate, the team of evaluators should involve local experts.

- Reporting to the External Evaluation Committee, including the biannual report and the results of independent evaluations.
- Systematic publication of independent evaluations, related management responses as well as comments of the External Evaluation Committee.

The evaluation unit may raise to *the committee* any issue related to the independence of the unit.

5 Contribution of Evaluation to Knowledge Creation and Management

Evaluation is recognized as a key contributor to knowledge creation and management in the division of Economic Cooperation and Development.

For evaluations to be effective, findings and recommendations have to be incorporated in the strategic and operational activities of *the division*. Everyone, including Project or Program manager, Heads of sections, senior management and the evaluation unit, is responsible for ensuring appropriate use of evaluation findings and recommendations.

In addition, other mechanisms exist to further integrate the evaluation results in the daily work of *the division*, in particular:

- Systematic training of *the division's* staff on evaluation by means of introductory and targeted courses, including training on the use of evaluation results.
- Periodic updating of evaluation guidelines.
- Follow-up of implementation of relevant evaluation recommendations by the evaluation unit.
- Regular dialogue of operational sections, the evaluation unit, the management of *the division* with the External Evaluation Committee.

6 Transparency and Communication

Transparency is essential for the credibility of the evaluation system in *the division*. It involves an accessible, user-friendly, and timely publication of:

- Independent evaluations, including management responses and comments from the External Evaluation Committee.
- Medium-term evaluation program (the external evaluation reports and the management response are available on request).
- Any other study or information as deemed appropriate by the External Evaluation Committee.

In its quest for transparency, *the division* follows the provisions of the most recent version of the Federal Act on Freedom of Information in the Administration (FoIA) from 2004. Under this Act, evaluation reports are considered official documents (Art. 5). Any person has the right to inspect official documents and to obtain information about the content of official documents (Art. 6). However, the right of access shall be limited, deferred or refused for different reasons, such as likely revealing professional, business or manufacturing secrets, or prejudicing the privacy of a third party (Art. 7).

7 Final clause

The revised principles of this policy were approved by the External Evaluation Committee on 16-Nov-2020. The policy was adopted by the Director of SECO on 22-Jan-2021.

The authority to change or repeal this policy lies with the Director of SECO. The evaluation unit advises the Management of *the division*, the External Evaluation Committee and the Director of SECO on necessary amendments of this policy.

Annex I. Chronology of Versions

Version	Who	What
1.0 (05-Nov-2007)	Cudré-Mauroux, Catherine WECO	Approved by the division's Policy Committee
2.0 (06-Mar-2009)	Cudré-Mauroux, Catherine WECO	Revised and approved by Head of division (Maser Mallor, Beatrice)
3.0 (22-Jan-2021)	Schneider, Johannes WEQA	Revised evaluation policy presented at the meeting of the External Evaluation Committee on 16-Nov- 2020, approved by the SECO Director (Ineichen- Fleisch, Marie-Gabrielle) on 22-Jan-2021