



CHAPTER 2

PREPARING FOR THE EVALUATION



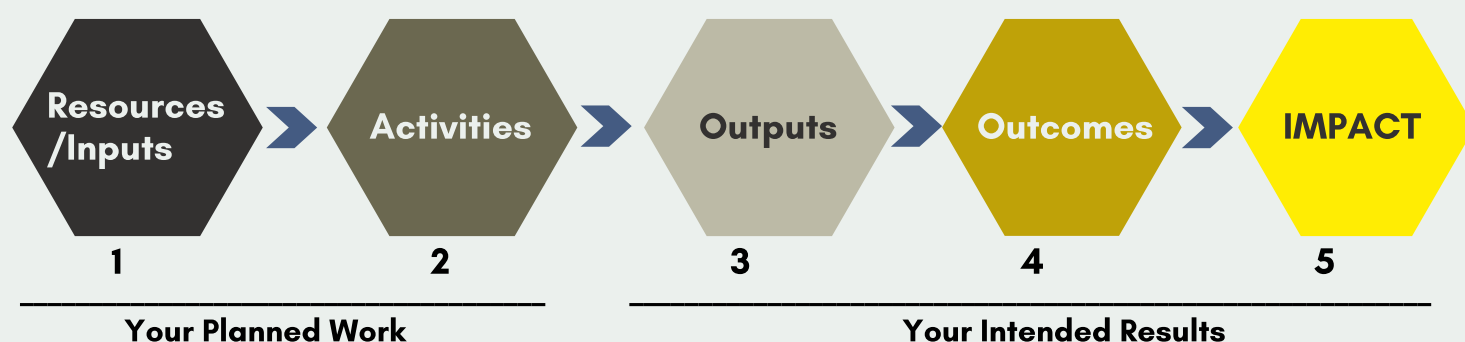
*"You can't do "good" evaluation if you have a poorly planned program".
Beverly Anderson Parsons (1999)*

In the toolkit, we concentrate on **impact-focused evaluation**. We present practical ways of conducting such evaluation regarding primarily the **effects of project activities** in terms of an intended change. The subject of our interest are the effects of project activities (outputs, outcomes, impact) and their compliance with the project **theory of change** (or project theory). The project theory defines the concept of the intended change and plan of the project, including its objectives, activities, expected outputs, outcomes and impact, as well as the way in which they will be measured, and what resources are needed to achieve these effects.

2.1. What you need to know about the project to plan its evaluation

The basic element of the project theory is the **logic model of change** that compiles information on what the project running organisation needs to accumulate (inputs/resources), the work it needs to do (project activities), and the effects it intends to achieve. The logic model of change for a given project is developed according to the following scheme.

Diagram. 1. Basic logic model of change



Source: W.K. Kellogg Foundation, *Logic Model Guide* (2004), p. 1.

Example of the chain of changes in an employment project aimed at unemployed young mothers in a small town

Resources	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impact
What resources are mobilised for the project?	What type of activities are performed in the frame of the project	What types of products / services were delivered to the beneficiaries?	Direct effects / changes in the target group	Long-term effects on the labour market
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Budget Project participants selected by the local Labour Office Project team Labour market adviser Trainer of social competences Trainer of vocational skills Equipment for training Office room Provision of places in childcare facilities for the project beneficiaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultations with local employers on their staffing needs Diagnosis of the soft skills needs among the project beneficiaries (unemployed young mothers who had to be supported by social welfare benefits before the project) Recruitment of social and vocational skills trainers according to the diagnosed needs Training in social competences Training in vocational skills needed by local employers Advice on the job application process for particular beneficiaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Certificates of completed social competences training for the project beneficiaries Certificates of completed vocational training for the beneficiaries Reports prepared by counsellors supporting beneficiaries in the job application process (preparation of documents and getting ready for the interview) Prepared application documents (CVs and LMs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed social competences needed for employment according to beneficiaries' diagnosed needs Acquiring the vocational skills needed by local employers Enhanced motivation of the beneficiaries to apply for a job 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employment of at least 60% of project recipients in the three months after completing the project Reduced unemployment among young mothers in the town a year after the project ended Reduced spendings on social welfare benefits for the households of the young mothers Better living conditions for the children of the young mothers who participated in the project

The methods of measuring the project outcomes and the related assumptions are sometimes specified in a separate table called the project logic matrix. The logic model and logic matrix should be part of the project documentation.

In practice, it happens that the logic matrix or even the logic model of change have not been developed or are very selective. A lack of assumptions indicating how you define the success of the project makes it impossible to evaluate it and thus verify whether the planned change took place as well as whether it occurred as a result of the project activities.

What to do if there is no logic model of change in the project documentation?

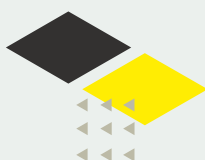
In such a situation, it is necessary to recreate the logic of change behind the project, e.g. based on interviews with the management and project staff, as well as already existing documents such as strategy / project implementation plan, justification for its implementation, application for co-financing, partnership agreement, etc. Table 1 (next page) may help you to reconstruct the logic of the project.

See attachment:

Tool 1. (RE)CONSTRUCTION OF PROJECT LOGIC

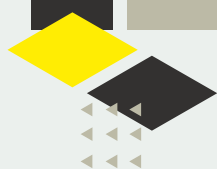
The tabulation of the logic of the project allows you to reflect on the ways of demonstrating the level of achieved effects (outputs, outcomes and impact). This goal is served by **defining the indicators** by which you will measure the progress of the project. An indicator is an observable attribute (feature) that enables the phenomenon to be measured. Each indicator has a measure (quantitative or qualitative) which informs about the degree / intensity of the occurrence of this phenomenon. In order to measure the change that has occurred as a result of the project implementation, you should determine the values (level) of a given indicator at the beginning and at the end of the project, i.e. the baseline value and the final value. It is also good to know what the minimum required value of the final output indicator is, if such a value was defined at the beginning of the project. See example of indicators in Tool 2 (page 10). More information on indicators can be found in the [online course](#) (Module 3).

See attachment: Tool 2. **TABLE OF INDICATORS OF PROJECT EFFECTS** (outputs, outcomes, impact), including sources of information enabling the verification of their level, with examples.



Tool 1. (RE)CONSTRUCTION OF PROJECT LOGIC

1	What is the wider problem to be solved by the project?	
2	What is the project's target group (beneficiaries)? Who will be the direct recipients of the project activities?	
3	What change is expected to occur for the beneficiaries as a result of their participation in the project?	
4	What factors can contribute to such change? Consider both project and non-project factors. Order them according to the strength of their influence.	Internal factors (resulting from the project implementation) 1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ External factors 1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____
5	What factors can counteract such change? Consider both project and non-project factors. Order them according to the strength of their influence.	Internal factors (resulting from the project implementation) 1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ External factors 1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____
6	What outcomes of the project must be achieved in order to consider that the expected change has actually taken place? (list all of them and number them)	
7	What outputs must be produced and transferred to the beneficiaries in order to achieve the above-mentioned outcomes? (list all and number according to the numbering of the outcomes)	
8	What project activities are necessary to produce the above-mentioned outputs and outcomes? (list all and number according to the numbering of outputs)	
9	What inputs/resources are necessary to carry out the above-mentioned actions? (e.g. time needed, human resources, financial, technical/equipment, premises)	
10	What are the necessary steps on the way to achieving the project objectives?	1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ 4) _____ 5) _____



Tool 2: Table of indicators of project effects (outputs, outcomes, impact)

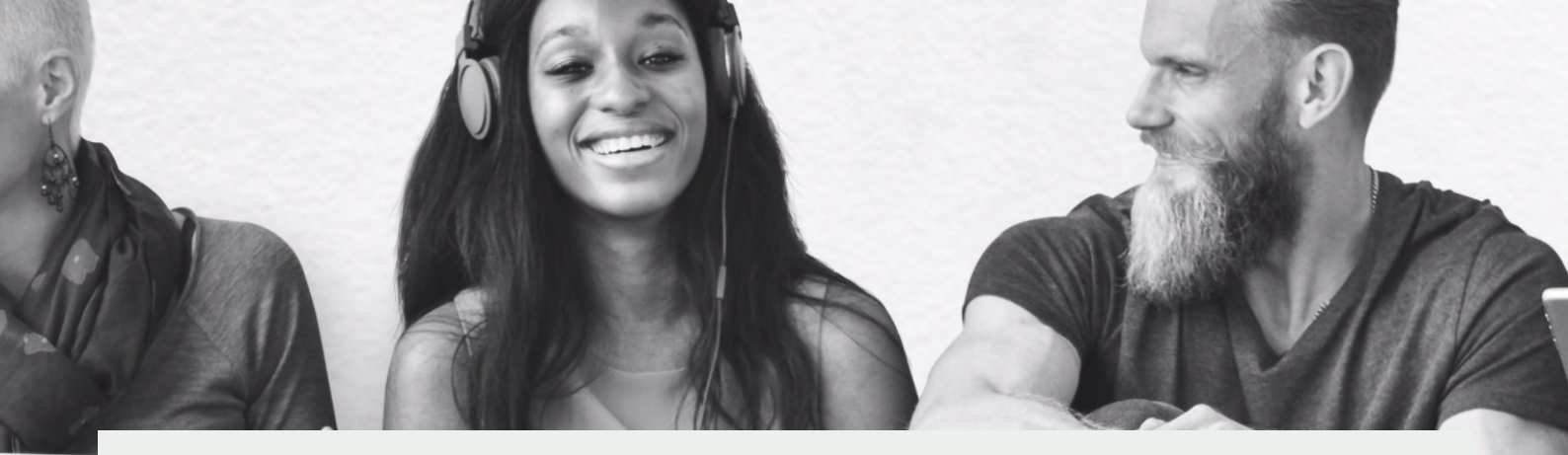
including sources of information enabling the verification of their level, with examples



More examples of targeting indicators can be found in the **Guide on Measuring Decent Jobs for Youth**.

Monitoring, evaluation and learning in labour market programmes, ESTABLISHING A MONITORING SYSTEM, p.6-9

	What INDICATORS will be used to assess the achievement of the project effects?	Who or what can be a SOURCE OF INFORMATION needed to verify the level of indicators (to compare the level of planned and actually achieved results)?
OUTPUTS Material goods / services that the recipient receives (or participates in their "production") during the course of the evaluated project <i>In reference to specific, operational goals</i>	<i>Number of self-analyses of the project recipients' strengths</i> <i>Number of CVs developed as part of the project</i> <i>Number of sample cover letters</i> <i>Number of psychological diagnoses performed</i> <i>Number of diagnoses of professional preferences and predispositions</i> <i>Number of Individual Action Plans prepared</i>	<i>Project recipients, psychologist, career counsellor</i> <i>Project recipients and career advisor</i> <i>Psychologist, career counsellor, internship supervisor</i>
OUTCOMES (HARD AND SOFT) Direct and immediate effects (in tangible and intangible form) <i>In reference to the specific and operational objectives of the evaluated project</i>	<i>Number of reports prepared by people conducting individual project activities (psychologist, career counsellor, trainers / trainers, internship tutors)</i> <i>Number of people who participated in training</i> <i>Number of people participating in internships</i> <i>Number of certificates of completion of a particular type of training</i> <i>Number of apprenticeship completion certificates</i> <i>Number of hours of classes (training, psychological and professional counselling, internships)</i> <i>Number of people who acquired new competences, i.e. knowledge and skills (comparison before and after training)</i> <i>Number of people with increased motivation for professional activation (taking up employment or starting own business)</i>	 <i>Psychologist, career counsellor, trainers / trainers, internship tutors</i> <i>Attendance lists for training and internships</i> <i>Photographic documentation</i> <i>Letters confirming receipt of certificates from training and internships</i> <i>Internship contracts</i> <i>Project documentation (registers / lesson plans signed by the teachers).</i> <i>Intern diaries</i> <i>Knowledge and skills tests conducted before and after the training</i> <i>Opinion of a career counsellor, findings regarding the study of motivation to take up employment</i>
IMPACT Wider effects of the project going beyond the direct and immediate effects, changes that occur in the social group or beneficiaries' community caused by the project <i>In reference to the overall strategic goals of the evaluated project</i>	 <i>Number of young unemployed people in the region covered by the project (before and after its completion)</i> <i>Number of people who are employed as a result of participating in the project</i> <i>Number of people who set up a business / own companies as a result of participating in the project (including the self-employed)</i>	 <i>Powiat Labour Office,</i> <i>Local Data Bank,</i> <i>Information provided by project recipients and their social environment (families, relatives)</i>



2.2. When to start developing an evaluation concept and plan?

It is worth developing the concept of evaluation before starting the project or even during its planning, because it allows you:

- To initiate an in-depth reflection on the logic and coherence of project activities, their translation into project objectives, as well as factors facilitating and hindering their achievement;
- To plan in advance the collection of information (data) that enables evaluation questions to be answered (e.g. without the baseline measurement of the level of knowledge and skills of the recipients of the training (before this activity), it will be impossible to reliably demonstrate the change that has been obtained, i.e. an increase in competences, which should take place as a result of this training);
- To find appropriate funds to conduct the evaluation and to enter into the schedule of project activities that will help to collect relevant data, analyse them and report them;
- To plan the collection of information in the most efficient way (the cheapest, fastest, easiest) during or after the implementation of project activities.

It is worth remembering that **evaluation is a multi-stage process** that must be designed and planned well, and then implemented step by step.

Stages of the evaluation process

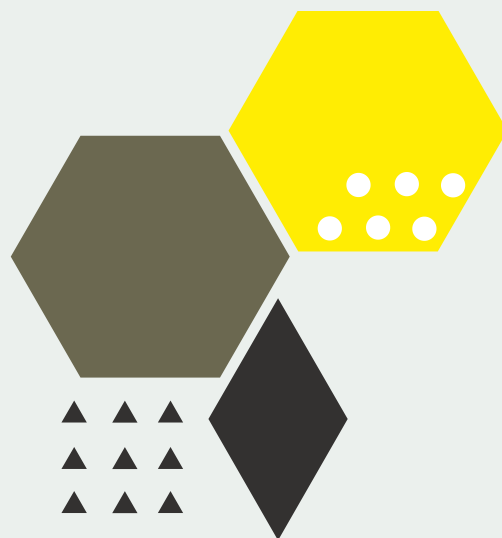
- 1) Diagnosis of evaluation needs
- 2) Conceptualisation and planning
- 3) Information collection – research implementation
- 4) Data analysis and inference
- 5) Reporting
- 6) Using evaluation results – implementation of recommendations

2.3. How to diagnose the evaluation needs of the project stakeholders

Conceptualization and planning of evaluation should not start without identifying who needs the information, conclusions and recommendations from the evaluation and for what purpose. It is good to begin the diagnosis of evaluation needs with the stakeholders of the project to be evaluated.

Project stakeholders are people / entities (institutions, organisations) involved in various ways in the implementation of a particular project, e.g. its beneficiaries, project team, staff implementing project activities (e.g. trainers, psychologists, career advisors), project partners (cooperating organisations or institutions), sponsors / funders, etc.

The participation of project stakeholders in the evaluation is very important as they are potential allies of the evaluator. They can support the entire evaluation process, including the implementation of recommendations that improve the project. Thanks to the involvement of various stakeholders in the evaluation activities, it is possible not only to improve communication and cooperation with partners, beneficiaries and project staff, but also to convince funders to invest in the project currently being implemented or its next edition. If the stakeholders are interested in the project evaluation then conducting the evaluation in a **participatory manner** – involving the stakeholders in the entire evaluation process, starting with the diagnosis of evaluation needs – should be much easier.



The best way to diagnose evaluation needs while ensuring a high level of stakeholder participation is to conduct a **workshop** / group interview with representatives of all entities (organisations, institutions) and groups of people involved in a particular project.

If the recipients of the project are young people (e.g. NEETs) or other group who may have concerns about expressing their opinions in public, you should first hold a separate meeting with these beneficiaries and then invite their representatives to participate in a workshop with other stakeholders. This type of workshop with young people or other project recipients with a relatively weak social position should be based on values strengthening the subjectivity of the project beneficiaries (see the example from *Participatory evaluation with young people*, p. 7-8).

EXAMPLE OF WORKSHOP WITH STAKEHOLDERS

A meeting with the stakeholders should start by discussing its purpose and introducing all the participants. Then, it is worth presenting the benefits of project evaluation (see p. 8-9), as well as talking about how it is useful for individual stakeholders.

After such an introduction you could hand out small post-its to the participants of the workshop and ask them to answer the following questions:

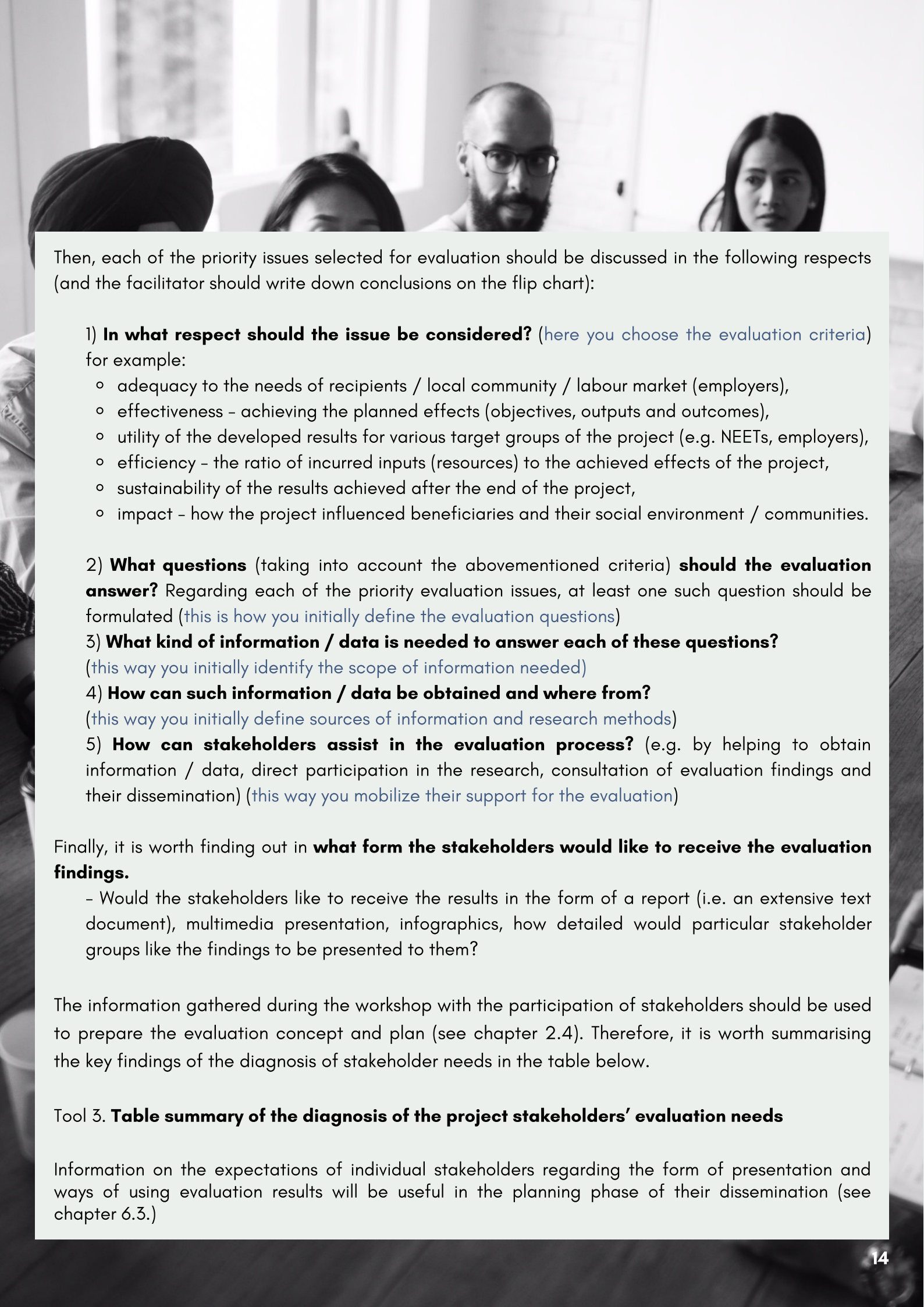
1) What do I want to learn from evaluation?

2) Why is it important to know that? What do I want to use this knowledge for?
(that way you define the **OBJECTIVES OF THE EVALUATION**)

The collected post-its should be grouped (preferably on a flipchart) in such a way that similar matters and related project elements are next to each other. You can group the reported issues into the following areas:

- **Activities**, e.g. recruitment of project recipients, diagnosis of their needs, psychological counselling, conducting training, career counselling, organisation of internships, promotional and information activities,
- **Outputs**, e.g. Individual Action Plans, CVs and cover letters prepared during project exercises, certificates of training and internships completed, attendance lists, training programmes, trainers' reports, training materials, promotional materials,
- **Outcomes**, e.g. an increase in soft (social skills) and hard (professional skills) competences, a change in the attitudes of project participants, an increase in motivation to look for a job, finding a suitable job, maintaining employment, social activation,
- **Objectives**, e.g. long-term effects of the project / target state,
- **Other issues**, e.g. communication with project recipients, project management

Discuss the selected issues / elements of the project with stakeholders, consider together which of them are the most important. Finally, there should be no more than a few issues [in this way, the scope of evaluation will be initially determined].



Then, each of the priority issues selected for evaluation should be discussed in the following respects (and the facilitator should write down conclusions on the flip chart):

1) **In what respect should the issue be considered?** (here you choose the evaluation criteria) for example:

- adequacy to the needs of recipients / local community / labour market (employers),
- effectiveness - achieving the planned effects (objectives, outputs and outcomes),
- utility of the developed results for various target groups of the project (e.g. NEETs, employers),
- efficiency - the ratio of incurred inputs (resources) to the achieved effects of the project,
- sustainability of the results achieved after the end of the project,
- impact - how the project influenced beneficiaries and their social environment / communities.

2) **What questions** (taking into account the abovementioned criteria) **should the evaluation answer?** Regarding each of the priority evaluation issues, at least one such question should be formulated (this is how you initially define the evaluation questions)

3) **What kind of information / data is needed to answer each of these questions?** (this way you initially identify the scope of information needed)

4) **How can such information / data be obtained and where from?** (this way you initially define sources of information and research methods)

5) **How can stakeholders assist in the evaluation process?** (e.g. by helping to obtain information / data, direct participation in the research, consultation of evaluation findings and their dissemination) (this way you mobilize their support for the evaluation)

Finally, it is worth finding out in **what form the stakeholders would like to receive the evaluation findings.**

- Would the stakeholders like to receive the results in the form of a report (i.e. an extensive text document), multimedia presentation, infographics, how detailed would particular stakeholder groups like the findings to be presented to them?

The information gathered during the workshop with the participation of stakeholders should be used to prepare the evaluation concept and plan (see chapter 2.4). Therefore, it is worth summarising the key findings of the diagnosis of stakeholder needs in the table below.

Tool 3. **Table summary of the diagnosis of the project stakeholders' evaluation needs**

Information on the expectations of individual stakeholders regarding the form of presentation and ways of using evaluation results will be useful in the planning phase of their dissemination (see chapter 6.3.)

Tool 3. Table summary of the diagnosis of the project stakeholders' evaluation needs

Authors: Monika Bartosiewicz-Niziołek, Sławomir Nałęcz

This tool is part of the **Employment Evaluation Toolkit**, designed by **YOUTH IMPACT** project.

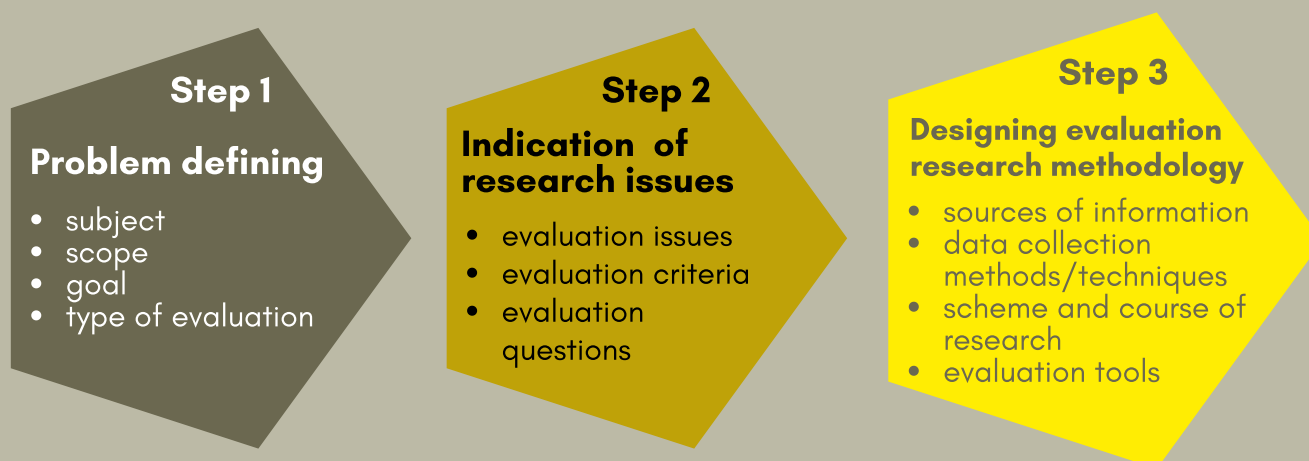


	1. Evaluation Focus Areas What is to be evaluated: individual project activities, outputs, outcomes, impact, other issues?	2. Evaluation criteria and questions What questions should the evaluation answer regarding particular criterion and issue? (at least one question for each criterion and issue)	3. Stakeholders who want to know the answer to this question
1			
2			
3			
	Evaluation stakeholders (examples)	4. Type of support declared by stakeholders (e.g. obtaining, processing information / data, consulting evaluation findings, disseminating results.)	5. Preferred form of evaluation report (e.g. a comprehensive text document, its abstract, presentation, infographics)
	Management of the organisation implementing the project		
	Project Team		
	External specialists (e.g. trainers, internships supervisors)		
	Project target group (beneficiaries / recipients)		
	Grant giving institution, donor		
	Partner 1		
	Partner 2		

2.4. How to design and plan the evaluation

The information collected during the workshop with the stakeholders will be used to prepare the concept and plan of the evaluation. The concept of evaluation, i.e. an idea on how to carry it out, can be prepared in 3 steps.

Diagram 2: Evaluation concept



The first and second steps include the following:

- **Subject of evaluation** – what do you want to evaluate (e.g. which project or programme),
- **Scope of evaluation** – what part of the project will be included in the evaluation, e.g. the entire project or selected elements – particular activities, effects,
- **Purpose(s) of the evaluation** – what are you conducting it for, what will you use the evaluation findings for,
- **Type of evaluation** – at what stage of the project implementation will you conduct the evaluation; before the commencement of project activities (ex-ante evaluation), during their implementation (mid-term or on-going evaluation), after completing the project (ex-post evaluation),
- **Evaluation criteria** – features indicating in what respect the project is being evaluated (e.g. relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, utility, impact, sustainability),
- **Evaluation questions** – generally formulated questions regarding issues that are important in terms of assessing the value and quality of the evaluated project,
- **Evaluator** – who will perform the evaluation, e.g. a team implementing the project (self-evaluation), an evaluation specialist employed by the organisation implementing the project (internal evaluation) or an external entity contracted by it (external evaluation).

You can present this information in a table showing your **evaluation concept**. An example of such a table and its application to a specific project are presented below.

Tool 4. Evaluation Concept Table (template can be found in the attachments).

1	Subject of evaluation – what do you want to evaluate?	<i>Project of activating young adults co-financed from external funds</i>
2	The scope of evaluation – what part of the project do you want to evaluate (the whole one or selected activities/ tasks)?	<i>The evaluation will cover all project activities / tasks, i.e. recipient recruitment, training for the development of hard and soft (psychosocial) competences, psychological and vocational counselling and internships.</i>
3	What stage of the project implementation do you want to evaluate?	<i>Project completion (ex-post evaluation)</i>
4	Who will implement the evaluation?	<i>c) Persons involved in the implementation of the evaluated undertaking/ project (self-evaluation)</i>
5	The purpose of evaluation (objectives) and the planned use of its findings. Purposes can be related to the main functions of evaluation: educational, decision-making, development, reporting, promotional, procedural. Evaluation purposes should be linked to evaluation types, criteria and questions.	<i>Why do you conduct the evaluation? What do you want to achieve? How are you going to apply (use, utilise) the evaluation findings?</i> <i>The main purpose of evaluation is to improve the next edition of the project and increase its impact. We want to find out whether the proposed model of professional activation of young people made it possible to achieve the assumed effects, what factors influenced this process, and to what extent the achieved results were adequate, useful and sustainable. We will also use the evaluation findings to increase the efficiency of the project in order to achieve the assumed effects with less resources.</i>
6	Criteria* and evaluation questions** - in what respect should the subject of evaluation be considered (*) and what do you want to learn about it (**)? Evaluation questions should be related to the evaluation criteria, but you can also add questions that are not related to the abovementioned criteria or formulate your own criteria (e.g. complementarity, synergy). Evaluation questions may relate to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • processes and activities that serve the project implementation, • the effects achieved and the reasons of examined phenomena, • the way the project is operated (e.g. management system). 	1. <i>Criterion: relevance</i> <i>Questions: To what extent were project activities (such as project recruitment, training, consulting, internships) adjusted to the needs of participants, and to what extent to the needs of employers? What changes to the project would help to better adapt it to the needs of both of these target groups?</i> 2. <i>Criterion: effectiveness</i> <i>Questions: To what extent were the assumed objectives, outputs and outcomes achieved? Have any assumptions failed and why has that happen?</i> 3. <i>Criterion: efficiency</i> <i>Questions: Do the obtained results correspond to the resources incurred? Was it possible to achieve the same results with smaller resources (financial, time, human, technical, organisational)?</i> 4. <i>Criterion: utility</i> <i>Questions: To what extent are the project outcomes useful for its recipients, i.e. young people and employers? Can this usefulness be increased and how?</i> 5. <i>Criterion: sustainability</i> <i>Questions: Do the achieved results persist after the end of project financing? What factors contribute to the sustainability of the achieved results?</i> 6. <i>Criterion: impact</i> <i>Questions: To what extent did the project influence its beneficiaries (young people) in the area covered by the project activities? Do the effects of the project go beyond its direct recipients, and if so, what is this phenomenon and what mechanisms cause it?</i> 7. <i>Other: Which elements facilitated and which hindered the implementation of the project from the point of view of its implementers (the project team and the staff conducting the activities)? Which elements facilitated / hindered beneficiaries' participation in the project?</i>

The third stage of developing an evaluation concept requires knowledge of the various research methods and tools presented in Chapter III. For this reason, part of the evaluation planning related to the methodology of collecting data for evaluation is presented in Section 3.3 (an example of this stage of evaluation design is presented in tool 6).

Information on the availability of the necessary data, as well as the possibility of obtaining support from respective stakeholders, will be used when planning the evaluation process and estimating the resources necessary to carry it out. The evaluation plan should include such elements as: **its schedule** (with respective stages), **resources** necessary to conduct the evaluation (human, time, financial, information), as well as the planned form(s) of **the evaluation report**.

You can present this information in an evaluation planning table. An example of such a table together with how it is applied to a specific project is presented below.

1. Evaluation timeplan How long will it take to complete each of the following activities/ tasks?	1. Development of the evaluation concept and preparation of the evaluation study (preparation of research tools, organization of the study): 4–6 weeks 2. Collecting information / data: approx. 12 weeks 3. Analysis of collected data (quantitative, qualitative): 3–4 weeks 4. Preparation of the report: 4 weeks
2. Available resources that can be used to conduct the evaluation.	<p>a) Human (number and competences of people needed to conduct the evaluation) The evaluation will be carried out by 3 people from the project team, who may be supported by an external specialist (evaluator) at various stages of the process, e.g. assessing the consistency of the evaluation concept as well as relevance and methodological correctness of research tools, consulting the data analysis process and the content of the report. The team conducting the evaluation have experience in carrying out quantitative (surveys) and qualitative research (individual and group interviews, documentation analysis).</p> <p>b) Time (how long will it take us to complete the evaluation?) Approx. 20 weeks (people conducting the evaluation will perform other professional duties at the same time. The duration of the study was extended due to the holiday period, which may lead to difficulties in accessing respondents).</p> <p>c) Financial (what financial resources do you plan to allocate for evaluation, e.g. a percentage of the project budget?) Approx. 5–10% of the entire project budget</p> <p>d) Information (what data needed to answer the evaluation questions are currently available, what reports, documents, statistics can you use?) Examples: a report on the analysis of the needs of the project target groups, write-ups of trainers, consultants and internship supervisors, data on unemployment among young people in the area covered by the project, information on local demand for particular professions and the staffing needs of employers, data from project monitoring , information (including evaluation reports) on similar projects, outputs developed within the project (individual action plans, CVs, sample cover letters), project documentation regarding the outputs (attendance lists, training and internship completion certificates issued), outcome indicator measurements (baseline, mid-term and final measurements of the social and vocational competences)</p>
3. Form of presentation of evaluation results	A multimedia presentation and an infographic to be posted on the project website

As you can see in the table above, information is one of the key assets that must be provided to conduct evaluation and there are plenty of data sources which can be useful for this purpose. In the context of youth employment projects one of the most important areas of the progress intended in the projects are general and vocational competences. The default source of the information on the initial and final level of such skills among project beneficiaries should be the trainers of these competences. Therefore, you should cooperate with the trainers on gathering and using the data concerning the competences level before and after the training.

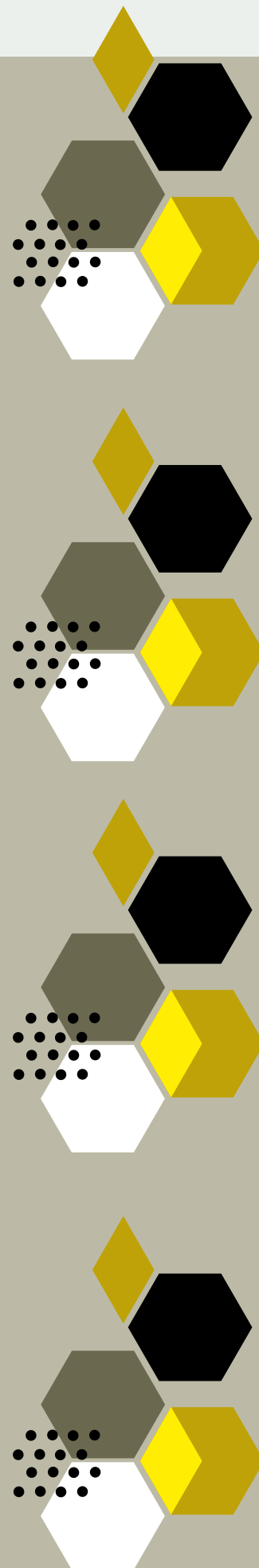
The measurement should use multilateral perspectives on the skills of trainees (the trainer's perspective, self-assessment of the trainee and psychometric test) and be coherent and relevant to the content of the training. You can find an example of such tools sets in the appendix **. It concerns 8 key competences "needed for personal fulfilment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment" mentioned in Recommendation 2006/962/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on key competences for lifelong learning*.

2.5. How to design impact evaluation

The key distinguishing feature of impact evaluation is the fact that the assessment of project effects takes into account not only the impact of activities carried out in the project and the outputs produced but also the influence of external (non-project) factors. To evaluate the real (net) impact of the project it is necessary to plan and conduct the evaluation in a way that makes it possible to determine if the implementation of the project caused the intended exchange, and to what extent it was influenced by non-project factors.

* The Recommendation 2006/962/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning refers to the following skills:

- 1) communication in the mother tongue,
- 2) communication in foreign languages,
- 3) mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology,
- 4) digital competence;
- 5) learning to learn,
- 6) social and civic competences,
- 7) sense of initiative and entrepreneurship,
- 8) cultural awareness and expression.





Conducting an impact evaluation allows you to collect various types of information that are very useful for **project development**:

1) data on the **actual impact** of the project on achieving the expected change is the key information for deciding whether to repeat, duplicate, improve or discontinue the project because:

a) **non-project factors could have contributed to the change intended in the project**, so that **the (net) impact** of the evaluated project **may be lower** than indicated by the difference between the final value of the outcome indicator and its baseline value (measurement at the beginning of the project).

b) **external factors could counteract the change expected** in the project, so that **the (net) impact** of the evaluated project **may be greater** than the difference between the final and the baseline value of the outcome indicator,

2) **information** on the diversity and mechanisms of **the impact of individual elements of the project** on achieving the expected change **is very helpful in improving the project**,

3) **identifying major external factors and the mechanisms of their impact** on the intended change **can be used to modify project activities so that they better concur with the processes supporting the change and better cope with opposing factors**.

Design type	Basis for causal inference	Requirements	Examples (further details below)
Experimental	'Counterfactual': comparing the change in the outcome variable in the intervention site with what would have happened in the absence of the intervention	Valid control with or without baseline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Randomised controlled trials Quasi-experimental designs (Before-After-Control-Intervention)
Statistical	Correlations between the outcome indicator and the input indicator, controlling for confounding factors	A large sample size, comparison groups or longitudinal data, and data on confounding factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Statistical regressions
Theory-based	Identifying the mechanisms that explain changes in the outcome variables, and providing empirical evidence	Strong theory of change (pre-existing or developed)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Process tracing
Case-based	Comparison across and within cases of the outcome of interventions under a combination of presumed causal factors	Strong theory Several different cases are needed for comparison	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Qualitative comparative analysis
Participatory	Perceived causation from the point of view of people affected by the intervention	Skilled facilitators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflexive counterfactuals Ranking and scoring Most significant change (narrative)

Depending on which of these issues is a priority in the evaluation of a particular project, but also depending on the feasibility of obtaining relevant data, different models (design) of impact evaluation are used along with data collection methods adapted to them.

Table 1. Different design approaches for impact evaluation.

Source: Emily Woodhouse, Emiel de Lange, Eleanor J Milner-Gulland. *Evaluating the impacts of conservation interventions on human well-being: Guidance for practitioners*.



Experimental and quasi-experimental evaluation designs are used to determine what portion of the intended change in a project can be attributed to the project activities (net impact). The measure of the impact of project activities is the difference between the measurement of the indicator before and after the end of the project in the group of its recipients (change in the test group, participating in project activities) after adjusting it for the impact of non-project factors. The impact of non-project factors is estimated on the basis of measuring the change of outcome indicator in a group of people who did not participate in the project and are as similar as possible to the project recipients.

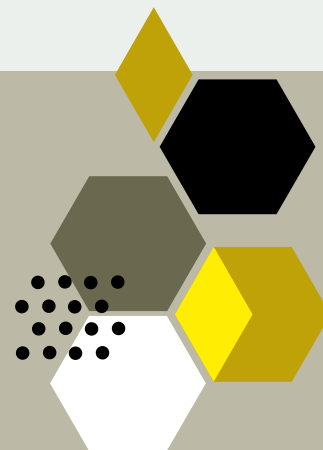
- In **experimental designs** (called also RCT - **Random Controlled Trials**), people are randomly assigned to the group of beneficiaries of the project (test group) or to the group not covered by the project (control group). Random selection to both groups helps to ensure that the two groups do not differ from each other*. Thus, changes in the measured indicators in the control group can be attributed only to external factors, and in the test group - to the combined influence of external factors and the project's activities.
- In **quasi-experimental designs**, there is no random selection of groups. For a test group which took part in the evaluated project, a control group is selected using non-random methods, but still providing it is as similar to the test group as is possible and performs similar functions as the control group in experimental models.

In order to apply experimental or quasi-experimental designs, evaluation activities must be coordinated with the evaluated project activities and therefore need to be planned before they are implemented. For example, when you expect surplus candidates for project beneficiaries or when the project will be implemented in several editions and you can organise joint recruitment, you can do the group assignment using random sampling. This way you can get a randomly selected test group (to be immediately involved in the project activities) and the control group (the people not selected for the current edition of the project). Just after selecting the groups the baseline measurement should be conducted (and final measurement in both groups after the project has been completed).

If the beneficiaries of your project are chosen by an external institution (e.g. Labour Office), it is also worth checking what selection procedure is used there. If this procedure gives the opportunity to select a control group or comparison group in which the project outcome indicator can be measured, verify it and plan the measurement in this group at more or less the same time as it is carried out in the evaluated project.

*When the test group or control group is small, structured random selection should be used (instead of simple random selection) to make sure that the two groups have similar structure according to features which can affect the intended outcome of the project (e.g. the structure of educational attainment level should be similar in the control and test groups otherwise the more educated group can make better progress in achieving skills which are to be developed in the project under evaluation).

Planning and interpreting an impact-focused evaluation requires the use of the project theory to examine the **consistency of the evaluation findings with the project logic** (of change) and to **verify the impact of the alternative factors**. Examining the consistency of facts with the project logic focuses on identifying evidence confirming a **cause-and-effect relationship** as well as data, which confirm these relationships. In this approach, it is crucial to plan as early as possible what kind of data should be collected during the project in order to verify:



- the cause-and-effect relationship between activities, outputs, intermediate and final effects (outcomes, impacts) that make up the project logic of change,
- achievement of successive stages in the cause-effect chain of intermediate effects leading to the outcomes measured by the final indicator (the milestones).

Assessment of the impact of alternative factors is based on similar planning and verification of factors of change other than project activities expected as the results of the project.

If the evaluated project is a part of a larger programme carried out in different locations or by different organisations, this may provide an opportunity to obtain comparative data that will be used in the impact evaluation based on **case study analyses**. To use the case-based evaluation design, you should collect information not only about the outcome indicator that you measure in the evaluated project, but also about all important factors that may **affect the value** of this indicator. The set of such factors should be determined on the basis of the project theory, taking into account the different elements which may influence the intended change.

It is worth remembering that in this model it is possible to use information about projects implemented in the past. Regardless of where the analysed cases come from, it is important to obtain a predetermined set of information from them. The final analysis is based on a table that summarises the data from all analysed cases concerning the occurrence of the factors that may affect the intended change of the outcome indicator and, of course, the outcome indicator itself.

Table for summing up the findings from case studies analysis - example

In the table you can see summarised information on 4 cases where the outcome (having a job or being in education or training 1 year after the project completion) was monitored against three factors. Two of them were different project stimuli (extensive training in social competences and vocational training) while the third one was external – supported employment for six months right after the end of the project). The analysis showed that it was the extensive training in social competences which caused the intended outcome.

	Phenomenon 1 : More than 50% of NEETs who participated in the projects have a job or are engaged in education or training 1 year after the project completion	Phenomenon 2 : NEETs participating in a project had extensive training in social competences	Phenomenon 3: NEETs participating in a project had vocational training	Phenomenon 4 : (non-project stimulus) NEETs participating in a project got 6 months' supported employment organised by the Labour Office right after the project
Case 1: A currently evaluated project, the outcome of which is displayed in Column 1	1	1	1	1
Case 2: The same project was run 2 years earlier by the same implementer	1	1	1	0
Case 3: Another project within the same programme (the same outcome expected), different implementer	1	1	0	1
Case 4: NEETs treated only with the supported employment, organised by the Labour Office	0	0	1	1

0 – phenomenon did not occur, 1 - phenomenon occurred



Participatory design is an underrated but popular model of impact-focused evaluation. It does not guarantee as much reliability and precision as experimental or quasi-experimental designs, nor is it as convincing as a strict case study analysis but it can still be useful, especially in small projects. In participatory design, you refer to the perceptions of the participants in the evaluated project and, on the basis of the data obtained from them, you evaluate the impact of the project. Thus, the methodology of collecting data is of great importance because the project beneficiaries tend to adjust their opinions to what they think the researcher might want to hear, especially if data collection is conducted by someone from the project staff.

- One of the participatory evaluation designs is called **Reflexive counterfactuals**. Its advantage is that it can be used after the end of the project. On the other hand, it is exposed to the previously described risks, such as influence from the researcher. As part of reflexive counterfactuals, the beneficiaries are asked to compare their current situation with their situation before they participated in the project and to describe what has changed for better and for worse. Then, they rate the relevant importance of particular benefits and costs to select the ones which were considered to be the most important. Using different research techniques, it is also possible to ask about the causes of particular changes and find out which of them were associated with the project.
- Another technique for participatory impact analysis is **MSC (Most Significant Changes)**. It is based on the generation and in-depth analysis of the most significant stories of change in the lives of project beneficiaries. These stories of change were observed and noted by various project stakeholders (including the beneficiaries themselves). The properties of this research technique allow it to be used after the end of the project.

Finally, the possibility of conducting an **impact evaluation based on statistical methods** should also be mentioned. The basis here is the analysis of the correlation (coexistence) of the outcome indicator and the activities undertaken in the evaluated project. Such analyses are performed on large data sets, which makes this type of evaluation of little use for organisations running projects for a relatively small group of recipients.

More information on impact-focused evaluation can be found in the [online course](#) (Module 3).