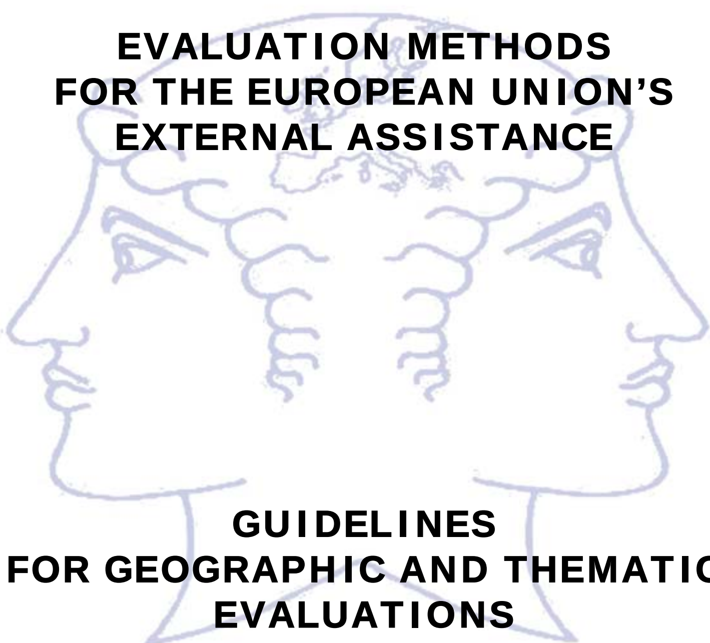
Directorate General External Relations

Directorate General Development

EuropeAid Co-operation Office

Joint Evaluation Unit



EVALUATION METHODS FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION'S EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE

GUIDELINES FOR GEOGRAPHIC AND THEMATIC EVALUATIONS

VOLUME 2

A great deal of additional information on the European Union’s external assistance can be accessed through the Europa server: *http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/index_en.htm*

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INTRODUCTION

Overview

The European Commission has developed and formalised a methodology for evaluating its external assistance, in which the priority is on results and impacts. The aim is thus to maintain the quality of its evaluations on a par with internationally recognised best practice.

In the past, the evaluation of European external assistance focused on projects and on certain programmes. The current methodological guidelines are designed to facilitate the move towards an evaluation practice focused more on programmes and strategies. It is intended mainly for:

- evaluation managers at European Commission headquarters and in the Delegations,
- external evaluation teams.

The methodology is also made available to all European external aid partners, as well as the professional evaluation community.

It is available in three languages (English, Spanish and French) and in two forms, optimised for reading and for navigation on the Internet, respectively.

The Internet version includes numerous examples and in-depth analyses. It is available on the European Commission website:

http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/evaluation/index.htm

The printed version consists of four volumes. The first volume “Methodological bases for evaluation” presents the basic concepts and their articulation. This second volume is a handbook for "Geographic and Thematic Evaluation". It pertains to the evaluation of the entire set of Community actions on the scale of a country or region, and the evaluation of all actions relative to a sector or a theme on a global scale. The third volume is a handbook for "Project and Programme Evaluation". It concerns large projects, pilot projects, multi-country programmes and any other project or programme for which an evaluation is required. The fourth volume "Evaluation Tools" presents the main techniques available for structuring an evaluation, collecting and analysing data, and assisting in the formulation of value judgements.

Geographic and thematic evaluation

This second volume builds on the recent evaluations of the European Commission's external assistance at global, region, and country level. Sector and thematic evaluations are covered at global level.

Effective and pragmatic solutions are provided to the problems stemming from the fact that large-scale complex interventions cannot be evaluated with the approach which has been applied to projects up to now.

The methodological guidance is organised in a chronologic way, following the evaluation process from A to Z, from the preparatory phase through to the follow up of recommendations. The reader is guided in a standard step-by-step way, with variants adapted to specific contexts, e.g. evaluation at country or region level, or global thematic or sector evaluation.

The guidance is adapted for two types of users:

- Evaluation managers at the European Commission, and
- external evaluation teams.

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Summary of the evaluation process

Preparatory phase (phase 0)

A manager is appointed to conduct an evaluation. He sets up the reference group, writes the terms of reference and recruits the external evaluation team.

Desk phase (phase 1)

The external evaluation team analyses the logic of the intervention on the basis of official documents and proposes the evaluation questions and judgment criteria (also called "reasoned assessment criteria"). The evaluation questions are validated by the reference group.

The team then specifies the indicators and provides partial answers to the questions on the basis of existing information.

It identifies the assumptions to be tested in the field and develops its work plan for data collection and analysis.

Field phase (phase 2)

The evaluation team implements its work plan for data collection in the partner country or countries. It applies the specified techniques and begins to test the assumptions.

Synthesis phase (phase 3)

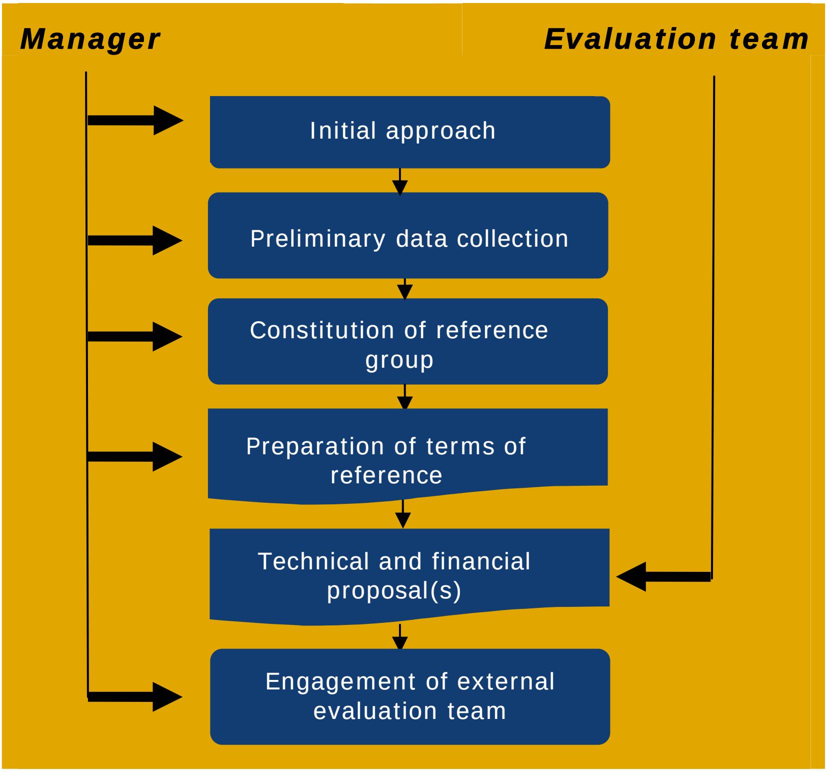
The evaluation team draws up its final report, which includes statements and conclusions which respond to the questions asked, as well as an overall assessment. The report also includes recommendations that are clustered and prioritised. The final report is subject to a quality assessment.

Dissemination and follow-up phase (phase 4)

The evaluation (report, executive summary, article and/or presentation) is disseminated to policy-makers, to the concerned services and partners, and is posted on the Commission's website. The uptake of the recommendations is monitored.

1 Guidelines for the evaluation manager

1.1 Preparatory phase



1.1.1 Initial approach

The evaluation mandate is defined. It specifies the intervention, the geographical area, and the sector or theme to be evaluated.

An evaluation manager is appointed within the concerned service, together with a deputy manager. The manager conducts the process from beginning to end on the Commission's behalf and under the responsibility of the hierarchy. He is the chairperson of the reference group.

1.1.2 Preliminary data collection

The evaluation manager reads the basic documents on the actions to be evaluated, hereafter referred to as "the intervention".

He identifies the global objectives as well as the sectors, themes and cross-cutting issues of particular importance in the context of the evaluation.

He consults the Commission's data bases for an overview of the support and its financing.

He identifies a few key informants within the Commission services and has informal talks with them to better understand the stakes of the evaluation.

He specifies the central scope of the evaluation as well as the themes and cross-cutting issues to be examined as a priority.

1.1.3 Constituting the reference group

The manager identifies the services to be invited to join the reference group, with a view to meeting three goals: provision of both expertise and information, expression of the variety of relevant views within the Commission, and legitimacy of the evaluation process.

A note is sent to the services invited to join in, explaining the role played by the reference group. Every service that has been invited to join in appoints a person who will be a group member.

Case of a country level evaluation

The Delegation is part of the reference group and is completely involved in the exercise.

The manager invites a person from the country's embassy in Brussels to the reference group.

Case of an evaluation managed by the Delegation

The headquarters' services are part of the reference group and are completely involved in the exercise.

The manager invites the Government's services from the partner's country to the reference group.

Role and benefits of the reference group

The reference group is an interface between the evaluation manager and the external evaluation team.

It discusses and comments on the terms of reference drawn up by the evaluation manager.

It ensures that the evaluation team has access to and consults all information sources and documentation on activities undertaken.

It validates the evaluation questions.

It discusses and comments on notes and reports produced by the evaluation team.

It assists in feed-back of the findings, conclusions and recommendations arising from the evaluation.

1.1.4 Preparing the terms of reference

Considering the basic information gathered, the manager specifies both the expertise required and the schedule.

The manager sends the first version of the terms of reference to the reference group members for their comments.

He launches the process of engaging the external evaluation team as per the terms of reference.

Case of a global sector or thematic evaluation

When preparing the terms of reference, the manager may be unable to point out which countries will be subject to a mission. In such case, the manager may ask for a budget proposal that includes the number of countries to be visited and their geographical distribution.

On the website: template terms of reference and examples

Checklist: content of the terms of reference

- Mandate
- Background
- Evaluation's objectives and scope
- Identification of the evaluation questions
- Management and monitoring of the evaluation
- Dissemination and follow-up
- Evaluation team
- Time schedule
- Cost of the evaluation, and payment modalities
- Annex 1: key documents for the evaluation
- Annex 2: outline of the final report
- Annex 3: quality assessment grid of the final report
- Annex 4: evaluation questions (this annex is attached later once the evaluation team and the reference group agree on the formulation of the questions)

1.1.5 Engaging the evaluation team

The evaluation manager receives the technical and financial proposal(s) that must include the following elements:

- Understanding of terms of reference
- Core team members' names and CVs
- Planned schedule and justification of any differences from the schedule in the terms of reference
- Budget.

On the website: examples of technical and financial proposals

For each proposal, the manager makes sure that the team has adequate knowledge and experience in the following fields: evaluation methods, concerned region or country, concerned sectors and cross-cutting issues, the functioning of European external assistance.

He verifies that both the human and the financial resources supplied are compatible with the allocated budget and are suitable for the particular difficulties that might have been identified while preparing the terms of reference.

The manager then engages the external evaluation team in line with the applicable procedure and after consultation with the reference group members, in particular on the risks of conflict of interest if a candidate for the evaluation has had any responsibility in the intervention under evaluation.

The team's engagement is then confirmed.

Case of a country level evaluation

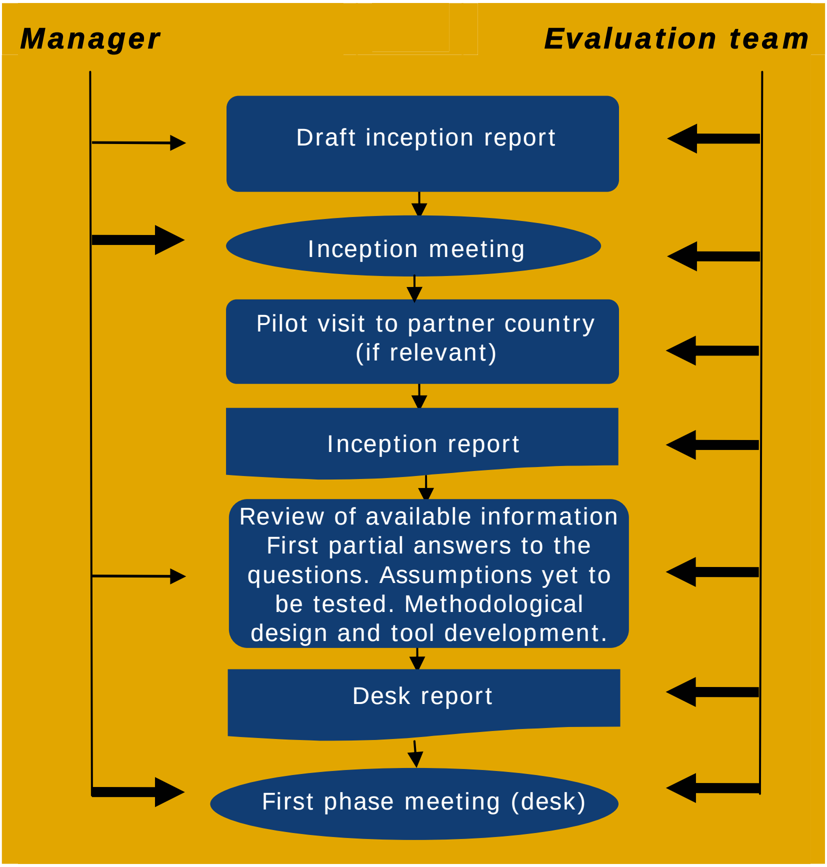
The manager makes sure that the proposal includes adequate resources for a pilot visit and a seminar in the partner country, in addition to the field phase mission.

Case of a global sector or thematic evaluation

Particular attention must be drawn to the delineation of the scope of the evaluation as well as to the definition of the sector or theme.

The proposal secures the budget for the field visits in 4 to 10 different countries.

1.2 Desk phase



1.2.1 Inception

The inception stage comprises two steps and lasts for two months after the signing of the contract.

Inception meeting

The first step leads to a discussion of the first works of the external evaluation team at the inception meeting of the reference group.

Checklist: agenda for the inception meeting

- Presentation of the evaluation's regulatory framework, its context, main users and expected uses
- Presentation of the external evaluation team's first works using slides
- Evaluation's central scope
- Scope extended to related policies
- Intervention logic according to the official documents (" faithful logic ")
- Questions likely to be addressed by the evaluation and associated judgement criteria

On the website: example of slides displayed at the inception meeting

The reference group members have one week to comment on the elements submitted to them.

The manager sends the comments received to the evaluation team, which finalises the set of questions. The reference group members validate the set of evaluation questions, which become an annex to the terms of reference.

Purpose of the evaluation questions
(see Volume 1 – Evaluation questions)

Evaluation questions focus the evaluation work on a limited number of key points, in order to better target the data collection process, to deepen the analysis and to improve the usefulness of the report. Choices have to be made, and the evaluation questions serve to discuss and master them.

Case of a country level evaluation: pilot visit

The manager contacts the Delegation to facilitate a short pilot visit by the evaluation team leader to the partner country, if such a visit was planned when the evaluation team was engaged. The visit may take place immediately after the inception meeting.

Inception report

Throughout the second step, the evaluation team brings the writing of its inception report to a close.

The inception report takes up the already validated elements, to which the following is added:

- The indicators considered in relation to each judgement criterion
- The method and the work plan for gathering available data
- The strategy envisaged for additional data collection and analysis thereof.

On the website: examples of inception reports

The evaluation manager checks that the contents of the report fit with specifications and that the quality is appropriate (see assessment criteria in Volume 1).

He asks the reference group members to comment on the report, either by exchanging emails or at a meeting if necessary. Comments should be received one week after receipt of the report, at the latest.

The manager forwards the comments received to the evaluation team and specifies what his/her requests for modifications are. The evaluation team now has one additional week to write the final version of the report taking the comments into account or explaining the reasons why this has not been done.

The report is formally adopted by an official letter authorising the continuation of the work.

If the countries to be visited have not been specified in the terms of reference, they should be selected as soon as possible.

1.2.2 Desk report

The desk report takes up the points dealt with in the inception report and goes into as much detail as necessary. The following elements are added:

- Progress in the gathering of available data
- First analysis of the data in relation to the evaluation questions and partial answers to the questions, with the assumptions yet to be tested during the field phase

- Presentation of the data allowing for the identification of a few global issues, cutting across individual evaluation questions, with a view to making an overall assessment
- Data collection and analysis strategy for the following phase.

On the website: examples of desk reports

The evaluation manager checks that the contents of the report fit with specifications and that its quality is appropriate. He sends the report to the reference group members for comments.

He convenes and chairs a reference group meeting, if necessary. Then He summarises the comments received and specifies the amendments that need to be made to the report.

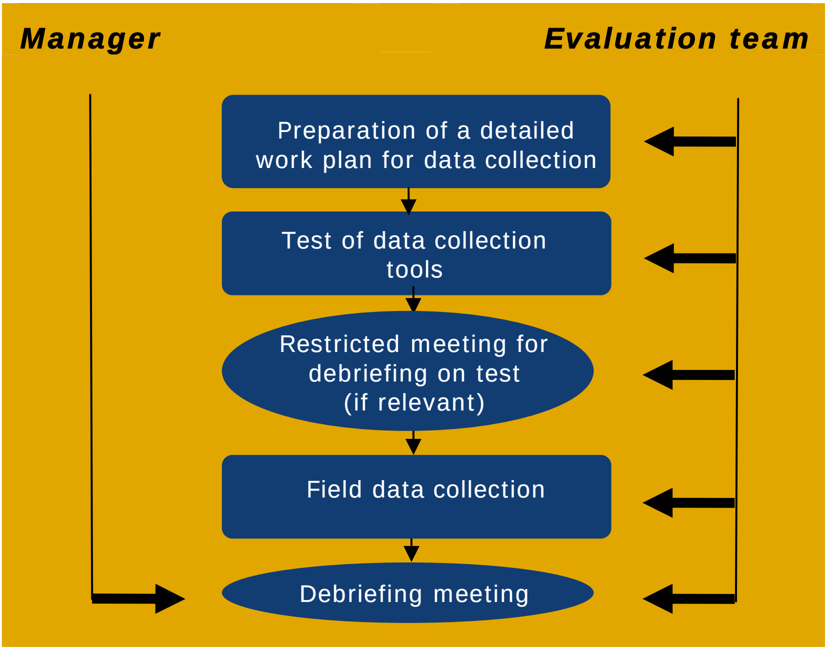
He receives and validates the final version of the report and authorises the launching of the field phase.

Case of a region level evaluation

The report sets out the way in which data collection is to be harmonised across the various countries.

If the engagement of the evaluation team was done on the basis of a budget that was limited to the desk phase, then the desk report is accompanied by a financial proposal for the field and synthesis phases.

1.3 Field phase



1.3.1 Preparation

The manager receives a detailed agenda prepared by the external evaluation team before the beginning of the field data collection mission(s).

> **Case of an evaluation covering several countries**
>
> The first country mission may be considered as a pilot mission and be used to test the data collection plan and the evaluation tools.

1.3.2 Follow-up

The manager is prepared to interact swiftly at the evaluation team's request if the later encounters a problem during its mission (or one of its missions), provided that the problem cannot be solved with the help of the concerned Delegation.

Case of global sector or thematic evaluation

For each mission, the manager receives a country note. It is by no means an evaluation of the intervention in the country.

The country note includes the following items: data collection method, assessment on reliability, brief description of the context in the visited country, relevant facts in connection with the evaluation questions (without any analysis or value judgement).

The note also includes a synthesis of the main aspects of data collected in the country (for the Delegation).

On the website: examples of country notes

1.3.3 Debriefing meeting

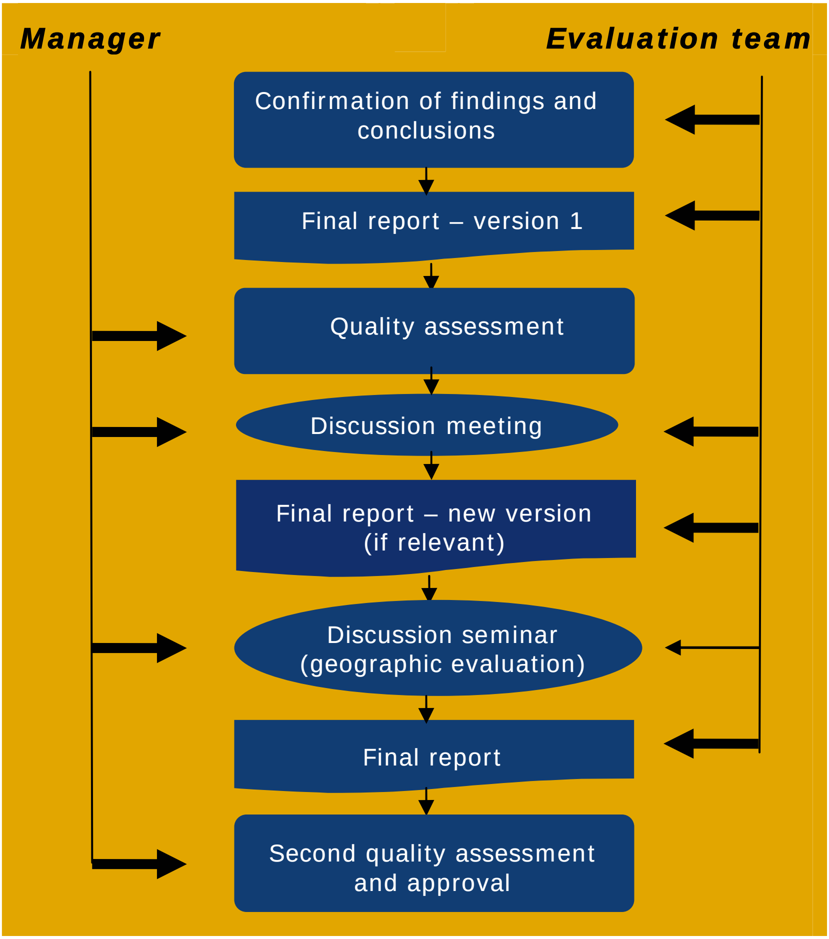
At the end of the field phase, the manager organises a debriefing meeting with the reference group and the evaluation team.

On the website: examples of slides displayed at a debriefing meeting

Checklist: agenda for the debriefing meeting

- Reminder of data collection and analysis plan
- Problems encountered and solutions adopted
- Assessment of the coverage and reliability of collected data
- Discussion with a view to verifying that collected information will be sufficient to answer the questions
- Presentation of the most significant findings by the evaluation team
- Main verification and analysis work to be carried out at the next phase

1.4 Synthesis phase



1.4.1 Quality assessment of the draft report

The final report is drawn up by the external evaluation team and submitted as a first draft.

On the website: examples of final reports

The manager checks that the document has the same format and contents as the final version, the only exception being the recommendations, which may be just sketched. He checks, in particular, that the report includes the findings and conclusions corresponding to the evaluation questions, as well as a synthesis containing an overall assessment of the intervention.

If the quality of the draft report is acceptable, the manager circulates it to the reference group members.

The evaluation manager fills in the quality assessment grid and rates the nine assessment criteria (see Volume 1). He verifies that the data collection and analyses have been carried out rigorously, and that the findings, conclusions and recommendations are linked appropriately.

The evaluation manager's quality assessment is double-checked by a second person.

Quality assessment and independence

The approval process does not contradict the external evaluation team's independence. In this respect the requests for amendments made during the approval exercise need to be differentiated:

- Comments concerning methodological quality have to be taken into account. If the evaluation team considers that it cannot take a demand into consideration, this should be fully justified. An assessment of the methodological quality is attached to the final report.
- Comments concerning the substance of the document, the findings and the conclusions are freely taken into account or rejected by the evaluation team. The team must nevertheless, in a note or in an annex, mention the requests not taken into account and comment upon its decisions in this respect.

On the website: quality assessment grid

1.4.2 Discussion meeting(s)

The manager convenes a meeting with the participation of the evaluation team.

Checklist: agenda for the final discussion meeting

- Reminder of the rules regarding the quality assessment of the final report
- Presentation of the draft version of the report by the evaluation team
- Answers to the questions and overall assessment
- Presentation of the methodological design, tools and collected data
- Validity and/or limitations of the analyses, findings and conclusions
- Participants' comments on the substance of findings and conclusions.
- Comments on the factual basis of the conclusions
- Presentation on the recommendations and transferable lessons
- Discussion on the utility and feasibility of the recommendations

The manager writes the minutes of the meeting, and attaches the quality assessment grid as well as his/her requests for quality improvement.

He receives the new version of the report drawn up by the evaluation team. This version finalises the recommendations which must be:

- Linked to the conclusions
- Clustered, prioritised and targeted at specific addressees
- Useful and operational
- If possible, presented as options associated with benefits and risks.

If the quality is appropriate, the manager approves the draft report and authorises moving onto the next step.

Case of a country or region level evaluation

Barring exceptions, the evaluation comprises a discussion seminar in the partner country or region, with a view to discussing the final report, the substance of the conclusions and the utility of the recommendations in the presence of the evaluation team.

Invitations are widely circulated: Delegation staff, national authorities, civil society organisations, project managers, representatives of the Member States, representatives of other bilateral and multilateral donors and experts.

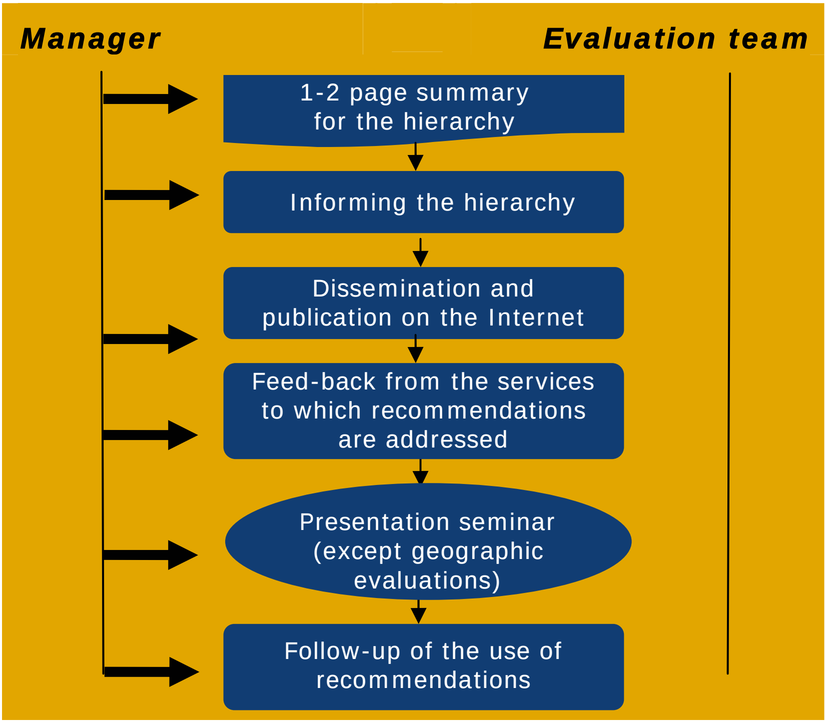
1.4.3 Final report

The manager receives the new version of the report submitted by the evaluation team. He checks that the document respects the terms of references regarding its content and its format and that the annexes are complete.

He runs a second full quality assessment with the help of the quality assessment grid, giving it a new overall rate and making a qualitative comment for all of the criteria. Again, the assessment is double-checked by a second person,

The final version of the report is approved and sent to the reference group members together with the quality assessment.

1.5 Dissemination and follow-up phase



1.5.1 Informing the hierarchy

The evaluation manager prepares a short summary (1 to 2 pages maximum) pointing out the most relevant conclusions, lessons and recommendations for the hierarchy.

On the website: examples of evaluation summaries

Both the report and the summary are sent to the hierarchy accompanied by a cover note signed by the head of unit. This cover note sets up the beginning of the dissemination process.

1.5.2 Dissemination of the final report

Fifteen days later, or more, if requested by the hierarchy, the manager publishes the report, the summary and the quality assessment grid on the Commission's Internet site.

He has the summary posted on the concerned DGs' Intranet sites, including a link to the report.

He draws up the dissemination list and sends the report and/or the summary to the concerned services and to the partners.

An article may be written in order to facilitate the dissemination of the main conclusions and recommendations.

The manager prepares a fiche consisting in a summary of the recommendations (*fiche contradictoire*) and collects the opinions of the services to which the recommendations are addressed.

The answers from the services (2nd column of the *fiche contradictoire*) are published on the Commission's Internet site.

On the website: examples of fiches contradictoires

1.5.3 Presentations

The manager may organise one or several presentations, for instance to the Inter-Service Quality Support Group, the management meeting of a concerned DG, the Member State Committee for the concerned region, a thematic / sector network. The manager may ask the evaluation team to participate in the presentation.

On the website: examples of slides for a dissemination seminar

Case of a global sector or thematic evaluation

A presentation seminar is organised at the Commission's headquarters or at any other relevant level. This seminar is attended by the Commission services involved with the conclusions and recommendations, as well as by Member States, other donors and external experts. The evaluation team contributes to the presentation.

1.5.4 Follow-up of recommendations

A year after the dissemination of the report, the manager contacts the concerned services and asks them how the recommendations were actually used. This allows for the *fiche contradictoire* to be finalised (3rd column), and published on the Commission's Internet site. This step concludes the evaluation.

2 Guidelines for the evaluation team

2.1 Preparatory phase

2.1.1 Basic assumptions

Considering the terms of reference and building on his/her own expertise, the author of the proposal formulates basic assumptions on:

- Areas requiring specific expertise
- Possibility to mobilise consultants with the right profile in the country or countries involved
- Number, nature and probable difficulty of the questions
- Existence, quality and accessibility of data on aid implementation
- Existence of previous evaluations which may be used (for example, reports from Court of Auditors, reports from other donors).

2.1.2 Tasks, expertise and budget

The method is broadly defined keeping the constraints set by the terms of references into account. The author of the proposal sketches the methodological design (see Volume 1) and draws up a first outline of the field data collection tools to be implemented.

The tasks are temporarily divided among:

- consultants from partner country or countries and international consultants
- senior, medium, junior consultants
- experts in the sector(s) of the intervention and experts in evaluation methods.

The core evaluation team members are identified and the absence of conflict of interest is verified.

Both the budget and the time schedule are specified within the framework of constraints set by the terms of reference.

On the website: template budget and example of declaration of absence of conflict of interest

2.1.3 Technical and financial proposal (*launch note*)

Checklist: content of the technical and financial proposal

- Understanding of the context in which the evaluation is being launched, of its purpose (intended users and intended use) and of its scope
- Understanding of the main areas to be covered by the evaluation questions and process to elaborate and select the questions (unless the questions are specified in the terms of reference)
- Main methodological options
- Understanding of the evaluation process and of the respective roles of the various players
- Time schedule
- Core evaluation team members, their field of expertise and their role
- Management modalities
- Budget in the standard format
- Team members' CVs in the standard format and declaration of absence of conflict of interest (annex)
- CV of an expert from outside the evaluation team who will be in charge of quality control.

On the website: examples of technical and financial proposals, template CV

2.2 Desk phase

2.2.1 Inception

Collecting basic documents

The first analysis of the intervention is undertaken on the basis of official documents only. The Commission's services do not interfere at this point (to avoid biases due to the current interpretation of the actors).

The analysis applies to:

- Design and programming documents related to the intervention under evaluation
- Basic documents on the policies to which the intervention corresponds (development policy, co-operation policy or foreign policy)
- Relevant documents on the partner country or countries' strategy.

Analysing the rationale of the intervention

The intervention rationale is reconstructed:

- Context in which the intervention has been decided upon, opportunities and constraints
- Needs to be met, problems to be solved and challenges to be addressed
- Justification of the fact that the needs, problems or challenges cannot be dealt with more effectively within another framework.

Analysing the intervention logic

The intervention logic is reconstructed:

- Political priorities in which the intervention takes place
- Objectives, principles and priorities
- Translation of objectives into expected outputs, results or impacts
- Categories of implemented activities

- Presentation of the activities and expected effects as well as cause-and-effect assumptions as understood from analysed documents
- Comments on the intervention logic and analysis of its internal coherence
- Proposals for reconstructing cause-and-effect assumptions, if necessary.

Delineation of the extended scope

The evaluation team identifies the related policies:

- Conducted by the European Commission
- Conducted by other donors
- Conducted by the partner country or countries.

Consulting data bases

The evaluation team consults the Commission's data bases and collects available information for each individual support allocated in the framework of the evaluated intervention:

- Identification of the support
- Budgetary data
- Progress of outputs
- Names and addresses of potential informants
- Ratings attributed through the "result-oriented monitoring" system (ROM)
- Availability of progress reports and evaluation reports.

Pilot mission

At this point, if the nature of the evaluation is suitable, the evaluation team leader may carry out a series of interviews in the partner countries (or region) in order to:

- Establish working relationships with the national/regional consultants
- Complete the collection of basic documents
- Draw up evaluation questions.

Proposing evaluation questions

The evaluation team prepares a first version of the evaluation questions, based on one of the following:

- Analysis of the intervention strategy (mainly relevance and coherence questions)
- Analysis of the intervention logic (mainly effectiveness and sustainability questions)
- Expectations of the persons met.

At this point, the number of proposed questions may be higher than the maximum number stated in the terms of reference. The suggested questions take the following into consideration:

- The purpose of the evaluation, as described in the terms of reference
- The need to reach an overall assessment of the evaluated intervention
- The need not to overlook questions of efficiency and sustainability, which tend to be neglected.

Each question is subject to an explanatory comment dealing with all or some of the following points:

- Scope of the question
- Clarification of terms used
- Way of addressing the question
- Potential feasibility problems
- Potential utility of the answer.

Inception meeting

The evaluation team leader presents his/her first works to the reference group using slides as visual support.

On the website: examples of slides displayed at the inception meeting

Finalising and validating the questions

A second version of the set of questions is drawn up in the form of a note, on the basis of the following elements:

- Comments received during and after the inception meeting
- Interviews with a few key people at the Commission head office and/or in the partner country or countries.

At this point, the number of questions must not exceed the maximum number stated in the terms of reference.

The questions are validated by the reference group members, and then become an annex to the terms of reference.

On the website: examples of note related to evaluation questions annexed to the terms of reference

Inception report

The evaluation team carries on with the interviews and documentary analyses and deepens its first approach to:

- The context and the intervention rationale
- The intervention logic
- The related policies of the European Commission, of other donors, and of the partner country/countries.

Every validated question is developed according to the following points:

- Question and explanatory comment
- Judgment criterion or criteria (also called "reasoned assessment criteria") in connection with the question
- Possible indicators for each judgement criterion
- The steps of reasoning that will be followed for analysing causality linkages between the activities and their effects, including external factors (see Volume 1)
- The approach to collecting data.

At this point, the team also defines the overall strategy envisaged for data collection and analysis, making certain that such a strategy will allow to:

- Cross-check several types of data to answer each question, based on the triangulation principle
- Formulate an overall assessment cutting across the answers to each question
- Fit within both the budget and the time schedule.

A detailed data collection work plan is established and covers:

- Gathering of available documents and mobilisation of expertise
- Countries to visit as long as the evaluation covers several countries.

- Draft list of actions to be examined in-depth in the next stages.

Checklist: content of the inception report

Introduction

- Origin of the evaluation
- Delineation of the evaluation's central scope
- Expectations expressed in the terms of reference
- Evaluation process

Main text

- Objectives, principles, priorities and challenges
- Translation of objectives into expected impacts and intervention logic presented in the form of a diagram of expected effects
- Analysis of the intervention logic and of its internal coherence, proposal for bridging gaps in the cause-and-effect assumptions
- Evaluation questions and explanatory comments on each question
- Judgment criteria relating to each question
- Indicators considered for each criterion
- Method and work plan for the gathering of available data at the Commission
- Strategy for the field data collection and its analysis

Annexes (indicative)

- Documents used
- Terms of reference
- Etc.

A first draft of the inception report is written with the required content and submitted for quality control to an expert who is not part of the evaluation team.

A final version taking received comments into consideration is prepared.

On the website: examples of inception reports

2.2.2 Completion of the desk phase

In this stage, the evaluation team carries on with the consultation of available documents and with its interviews with managers at the Commission's head office and in the partner country or countries. This is by no means a collection or examination of all available information. On the contrary, the evaluation team constantly focuses on information that is useful for answering the questions.

The tasks during this stage are carried out by people who have expertise corresponding to the questions addressed.

This stage also allows for finalising the methodological design and developing the tools envisaged for the field phase.

Documentary analysis

It consists in consulting available documents relating to the whole intervention or to its main components:

- Relevant documents issued by the Commission, the Council and the Parliament
- Preparatory documents, ex ante evaluation
- Programming documents (in addition to the documents already examined in the previous stages)
- Decisions related to implementation and/or modification of the intervention
- Reviews, audit reports, evaluation reports.

It consists also in consulting documents relating to the intervention context:

- Context indicators concerning the partner country or countries (see Volume 4)
- Documents on the partner country or countries' development strategy
- OECD statistical records on the assistance received by the partner country or countries

- Documents relating to interventions by other donors and international institutions in connection with the partner country or countries
- Abstracts of evaluation reports from the various donors for the partner country or countries.

Lastly, the evaluation team consults the documents pertaining to the actions to be examined in-depth. Such documents are identified by means of data bases or interviews. For each action under examination, the documents to be gathered deal with:

- Design and decision
- Implementation and monitoring
- ROM report(s) and evaluation if there is any.

Interviewing managers

These interviews aim at:

- Going deeper into the analysis done in the inception report
- Identifying available data, assessing their reliability and having access to them
- Identifying elements which may contribute to answering the questions and the assumptions left to be tested during the field phase.

The people met are the ones who have participated in the design of the intervention, contributed to its implementation or are likely to use the evaluation report. They work either at the Commission's headquarters, or in the involved Delegation(s), or within the partner country or countries' government(s) at central level.

Methodological design and development of tools

The methodological design envisaged in the inception report is finalised. The evaluation team refines its overall methodological approach and its approach to all questions in design tables (see Volume 1). The tools to be used during the field phase are then listed, with an aim to provide at least one, and preferably several information sources for answering the questions.

The evaluation tools are developed and tested as far as possible. The work may include:

- Preparation of one or several series of interviews and the corresponding interview guidelines

- Terms of reference of one or several focus groups
- Preparation and test of a questionnaire and a sampling method
- Selection of one or several case studies and development of the associated work plan(s).

This stage mobilises the national / regional members of the evaluation team.

Desk report

On the basis of its work and as much as necessary, the evaluation team examines the elements dealt with in the inception report in greater depth, and develops the following:

- Indicators for each judgement criterion
- Information gathered up to date, data collection method applied, limitations, biases and risks
- First partial answers to the questions and assumptions remaining to be tested throughout the field phase
- Indicative approach to the overall assessment of the intervention, to be drawn from a synthesis of answered questions, plus additional elements where relevant
- Final methodological design including the strategy of analysis, the information sources and cross-checking envisaged, the evaluation tools to be implemented, and the potential risks and biases.

A draft version of the desk report, including the required contents, is submitted for quality control to an expert who is not part of the evaluation team.

The report is forwarded to the evaluation manager and presented at a reference group meeting, if necessary.

On the website: examples of desk reports

Checklist: content of the desk report

Introduction

- Origin and scope of the evaluation
- Expectations expressed in the terms of reference
- Evaluation process
- Reminder of the context in which the evaluation is undertaken.

Main text

- Evaluation questions and explanatory comments on each question
- Judgment criterion or criteria relating to each question
- Progress of the gathering of available information: data collection method used, limitations, biases and risks, pending problems to be solved in the field phase
- First analysis of information linked to the evaluation questions and first partial answers, remaining assumptions to be tested in the field phase
- First analysis of collected data with a view to producing an overall assessment
- Strategy of data collection and analysis for the following phases, work plan, data collection tools to be used.

Annexes (indicative)

- Presentation of the intervention logic and analysis in the form of a diagram of expected effects, and approach taken to draw up the questions, judgment criteria and indicators
- Terms of reference
- Informants met
- Documents used
- Statistical data and context indicators
- List of projects and programmes.

2.3 Field phase

2.3.1 Preparation

The evaluation team leader organises the works:

- Allocation of data collection tasks and responsibilities
- Definition of documents to be delivered and required level of quality
- Schedule of various tasks and agenda (or agenda per country) sent to the evaluation manager for information
- Contracts with the national / regional consultants, if that remains to be done.

Case of a global sector or thematic evaluation

The evaluation team leader attends to the harmonisation of the contracts with national/regional consultants, so as the data collection and the test of assumptions are carried out in similar ways.

The evaluation team leader briefs those who are responsible for the tasks:

- Main predictable risks during field data collection works and how to behave in case a problem arises
- Need to strictly focus data collection on what is needed to answering the questions and to look for information relating to the selected judgement criteria (also called reasoned assessment criteria) and indicators as a priority.

2.3.2 Initial meeting

The evaluation team proposes to the Delegation to hold an information meeting within the first days of the field data collection process in the concerned country. The following points are covered in the meeting:

- Presentation and discussion of the work plan
- How to access to data and key informants within the national government and within the other donors' missions
- How to deal with and solve potential problems.

2.3.3 Data collection and analysis

The evaluation team implements its field data collection plan. The Volume 4 offers detailed instructions for the implementation of major data collection tools like interviews, focus groups, questionnaire and case studies.

The evaluation team leader ensures that the tools have been appropriately tested and coordinates their implementation.

He is informed in case a problem arises and makes sure that the problems encountered will not weaken the answer to the evaluation questions. If appropriate, He appeals to the Delegation to help to solve the problem. If the solution to a problem requires the work plan to be adjusted, He informs the evaluation manager accordingly.

One or several meetings are held among the evaluation team members to:

- Monitor and coordinate the progress of the works
- Identify unintended effects or external factors
- Derive provisional answers to the questions
- Start cross-checking data sources.

The evaluation team gathers the documents containing the collected data and their first analysis. These documents may be:

- Minutes and syntheses of interviews
- Minutes and syntheses of focus groups
- Responses to a questionnaire and analysis tables
- Case study minutes and monographs.

At this point, the analysis done is not only exploratory (e.g., searching for unintended effects or external factors) but also confirmatory (e.g., testing the assumptions made at the end of the previous phase).

2.3.4 Quality control

The team leader checks the quality of the work, following in particular the quality criteria below:

- Detailed presentation of the method actually implemented
- Compliance with work plan and respect of the harmonisation rules in the case of an evaluation covering several countries. Justification for adjustments

- Compliance with confidentiality rules
- Self-assessment of biases and of the reliability of data.

The quality of the work is verified by an expert who is not part of the evaluation team.

The Volume 4 offers detailed instructions for quality control of major data collection tools: interviews, focus groups, questionnaire and case studies.

2.3.5 Final meeting at the Delegation

The evaluation team offers the Delegation to hold a final meeting within the last days of the field data collection process in the concerned country. If held, this meeting deals with the following points:

- Progress of the works, problems encountered and solutions adopted
- Most significant factual elements in the context of the partner country
- Preparation of a discussion seminar at the stage of the draft final report in the case of a country level evaluation.

Case of a global sector or thematic evaluation

The team draws up a country note and forwards it to the evaluation manager. The first country may be used to test the evaluation method.

2.3.6 Debriefing

At the end of the field phase, the evaluation team leader participates in a debriefing meeting with the reference group.

His/her presentation is supported by slides and there are no minutes or approval. The presentation deals with the following points:

- Reporting on field data collection works
- Problems encountered and solutions found
- Self-assessment of reliability of the collected data
- Particularly significant facts and findings in connection with the questions asked

- Next steps pertaining to analysis and value judgement.

On the website: examples of slides displayed at a debriefing meeting

2.4 Synthesis phase

2.4.1 Expressing findings

The evaluation team formalises its findings on the basis of the analysis undertaken in previous phases.

Findings only follow from facts, data and analyses. Unlike conclusions, they do not entail value judgments.

Findings include cause-and-effect statements related to the contribution of the support to observed changes, or the attribution of part of the observed changes to the intervention under evaluation.

2.4.2 Confirming findings

For each question, the evaluation team submits its provisional findings to criticism in order to confirm them.

A finding is considered as sound if it stands criticism such as:

- Validity tests for statistical analysis
- Cross-checking with other sources of information
- Search for biases in the surveys
- Search for external factors likely to explain the detected changes even in the absence of intervention
- Cross-checking with findings obtained from similar research and evaluations (according to the experts involved)
- Critical comments received from the Delegation(s) or from the reference group members during debriefing meetings.

When a finding entails a cause-and-effect statement, the evaluation team specifies whether it may be generalised or transferred to other contexts.

2.4.3 Judgement and conclusions

For each question, the evaluation team formalises its responses by way of conclusions, on the basis of the following elements:

- Evidence and findings
- Judgement criteria (also called reasoned assessment criteria) adopted in desk phase
- Judgement criteria actually applied and justification for the discrepancies, if any
- Target levels

Among its conclusions, the evaluation team identifies transferable lessons, in other words, conclusions based on generalisable and transferable findings.

Apart from the answer to each question, the evaluation team seeks to articulate all the findings and conclusions in a way that allows for an overall assessment of the intervention.

2.4.4 Version 1 of the report

The evaluation team writes the first version of its report. This document must have the same format and contents as the final version, with the exception of the recommendations, which may be just sketched.

The report consists of four parts:

- Summary, including in particular the main findings, conclusions and recommendations
- Introduction presenting the assessed intervention, its logic, its context, and the purpose of the evaluation
- Presentation of the evaluation method
- Detailed findings, conclusions and recommendations.

The report is limited in size (maximum 60 pages) so that it is easy to read. Details are appended in annexes.

The evaluation team leader checks that the report meets the quality criteria. He ensures that the report is submitted to a thorough quality control by an expert who is not part of the evaluation team. The report is then handed over to the evaluation manager.

2.4.5 Presenting the report

The report is presented at a meeting of the reference group with slides. Following are the points to be addressed:

- Answers to questions
- Methodological limitations if there are any, and judgment criteria actually applied
- Overall assessment of the intervention
- Outline of recommendations.

The evaluation team leader receives three types of comments:

- Oral comments at the meeting
- Written comments after the meeting
- Comments from the evaluation manager on the methodological quality of the report and discussion of the first version of the quality assessment grid.

2.4.6 Version 2 of the report

The evaluation team takes the comments received into account, yet without compromising the independence of its value judgments.

The process is as follows:

- Comments dealing with methodological quality and facts are carefully taken into account, as long as that is possible. Whenever they are not taken into account, the evaluation team accounts for its reasons in the report.
- Comments dealing with the substance of the document, findings and conclusions may be taken into account or rejected by the evaluation team. The team mentions the dissenting views in a note or annex, together with an explanation of the position taken.

The evaluation team finalises its recommendations, which are clustered and prioritised. As far as possible, alternative options are proposed, including their respective benefits and risks.

The new version of the report is handed over to the evaluation manager.

Checklist: content of the final evaluation report

Executive summary (5 pages maximum: purpose of the evaluation, method, main findings, conclusions, recommendations)

Introduction: objectives and intervention logic; brief analysis of the political, economic, social and cultural context of the intervention; purpose of the evaluation; evaluation questions and of how they permit to assess the intervention as a whole

Method: judgement criteria and indicators; data collection process and analysis approach actually implemented and limitations if there are any; judgement approach actually implemented and limitations if there are any

Main findings, conclusions and recommendations in three distinct chapters:

- Answers to each evaluation question
- Overall assessment of the intervention
- Recommendations

Annexes (indicative list)

- Diagram(s) displaying the intervention logic
- Methodology : design table per question covering judgement criteria and indicators, strategy of analysis, sources of information used
- Inventory of actions covered by the evaluation
- Informants met
- Documents used
- Terms of Reference
- Statistical data and context indicators
- List of the projects and programmes submitted to in-depth study
- Project assessment fiches, case study monographs
- Questionnaires and survey reports
- Experts group or focus group reports, etc.

2.4.7 Discussion seminar

When a seminar is convened at this stage (mainly for geographic evaluations), its purpose goes beyond mere dissemination. It aims at discussing the substance of the conclusions and recommendations. The evaluation team presents the report with a slides presentation. It takes note of the received comments, which account for the last chance to check factual data, confirm analysis and justify value judgments explicitly. It also takes into consideration written comments received after the seminar.

The slides shown are handed over to the manager in PowerPoint version.

> **Case of a global sector or thematic evaluation**
>
> The evaluation team participates to the dissemination phase by being invited to seminars, ad hoc groups, committees after the publication of the final report.

2.4.8 Finalising the report

The evaluation team drafts the last version of its report and submits it to the expert in charge of quality control before it is handed over to the manager.

At this point, the evaluation team finalises the annexes and decides on presenting them under one of the following formats:

- Printed out annexes following the report
- Annexes on CDROM.

The report is printed out according to the instructions provided by the terms of reference.

The evaluation team leader receives a new quality assessment from the manager. If necessary, He writes a note setting forth the reasons why certain requests for quality improvement have not been sustained. This response will remain attached to both the quality assessment and the report.

On the website: examples of final evaluation reports

Available on Europa website

http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/index_en.htm

Examples and templates of terms of reference

Examples of technical and financial proposals

Standard budget format

Template CV

Examples of declaration of absence of conflict of interest

Examples of slides displayed at the inception meeting

Examples of note related to evaluation questions annexed to the terms of reference

Examples of inception reports

Examples of desk reports

Examples of country notes

Examples of slides displayed at a debriefing meeting

Examples of final evaluation reports

Quality assessment grid

Examples of evaluation summaries

Examples of slides displayed at a dissemination seminar

Examples of *fiche contradictoire*

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