

# Impact assessment

Impact assessment is a means of measuring the effectiveness of organisational activities and judging the significance of changes brought about by those activities. It is neither art nor science, but both. Impact assessment is closely linked to an organisation's / network's Mission, and, in that sense, ripples through them. Being able to assess and articulate impact is a powerful means of communicating, internally and externally, the contribution of activities to the identified Mission.

Impact is seen as the positive and negative, intended or unintended long-term results produced by an action, either directly or indirectly. Impact should be seen as the contribution of the intervention to the overall goal.

## 1. When should impact assessment take place?

Impact is a measure of the changes made and impact assessment seeks to establish a causal connection between inputs and changes in terms of magnitude or scale or both. The Logical Framework Approach (Logframe) provides the starting point for integrating impact assessment with monitoring and evaluation. Impact assessment should be seen as the contribution of the outputs and outcomes to purpose and overall goal.

Table 1 illustrates where it can be placed within the structure of the Logframe.

**Table 1: Placement of Impact within the Logframe**

Logframe Hierarchy	Performance indicators	Means of verification	Assumptions and risks
Overall Objective			
Priorities			
Impacts – assessment of changes made by action(s)	Impact indicators – the changes (positive, negative, intended, unintended) made by action(s)	Quantitative and qualitative techniques	
Results			
Activities	Inputs	Costs	

## 2. Planning for Impact assessment

The approach to impact assessment is very similar to the planning that is required to establish a monitoring system. The main difference is in the type of information and data that is needed to be able to assess impact. This can be summarised in the Logframe structure.

Table 2 shows the relationship between the Logframe and impact questions:

**Table 2: Logframe and impact questions**

Logframe Level	Monitoring Questions
Impact	To what extent has the action contributed to positive changes for beneficiaries? Have there been any unintended or negative changes that can be attributed to the action? Can beneficiaries identify the changes made by the action? Are there any trends that the action has influenced?
Outcomes	What are the beneficiaries' access to, use of, and satisfaction with the services delivered? Are the target groups benefiting to the extent foreseen? Is the action achieving its purpose?
Outputs	Process indicators
Activities	Inputs

### 3. Data collection

Issues of resources, capacity, proficiency and budget need to be addressed as part of a data collection strategy for assessing impact.

The commitment of projects to be effective and well run recognises that capacity and proficiency issues need to be addressed as part of organisational development. Resource requirements, personnel and equipment are an integral part of the projects. Requirements will vary depending upon the type of action.

There are a number of areas in data collection that need consideration in terms of impact assessment.

Table 3 sets out these issues.

**Table 3: Data collection considerations**

Consideration	Issues to consider
Who	Does the Centre have direct responsibility for monitoring? Is sufficient capacity available? Are appropriately skilled personnel available? Who will be responsible for managing data collection? Who will report on effectiveness of data collection and to whom? In the case of multiple actor interventions who will arbitrate attribution?
What	What data is needed for impact assessment? What are the resource implications? Can data be gathered in a systematic and reliable manner? Should all beneficiaries be monitored or is a sample sufficient?
When	Can a baseline be established? How often (frequency) should data be collected during the action? How long after the action should data be collected?
How	What techniques (qualitative or quantitative) need to be used for data collection during the intervention? What techniques can be used after the intervention?

### 4. What indicators?

Checking the design of the system is the first step in ensuring that impact assessment is built into the framework of the project.

Objectives should be assessed for compliance with Euroguidance policies but should also be expressed in ways that reflect the linkage between activities, outputs, outcomes and impact.

A clear distinction must be made between those indicators that are used to monitor activities and outputs and those that are used for outcomes and impact.

Impact assessment indicators must be chosen carefully. Too many indicators can be confusing and fuzzy indicators can be meaningless.

Table 4 illustrates the areas where indicators can be developed.

**Table 4: Process and impact indicators**

Implementation of the work programme			Effect of the work programme	
Input indicators	Process indicators	Output Indicators	Outcome indicators	Impact indicators

## 5. Evaluation of impact

In any evaluation the key questions in terms of impact are:-

1. What changes did the action generate?
2. Were changes positive or negative?
3. Were there any unplanned or unintended changes?

Evaluation can occur at different points during an action as well as after an action. In addition there is a hierarchy of evaluations – see Table 5.

**Table 5: A hierarchy of evaluations**

<b>Type of evaluation</b>	<b>Scope</b>
<b>System-wide</b>	Evaluation of the action of the whole network
<b>Partial</b>	Evaluation of a part of the network such as a thematic approach
<b>Single Euroguidance Centre response</b>	Evaluation of a specific Centre
<b>Single Centre, single activity</b>	Evaluation of a single activity undertaken by a specific Centre

Methods for assessing and analysing impact involve participatory approaches that seek to understand the opinions of different interest groups particularly by bringing in the perspective of those whose voices are normally excluded. Three different approaches to assessing impact can be identified. These should not be seen as mutually exclusive but as having the potential to be used as a combination of approaches:

1. The first is mainly “project-out” and involves clarifying and specifying project objectives and indicators and then assessing the degree to which they have been met. This involves a careful ordering of outputs, outcomes, and impacts with a limited number of indicators being verified at each level of the ‘impact chain’.
2. The second looks more broadly at the potential changes that may have occurred. Typically, this involves asking different stakeholders to identify the most important changes brought about by a given project, and how they happened.
3. The third is more “context-in” approach looking first and foremost at overall changes in people’s lives and then seeking to explore with them the importance of those changes and the sources of change, including the project in question.

## 6. Planning for the assessment of impact

Planning can help to facilitate the measurement of impact of a particular action. This is based on the rationale that the impact and effectiveness of an action can only be measured in relation to stated objectives and delivery goals (process indicators). This implies that some level of pre-planning has been undertaken. Preparedness is important in that it means:

1. A level of pre-planning
2. Knowledge of resources and capacity available to respond
3. A clear operational sense of what is expected

No matter how much pre-planning is undertaken, it is unrealistic to expect that every eventuality will be anticipated and therefore flexibility will be needed and changes are to be expected as the project management is a cyclical and ongoing process with the organisation learning from experience and improving procedures.

An agile and proactive organisation committed to improvement will always be seen as striving to meet its core aims.

Table 6 shows a number of key impact indicators that can be used to assess overall impact

**Table 6: Organisational impact indicators**

<b>External</b>	<b>What would this kind of indicator demonstrate?</b>
Externally audited accounts and financial statement	Transparency, accountability, advocacy – <b>A measure of the efficiency of the organisation in using funds effectively.</b>
Satisfaction survey	Aggregate indicator of satisfaction of the quality, quantity, speed and effectiveness of services – <b>A measure of a well-functioning organisation.</b>
Capacity building	Aggregate measure of the organisational commitment to developing and enhancing capability – <b>A measure of a learning organisation.</b>
<b>Internal</b>	
Feedback on usefulness of the support provided to beneficiaries	The efficiency, effectiveness and relevance of support. <b>A measure of a well-functioning organisation.</b>
Effectiveness of planning	Usefulness, appropriateness and responsiveness of planning – <b>A measure of listening, learning and adaptable organisation.</b>
Capacity developed	Quantity and quality of training – <b>A measure of a learning organisation</b>

## **7. Key Points**

- ✓ Assessment of impact is a measure of relevance to Mission
- ✓ It is a powerful tool for communication
- ✓ It is not easy – there are no standardised methods
- ✓ Openness, honesty and transparency are essential
- ✓ The focus is the beneficiary and flexibility in meeting those needs is essential.