

## 2 The Self-Assessment Process I: Preparation

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This section aims to provide step-by-step guidance for preparing a self-assessment of a Transformational Gender Action Plan.

### 1. Define the type of the self-assessment

As other types of evaluations, self-assessments can be distinguished by a variety of characteristics, for example according to the subject or the goal(s) of the self-assessment, as described below. A wide-spread approach is to make a distinction between formative and summative evaluations.

Formative evaluations aim to support the optimization of the subject of the evaluation (e.g. a Transformational Gender Action Plan) and its implementation throughout the process. That is why the evaluation feedback tends to target mainly the actors who are in charge of the implementation. Formative evaluations may include a needs assessment, an analysis of the logics of the initiative and an assessment of its implementation process, amongst others. Qualitative data tend to provide particularly valuable information for this type of evaluation.<sup>1</sup>

Summative evaluations, in contrast, examine to what extent the goals of the subject of the evaluation have been achieved. They assess the outcomes and impacts of the initiative as well as unintended consequences. Summative evaluations are usually conducted during and after the end of the implementation process (of the gender action plan, for example), and are likely to resort to quantitative and qualitative data. Often, the evaluation results are provided to actors who are responsible of taking major decision on the evaluated subject, e.g. on the question which resources will be allocated to its implementation in the future.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, self-assessments as other types of evaluations may combine elements of both formative and summative evaluations, and it has proven fruitful to use a 'mixed methods' approach (see the section on data collection ([link])). In line with this approach, this guide is tailored to assist actors in higher education and research institutions in evaluating Transformational Gender Action Plans or selected elements of these plans by integrating elements of formative and summative evaluations.

### Example from the INTEGER project

As pointed out in the introduction to this guide [link], the evaluation concept developed by GESIS-Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences integrates elements of formative and summative evaluation. As INTEGER project partners, the evaluators have accompanied and supported the design and implementation of the Transformational Gender Action Plans in the partner institutions from the very beginning. They contributed to the design of the baseline data collection conducted by the project partners, and collected qualitative and quantitative data both mid-way through the project and at the end of the project. Whereas the formative evaluation is considered to have provided helpful support to the implementing project partners throughout the project, and through the central evaluation report in particular, the summative evaluation only succeeded in providing a limited amount of meaningful data. The main reason for the less prominent character of the summative elements is probably the fact that the project duration was too short for the measures to produce substantial impacts, especially in quantitative terms.

### References

The National Science Foundation/ Joy Frechtling (2002): The 2002 User Friendly Handbook for Project Evaluation, available at: <http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2002/nsf02057/nsf02057.pdf>, pp. 6ff.

### 2. Define the subject of the self-assessment

As a basis for further steps, and in order to allow for a realistic attribution of resources (in particular: working time of dedicated staff) it is crucial to define the subject of the self-assessment. This could be, amongst others,

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Alkin, Marvin C. (2011): Evaluation essentials from A to Z. New York: Guilford Press, pp. 11f.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Ibid., p. 12.

(the implementation of) an individual measure, a programme phase, an entire programme, a gender action plan, or the overall institutional implementation of the gender equality mandate. It may encompass measures, plans or the overall set-up at the central, i.e. the organizational, level, and/or focus on (a) subordinate level(s), for example a gender equality programme in a certain faculty.

As it mostly draws on the evidence gathered within the INTEGGER project, this guide focuses on the implementation of Transformational Gender Action Plans within higher education and research institutions, and can also be used for the assessment of certain elements of such an action plan (e.g. a single measure).

Example from the INTEGGER project

The subject of the evaluation carried out within the INTEGGER project was the implementation of Transformational Gender Action Plans (TGAPs) within the three partner institutions at different levels, namely at the level of the organization and within the INTEGGER pilot institutes, faculties and laboratories, respectively. These TGAPs aimed at achieving transformational change towards greater gender equality through targeted measures in four identified areas of intervention, namely: engagement of decision-makers; organizational structure; career progression of female scientists; and work-life balance.

3. Define the role of the evaluator within the institutional set-up and its potential implications for the self-assessment

When planning a self-assessment it is, of course, to be decided who will be in charge of conducting it. Depending on the institutional context (e.g. the competences and resources of different actors), the person or entity tasked with the self-assessment could be the person responsible of the implementation of the gender equality plan to be evaluated, (other) gender equality actors within the institution, an in-house quality management body or other actors within the institution; alternatively, external (evaluation) experts can be hired for this task.

Involving external evaluators brings the benefits of their expertise, skills and their (relatively) independent perspective, facilitating an overview of relevant features and reducing restrictions caused by intra-institutional power relations. Possibly, external experts coming from prestigious institutions may also contribute to an **improved response rate, more cooperative respondents' behaviour and/or an increased interest of the target group** in the evaluation results. Yet, external evaluators tend to know less about the local, institutional and, possibly, national context than actors within the institution and thus almost exclusively rely on data collected in the framework of the evaluation.

A third option may be to conduct the evaluation in-house and to resort to evaluation experts at a certain point in the process, for example when designing the evaluation concept or when conducting interviews.

Either way the quality of the evaluation benefits from a self-reflection by the evaluators on their own position and role(s) within the institutional set-up and potential implications for the assessment. This may influence the definition of (implicit) goals of the evaluation, increase awareness of limits to the evaluation and help to understand and reduce different forms of bias.

Please find below an overview of the main advantages of externally conducted evaluations, on the one hand, and self-assessments, on the other hand:

Advantages of External Evaluations	Advantages of Self-Assessments
+ Evaluation expertise & skills	+ High familiarity with internal processes, etc.
+ Rather independent view	+ Lower costs
	+ In-house capacity-building

Table 1. Advantages of external evaluations and self-assessments



### Example from the INTEGGER project

As pointed out in the introduction to this guide, in the INTEGGER project the design and implementation of Transformational Gender Action Plans was supported by an external evaluation carried out by GESIS-Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences. As a project partner, GESIS closely accompanied the change processes in the partner institutions from the beginning. Thus it was GESIS who, for example, provided the project partners with a basic definition of transformational change (see the section on '[Define key terms](#)' below).

The evaluators at GESIS conceptualized their role as 'critical friends', supporting their project partners in the design, implementation and quality assurance of their Transformational Gender Action Plans through a critical and constructive analysis from an external perspective.<sup>3</sup> A basic rationale for the choice of this approach is that it provides guidance in striking "an optimal balance between the challenges of evaluation theory and practice and the fact that the utilization of evaluations depends decisively on the decision makers' interest in the results"<sup>4</sup>.

### References

Balthasar, Andreas (2011): Critical Friend Approach: Policy Evaluation between Methodological Soundness, Practical Relevance, and Transparency of the Evaluation Process, in: *German Policy Studies* 7 (3), pp. 187–231.

#### 4. Define the goals of the self-assessment

In an evaluation guide targeting the Commission services, the European Commission identifies four main purposes of evaluation that can be summarized as follows: contribution to (1) the design of interventions; (2) efficient allocation of resources; (3) quality improvement of an intervention; and (4) accountability.<sup>5</sup> It depends on the specific context of the self-assessment which goals it is to focus on. In any case, a basic feature of evaluations is that they are supposed to feed into the optimization of the evaluated subject (and its implementation, in the case of a gender action plan) and thus constitute an essential element of the project/programme management cycle, as described above.

It is recommended to formulate concrete goals of the self-assessment and to tailor the self-assessment design to these goals. The goals defined at this stage will then guide the self-assessment and provide the ground for a quality assessment of the self-assessment itself. Communicating these goals e.g. to potential interviewees serves to explain and underline the relevance of the self-assessment.

In addition, self-assessments – as other types of evaluations – often pursue implicit goals, i.e. goals not explicitly stated neither in the self-assessment mandate nor in any further communication on the self-assessment towards e.g. decision-makers. An important goal can be the legitimization of existent gender equality structures and initiatives or an awareness-raising of gender inequalities and the need for (further) initiatives to combat these inequalities.

### Example from the INTEGGER project

The evaluators identified two main goals of their evaluation of the Transformational Gender Action Plans (TGAPs) designed and implemented by INTEGGER partner institutions: Firstly, the external evaluation should provide the local project coordinators with an independent view on the implementation process as support for programme steering and quality assurance with respect to chosen objectives, including sustainability of advancement in gender equality. Secondly, the evaluation aimed to explore outputs, outcomes and impacts of each TGAP at the organisational and subordinate levels for the purpose of proving cause-effect relations by making effects of its activities tangible. In addition, the evaluation was also supposed to feed into these Self-Assessment Guidelines

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Balthasar, A., (2011), "Critical Friend Approach: Policy Evaluation between Methodological Soundness, Practical Relevance, and Transparency of the Evaluation Process", *German Policy Studies* 7, 3, pp. 191ff.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 191.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. European Commission (2004): Evaluating EU activities: A practical guide for the Commission services, available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/eval/guide/eval\\_activities\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/eval/guide/eval_activities_en.pdf), p. 9.



and Toolkit aimed to provide guidance on evaluating Transformational Gender Action Plans to other higher education and research institutions.

## References

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2009): Handbook on Planning, Monitoring and Evaluating for Results, available at: <http://web.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/handbook/english/documents/pme-handbook.pdf>, pp. 127ff.

### 5. Define key terms

Ideally, the evaluated plan, measure, etc. provides clear definitions of relevant key terms. In particular, relevant documents should be scanned for definitions of what will be measured which is likely to correspond to the objective(s) of the gender action plan, the measure, etc. Still, it is often the case that not all key terms are clearly defined. In these cases, definitions should be set up in accordance with the goals of the plan and its measures and, whenever necessary, in consultation with relevant actors and/or experts.

### Example from the INTeGR project

As the overall goal of all Transformational Gender Action Plans (TGAPs) set up within the INTeGR project is to support transformational change towards greater gender equality within the partner institutions, it was necessary to agree on a common understanding of transformational change between implementing partners and the evaluator. Thus, the evaluation team supplied its project partners with an operational definition of transformational change which has been adapted by each partner. The basic definition reads as follows:

**"Transformational Change is a strategic mean which is steered by institutions that employ research staff. Through operating transformational change, research institutions demonstrate significant gender awareness and competency to use gender as a resource to create new knowledge and stimulate innovation by modernizing their organizational culture. The ultimate objective of the change process is to work towards a better gender relation and equal representation of both sexes in all staff categories of the institution. Operating transformational change effectively demands awareness of the statistical base, periodical examination of institutional processes (such as recruitment, promotion, retention), the willingness at the top of the institution to open up discussion and to sustain the process of self-study and change and support the achievement of organizational goals within a supportive climate."**<sup>6</sup>

## References

### *References to tools*

The following glossaries are not at all comprehensive but may prove useful in defining key terms related to the gender action plans to be evaluated.

- The OSCE Glossary on Gender-Related Terms of 2006, compiled by the OSCE Gender Section, is predominantly based on OSCE sources and provides definition and examples of 15 basic gender equality-related terms and concepts. The glossary is available at: <http://www.osce.org/gender/26397>.
- The European Commission's Glossary of Gender and Development terms that forms part of the "Toolkit on mainstreaming gender equality in EC development cooperation" (2004) focuses on gender and development cooperation but provides clear definitions of a number of gender-related concepts that can be useful for gender equality initiatives in universities and research institutions as well. It is available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/toolkit-mainstreaming-gender-section-3\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/toolkit-mainstreaming-gender-section-3_en.pdf).
- The Glossary of Gender-related Terms and Concepts developed by the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (UN-INSTRAW) contains around 20 brief definitions of basic concepts relevant to gender equality-related work, including definitions of

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Lipinsky A., Schäfer M. (2014), GESIS Evaluation Concept for Transformational Gender Action Plans, INTeGR Deliverable 7.13, available at: [http://www.gesis.org/cews/fileadmin/cews/www/download/D7\\_13-Detailed-Evaluation-Concept.pdf](http://www.gesis.org/cews/fileadmin/cews/www/download/D7_13-Detailed-Evaluation-Concept.pdf).

different degrees of integration of a gender perspective in projects. The glossary can be accessed via the following link: <http://unamid.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=11012&language=en-US>.

- The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) is envisaging to establish a Europe-wide gender equality thesaurus and glossary in consultation with stakeholders which can be expected to become a useful tool in the future.
- For the definition of key terms related to the self-assessment itself the Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management (trilingual version) developed by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Working Party on Aid Evaluation (WP-EV) is recommended. It is available online via the following link: <http://www.oecd.org/derec/dacnetwork/35336188.pdf>.

## 6. Define the time-frame

Two time-frames are to be defined before conducting the self-assessment: the time-frame of the self-assessment activities and the time-frame related to the subject of the self-assessment. The first time-frame refers to the planned dates of the beginning and the completion of the self-assessment activities, and the work phases during this period, namely data collection, data analysis and presentation of results. As the second relevant time-frame it is to be defined which period of time will be assessed in the self-assessment, such as the implementation period of a (phase of a) gender action plan since its entry into force.

In both regards it is recommended to adapt the time-frame to certain internal and/or external cycles or caesura, where possible, in order to seize a certain momentum. Such cycles or caesura may be political (e.g. related to the university elections, or a relevant national law) or administrative (e.g. a redefinition of staff categories).

### Example from the INTEGGER project

The INTEGGER project did not leave much scope for defining time-frames of the evaluation and thus did not allow for taking into account institutional or local caesura. The period of time to be assessed corresponded to the time-frame of the evaluation itself, starting with the design of the Transformational Gender Action Plans.

However, the evaluators could define the points in time of the different phases of the evaluation. Thus, they opted for scheduling the central evaluation round for around 1 ½ years after the official beginning of the implementation of the Transformational Gender Action Plans, and the final evaluation round for one year later. The experiences from the INTEGGER project show that a time-span of four years between the baseline data collection and the (final) evaluation is rather short, at least if impacts are to be measured.

## 7. Identify sources of information and material to be collected and analysed

In order to provide for a sound self-assessment, the analysis carried out needs to be based on a clearly defined corpus, i.e. the material to be analysed. The definition of the corpus should be guided by the objectives of the self-assessment and the methods of analyses (see section on '[Implementation](#)' below), and need to take into account practical considerations like the time-frame and the resources available for the self-assessment. It is recommended to consider both quantitative and qualitative data.

Sources of information to be identified can include, amongst others, administrative (HR) data, further compilations of sex-disaggregated (staff) data at national, organizational and/or subordinate levels, official institutional documents, policy and legal documents at regional, national and European levels, the gender action plan etc. itself, interviews, group discussions and surveys. In order to select methods of data collection, it is first to be assessed which data is already available within the institution and beyond. Data gaps are to be identified and it is to be decided which data needs to and can be harmonised. Subsequently, it can be determined which data is to be produced in order to fill existing data gaps.

### Example from the INTEGGER project

In a detailed evaluation concept shared with the project partners the evaluators within the INTEGGER project defined the corpus of material, comprising: each institution's Transformational Gender Action Plan and supplementary documents; a completed template for collecting HR statistics; the INTEGGER baseline data report that features, amongst others, key results of the staff surveys conducted at the implementing partner



institutions; each project partner's self-report; individual and group interviews as well as group discussions with staff, decision-makers and gender equality actors; site-visits to the pilot entities within the partner institutions; and policy and legal documents at national, organisational and local level collected through additional desk research.

#### 8. Select data collection methods

The definition of the corpus and the assessment of available data ([see above](#)) give information about which data is available and needs to be collected and which data is to be produced in the course of the self-assessment.

It is recommended to use a mixed methods approach, i.e. to use both qualitative and quantitative methods. That is because mixed methods tend to produce more comprehensive insights than one of the methods alone. The use of several methods for the assessment of the same object (a technique called triangulation) also serves to check the validity of the results, and thus supports solid, sound and credible research. It can also be argued that in any way both types of data are closely related (as Trochim (2000) points out: "[a]ll quantitative data is based upon qualitative judgments; and all qualitative data can be described and manipulated numerically"<sup>7</sup>).

Selected data collection methods that are considered relevant for evaluating Transformational Gender Action Plans are briefly outlined in the section '[Overview of relevant data collection/production methods](#)' below. For further information and practical guidance please consult the entire section on the '[implementation](#)' of the self-assessment and the recommended literature.

#### Example from the INTEGR project

In the framework of the INTEGR project, the evaluators opted for a mixed-methods approach, combining all data collection methods mentioned above. Broadly speaking, desk research was particularly important at the beginning of the project, whereas the central evaluation round resorted to interviews, group discussions, site visits, and self-reports provided by the project partners. As regards the final evaluation web surveys were used. Quantitative staff data was collected at regular intervals throughout the project, facilitating a sound data monitoring.

In the selection of data collection methods and in their application the evaluation team benefitted from the fact that the team is composed of researchers with different methodological expertise and skills which facilitated fruitful exchanges.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Trochim, William M. (2000): The Research Methods Knowledge Base, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, online version available at <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/>.