

Working Group

WORK PLAN

INTRODUCTION

The Work Plan documents all activities needed to achieve the Working Group's (WG) goals along with their detailed schedule. The Work Plan will be used as the basis to monitor the progress and control the work of the WGs.

Content:

- Working Group info
- Document info
- General concept
- Needs assessment of Working Group members
- Working Group objectives
- Expected results
- Working method
- Work breakdown
- Roles and responsibilities
- Appendix I.: References and related documents

WORKING GROUP INFO

Working Group number	1	
Working Group title	THEORETICAL CONCEPT OF POLICY EVALUATION	
Working Group leader	Name	Mirela Tase
	Contact	00355682023336
Working Group Members	The list of this Working Group's members can be found on COST.eu here .	

WORKING GROUP GENERAL CONCEPT

I.1. General concept (as per Memorandum of Understanding)
Working Group 1: Theoretical concept of policy evaluation



To design an excellent evaluation and to properly select between the potential methodologies the evaluator should understand

- 1) the intervention logic of the given policy or programme,
- 2) the incentives and limits of policy makers, and
- 3) the technical limits (time, data availability and financial resources) of evaluation.

WG1 will address these issues.

I.2. Other elements (challenges, objectives) WG 1 need to contribute to (as per Memorandum of Understanding) and possible actions of WG 1

The Working Group contributes to the overarching objectives of the PROFEEDBACK Action by providing a structured platform for dialogue, exchange of practices, and the development of professional standards in the field of policy evaluation. The activities described below are designed to ensure scientific excellence, cross-sectoral cooperation, methodological advancement, and practical impact on policy-making across Europe.

To foster networking and knowledge exchange of the policy evaluation community at EU-level

Activity 1. Representatives of evaluation-related institutions and bodies at EU level shall be invited to the meetings and events of the Action. Their involvement will contribute to addressing identified challenges in policy evaluation and will ensure that the work of the Action is connected to ongoing European debates and institutional needs.

To establish cross-sectoral cooperation and to foster a participatory approach by launching dialogue along the quadruple helix and linking policy makers responsible for planning and evaluating policies with actors from academia, business, and the civil sphere. The Working Group will strive to ensure that evaluation aspects are systematically emphasized during both the planning and the implementation phases of programmes.

Activity 2. Relevant actors shall be invited to meetings and events of the Action. Furthermore, a dedicated meeting shall be organised to debate whether the waiver of ex-ante evaluation for EU-funded programmes has produced the expected benefits, thereby addressing an issue of direct relevance for policy-making.

To reinforce state-of-the-art research in the policy evaluation field and to contribute to standards

Activity 3. A dedicated sub-group shall be established within the Working Group focusing on Evaluation Standards, including the development of a Code of Conduct. This sub-group will address issues of professionalisation, ethics, quality assurance, and integrity in evaluation. The main output will be a Code of Conduct that standardises good practices and strengthens the credibility of the European evaluation community.

To develop evaluation policy research by debating pressing issues of the research community and by encouraging scientific publications

Activity 4. A sub-group on publication (already under implementation) shall continue its work and deliver collective publications on policy evaluation. These outputs will contribute to the enrichment of international literature and to the visibility of the PROFEEDBACK Action in academic fora.



To support methodological development by presenting and discussing methodologies frequently used in policy evaluations through the Working Groups

Activity 5. Specific methodological challenges encountered by members in their evaluation practice shall be collected, for example questions related to the choice of appropriate methods for answering evaluation questions. Selected monthly meetings shall be dedicated to low-key brainstorming sessions, allowing members to discuss these methodological challenges in a constructive, flexible setting without major preparation requirements.

To discuss existing theories and practices of different countries

Activity 6. Monthly meetings shall provide the opportunity to present the status of evaluation in different PROFEEDBACK countries. This comparative exchange will strengthen mutual learning and enable the identification of transferable good practices and areas requiring further improvement.

To contribute to the elaboration of the PROFEEDbooks (D4.1–D4.8)

which summarise the main presentations and results of the conferences in three sections. The first section of each PROFEEDbook shall be prepared by this Working Group, focusing on the research questions and theoretical approaches of policy evaluation.

To conduct comparisons and performance assessments of existing theories, models, methodologies, and practices in policy evaluation

This objective shall be realised primarily through the methodological focus of the Working Groups. *Activity 8.* The Working Group meetings will provide a forum for in-depth debates on theories and methods, ensuring that different approaches are systematically assessed. The results of these debates shall be synthesised in the PROFEEDbooks (D4.1–D4.8) in order to ensure dissemination beyond the membership of the Action and to reach the wider policy evaluation community.

To prepare and deliver two policy briefs (D6.1 and D6.2) aimed at improving policy evaluation

These policy briefs shall be finalised before the dissemination events and presented at these events. Their purpose is to provide recommendations, conceptual frameworks, and methodological guidance for decision-makers and policy-makers, in particular regarding the implementation of new tools and policies. The two briefs shall be compiled by the Working Groups on the basis of the topics of the half-yearly conferences. Deliverable D6.2 shall also include recommendations on the further development of policy evaluation research and the professional community of evaluators. It will frame an ethical Code of Conduct that outlines and standardises the norms, rules, responsibilities, and proper practices of the evaluation community at EU level.

To facilitate peer-to-peer learning sessions

Activity 11. Develop “Live Stories” as a structured template to support members in sharing their professional experiences during discussions. This tool will serve as a valuable resource for illustrating how practical challenges are addressed in the field of evaluation and will support mutual learning within the network.

Activity 12. Organise a second training session, based on the identified needs of the members of the Working Group, in cooperation with Working Groups 2 and 3. This includes the Training School held in Budapest from 14 to 17 June 2025, which was successfully realised under the leadership of the WG1 Leader.

NEEDS ASSESSEMENT OF WORKING GROUP MEMBERS

The main needs informing the initial version of the Work Plan were collected, presented, and discussed during the first PROFEEDBACK Conference, held in Budapest in spring 2022. These needs constitute the thematic foundations of the Working Group’s activities and reflect both conceptual debates and practical challenges in policy evaluation.



Funded by
the European Union



II. 1. The main needs collected for the first version of the Work Plan, as presented and discussed during the first PROFEEDBACK conference in Budapest in spring 2022 are as follows.

Evaluation approaches, with a particular focus on theory-based approaches.

Theory-based evaluation, as elaborated by authors such as Weiss and Chen, has not only been incorporated into the guidance of the European Commission's Directorates-General for Regional Policy and Employment but also occupies a central place in broader discussions on the evolution of evaluation practice. The field is diverse: while different scholars emphasise different aspects under the umbrella of "theory-based evaluation," there are also competing approaches—such as developmental evaluation—that diverge either fundamentally or in more incremental ways. Each approach brings specific strengths as well as limitations, requiring critical comparison and reflection within the community.

Causality as a core concept of evaluation.

The concept of causality is inherent to evaluation, although it is often applied in different ways and with varying degrees of explicitness. Approaches diverge along several dimensions. One dimension relates to philosophical underpinnings: whether causal claims in evaluation can be considered objective truths or whether they are inherently constructed and context-dependent. Another dimension addresses the complexity of causality in social settings, where individuals act according to different objectives and contexts, thereby complicating causal attribution.

Measurability and methodological limits.

The issue of how causal relations can be captured, measured, and documented links the debates on approaches and causality to broader methodological concerns. This includes the assessment of the extent to which existing methods can provide reliable and valid information, and the critical evaluation of their limitations. Such discussions are crucial in clarifying the scope and boundaries of evaluation methods and in identifying where triangulation, innovation, or new methodologies may be needed.

The use of evaluations.

The question of how evaluations can induce change is widely addressed in evaluation research. Both the process of conducting evaluations and the results themselves may trigger behavioural changes among different actors. In policy evaluation, this is particularly linked to the specific dynamics of political and administrative processes. Stakeholder involvement, the relation of evaluation to academic discourse, and the role of communication and dissemination activities (including those carried out under the Scientific Communication and Innovation and Exploitation functions of the Action) have all been identified as key issues requiring attention.

Ethics and quality of evaluations.

The extent to which evaluation activities should be guided by overarching ethical principles is a recurring theme within the evaluation community. Defining evaluation standards is often a response to such concerns, yet the role and scope of standards remains contested. Closely linked is the discussion on the quality of evaluations, which depends on factors such as the adequacy of resources, timeframes, and stakeholder willingness to contribute. These issues underscore the need for agreed benchmarks and professional frameworks that can ensure the integrity and credibility of evaluation results.

Competencies and capacities.

Evaluation processes rely on the competencies of both evaluators and the policy makers or officials commissioning and using evaluations. Each group requires specific knowledge and skills, and successful evaluations depend on the constructive interplay between these competencies. This

debate is embedded in the broader discussion of the professionalisation of the evaluation field, which includes capacity building, training, and the establishment of professional standards.

Cross-cutting considerations

Given the Europe-wide and international composition of the Working Group, an essential cross-cutting aspect is the need to consider multiple levels of evaluation practice:

- **National systems.** Different national traditions, histories, and institutional cultures of evaluation shape how evaluation is understood and applied. The presence and maturity of national Evaluation Societies further illustrate this diversity.
- **European policies.** European Union policies constitute an additional layer of complexity. Their implementation in the EU's multi-level governance system interacts with national variations, generating specific challenges for evaluation design, comparability, and use.

The interfaces between national evaluation systems and the European policy level must therefore be carefully considered when addressing the issues outlined above. These interfaces represent not only potential challenges but also opportunities for cross-fertilisation, mutual learning, and the development of shared standards within the PROFEEDBACK network.

II.2. Based on the survey subsequently carried out, the members of the WG 1 have the needs presented in the table below.

As it can be seen, most needs discussed during the meetings are almost equally relevant for the members of the WG1 (the least relevant is the need to protect evaluators and evaluations when the political context is a challenging one, through international evaluation standards).

The most relevant for WG 1 are:

- The need to extend and develop **more complex and comprehensive theoretical views as to be able to better integrate the evaluation practice in complex political and cultural contexts**
- The need **to increase communication, interaction and knowledge / experience exchange and between academia / researchers in the field of evaluation and practitioners**
- The need to raise the awareness regarding the importance of evaluation in the policy making process as to increase the **utilization of the evaluation**.

	Weighted Average
2. The need to extend and develop more complex and comprehensive theoretical views as to be able to better integrate the evaluation practice in complex political and cultural contexts	4,21

3. The need to raise the awareness regarding the importance of evaluation in the policy making process as to increase the utilization of the evaluation	4
6. The need to protect evaluations and evaluations when the political context is a challenging one, through international evaluation standards	2,89
4. The need to improve the process of communication regarding the evaluation results	3,87
5. The need to strengthen participatory approaches as to increase the interplay between the evaluators, the commissioners of the evaluation and the programming and implementing departments, to better identify, include and inform key stakeholders on the evaluation process, its objectives and results	3,33
1. The need to increase communication, interaction and knowledge / experience exchange and between academia / researchers in the field of evaluation and practitioners	4,29

The first three priorities of the WG members are, in this order:

1. Use of evaluation.
2. Measurability and
3. Ethics and quality.

ID	Need description	Priority
1.	Context and contingency	4
2.	Causality	5
3.	Measurability	2
4.	Use of evaluations	1
5.	Ethics and quality	3
6.	Competencies and capacity	6

7.	Communication of evaluation results	5
----	-------------------------------------	---

II.3. The possible actions based on needs identified above (in correlation with actions proposed under point I.2) are:

Need	Possible action
Evaluation approaches, mainly theory-based approaches	<u>Activity 8. To organise some of the monthly meeting on existing theories (the models and methods are for WG 2 and 3) and discuss about them.</u> An article in the book/publication may cover this topic, it may draw on the Training School, too.
Causality	<u>Activity 12. To organise some of the monthly meeting on existing theories (the models and methods are for WG 2 and 3) and discuss about them.</u> An article in the book/publication may cover this topic, it may draw on the discussions in the WG.
Measurability and methodological limits	<u>Activity 13. Joint discussion (series of discussions) WG 1, 2, 3.</u> May be carried out face-to-face, during conferences and may result in a chapter of the book/publication. A sub-group to coordinate all three interrelated topics?

Use of evaluations	<u>Activity 14 – A sub-group to be dedicated to this topic, which is very important for the members of the WG 1.</u> <u>Activity 1. Invite EU-level evaluation-related representatives to our meetings/events (see point 5, to contribute to solving to our challenges)</u> <u>Activity 2. Invite such actors, as relevant, to our meetings/events (see point 5, to contribute to solving our challenges). To organise a meeting to debate whether waiving the ex-ante evaluation for EU-funded programmes had the expected benefits.</u> Again, the efforts carried out in this direction may become a chapter in a book/publication.
Ethics and quality of evaluations	<u>Activity 3. Organise a sub-group for Evaluation Standards, Code of Conduct etc. (professionalisation, ethics, quality) that would create this specific output</u> <u>Activity 9. WG 1 in charge with D62, the second policy brief – to appoint a coordinator of this sub-group, ideally the same person coordinates the sub-group on standards, code of conducts, professionalisation.</u> Again, the efforts carried out in this direction may become a chapter in a book/publication.
Competencies and capacities	As above “Ethics and quality of evaluations”
The need to extend and develop more complex and comprehensive theoretical views as to be able to better integrate the evaluation practice in complex political and cultural contexts	<u>Activity 8. To organise some of the monthly meeting on existing theories (the models and methods are for WG 2 and 3) and discuss about them.</u> An article in the book/publication may cover this topic, it may draw on the Training School, too.
The need to increase communication, interaction and knowledge / experience exchange and between academia / researchers in the	<u>Activity 15. To organise some of the monthly meeting on this matter (although I would say this is a horizontal matter for all WGs).</u>

field of evaluation and practitioners	
The need to raise the awareness regarding the importance of evaluation in the policy making process as to increase the <u>utilization</u> of the evaluation.	<u>Activity 14 – A sub-group to be dedicated to this topic, which is very important for the members of the WG 1.</u>
Use of evaluation	As above
Measurability	As above
Ethics and quality	As above

WORKING GROUP OBJECTIVES

After each conference thematic deliverables will be issued. These so called **PROFEEDbooks (D4.1-D4.8)** will summarize the main presentations and results of the conferences in three sections. The first section will be prepared by WG1 on research questions and theoretical approaches of policy evaluation. The following two sections will be two methodological handbooks: one on quantitative methods by WG2 and one on qualitative and participatory methods by WG3.

General objectives	To tackle a set of stringent issues for the field of evaluation, from the perspective of theory-based evaluation, as to contribute to the development of the field.
Specific objectives (in order of importance based on WG members feedback)	· To highlight current research questions, possible theories and methodologies · To share information and knowledge on certain topics relevant in the context of the general objective of the WG · To increase interplay between academia / researchers in the field of evaluation and practitioners · To identify solutions, ways of action and disseminate them among Cost Action target groups

	To raise awareness on pressing issues of the research community / the community of practitioners among key intended evaluation users.
--	---

EXPECTED RESULTS (OUTPUTS)

ID	Result description	Main responsible(s)	Target delivery date
1.	Contribution to PROFEEDBooks through conference contributions	TBD in December 2022 / January 2023	1 month after the conference
2.	Contribution to PROFEEDCourses through the two trainings WG will organise (2)	Mihaela Aioanei/Sorin Bogdea (TDB)	1 month after the training
3.	1 Publication	TBD in December 2022 / January 2023	By the end of the project – publication fees to be checked.
4.	Collection of examples / good practices* Life story	December 2024/2025 January	Hope to finished but still waiting for results
5.	Guidelines*	2025/ September	

* Additional, based on survey

WORKING METHOD

Frequency of meetings	In-person	In person meeting at least 4 times in the project (combined with conferences / trainings etc.)
	Online	Every two months, at least 6 times per year (8 times in total out of which 2 times face-to face during conferences) General on-line meetings will be organised back-to-back with meetings of the 6 sub-groups, constituted on the following topics: A) Reconstructing the theory of change within the evaluation process – how and when? B) Confidence in the theory-based evaluation approaches



		C) Evaluation standards / quality of the evaluation process and its results D) Evaluation use – for whom it is conducted, by whom it should be used and how to increase or ensure its utilization? E) Communication of evaluation results – for its main intended users and for the general public F) The professionalization of policy evaluation
Online collaboration tools	Communication channels	○ E-mail ○ Zoom
	File sharing platform	○ Google Drive
	Other	○ Collaborative platforms like miro.com (can we handle it?)
Regularly reassessing needs	On-line survey	○ Collecting needs, perspectives on the activity of WG1 and proposals for improving its activity from WG members, once every 6 months