



# Results-based management at the heart of a new public governance?

An overview of public policy  
evaluation in Europe, 2008

# Editorial

**Public reforms implemented over the last few years in several European countries attest to the need for a new mode of public governance, in which evaluation plays a major role.**

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A twofold requirement for transparency and effectiveness is gaining momentum, generating a genuine revolution in behavior. In the public sector, this means moving from a means-based to a results-based rationale and measuring results through evaluations. In some countries, evaluation practices are advanced, while in others they are still at an early stage of development.

Evaluating public policies is a fairly complex process that:

- ▶ Requires periodic analysis of the relevance of public programmes (the right responses to appropriately identified needs),
- ▶ Measures effectiveness (level of goal attainment) and enhances efficiency (which means for which results?),
- ▶ Brings into question former approaches in order to achieve more appropriate policies and more consistent choices,
- ▶ Plans ahead and sets future deadlines for accountability.

With this in mind, Ernst & Young's goal is to promote public policy evaluation and to take part in the debate concerning its integration into the new public governance.

Ernst & Young has drawn up an overview of public policy evaluation practices and prospects in Europe in 2008.

Previous surveys on the subject (including our 1996 *Survey on European Programme Evaluations* and 2005 *Overview on French Practices*) outlined the main areas in which improvements needed to be made in the field of evaluation:

- ▶ Methodology
- ▶ Financial and organizational resources
- ▶ Follow-up of evaluation
- ▶ Communication of conclusions
- ▶ Political support

The present 2008 survey reports on the progress observed in these fields. It is the first survey relating to public policies evaluation to have been conducted on a European-wide scale, presenting the situation in European countries and some practices of the European Commission.



**Arnould Bertrand**  
Partner, Ernst & Young France  
Head of Government Services

## Key results

- 1.** 86% of respondents consider that **awareness to evaluation practices has increased** in Europe.
- 2.** The primary purpose of evaluation is to **improve the management, effectiveness and efficiency of a policy** (65% of respondents).
- 3.** Legal constraints seem to be the major catalyst in the development of evaluation. The need for insight prior to decision-making is also a key factor.
- 4.** **Three main groups** can be identified in Europe: the “Anglo-Saxon” pioneers with a management approach to evaluation, the “Continental” who are achieving great progress toward results-based management, and the “Easterners” introduced to evaluation by their accession to Europe.
- 5.** **European Commission programmes** are the most frequently evaluated policies.
- 6.** **Parliaments** have to date taken little advantage of developments in evaluation.
- 7.** Although the quality of evaluation reports is assessed positively (75% of respondents), few evaluations provide real significant inputs.
- 8.** A good evaluator should combine strong **sectorial knowledge** and **methodological expertise**.
- 9.** Evaluation does not systematically **impact the decision-making** process because of a lack of political appropriation and insufficient follow-up of recommendations.
- 10.** The European Commission’s evaluation system appears as a strong best practice with regard to a systematic evaluation process, the development of impact assessment and publicity prior to decision-making.

# Sample composition and methodology

**Ernst & Young has examined the place of public policy evaluation in public governance today.**

**The purpose of the survey is to obtain a clear overview of evaluation practices throughout Europe and identify prospects for medium and long-term development.**

## Scope of the study

The data collection was conducted during the second half of 2007, through two complementary approaches:

- ▶ A broad online survey, designed to collect quantitative information on perceptions regarding public policy evaluation practices across Europe. A significant and representative sample of 1,050 decision-makers, civil servants and academics was surveyed, including representatives from EU institutions

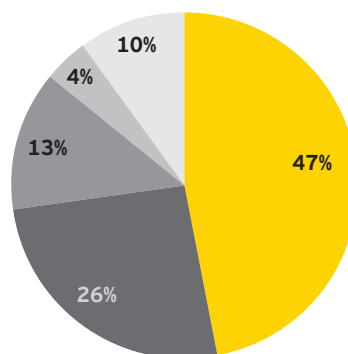
and from 11 European countries: Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland and Spain. The total response rate was 25%.

- ▶ Research and personal interviews with policy-makers and key stakeholders in the field of public policy evaluation, aimed at obtaining qualitative information.

## Breakdown of sample

The sample of respondents was composed of key stakeholders involved in the field of public policy evaluation.

### *Position of respondents*



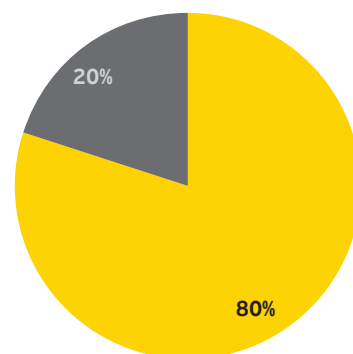
- Senior civil servant
- Civil servant in charge of performance evaluation
- Academic, NGO
- Elected representative
- Other (e.g., evaluators, consultants)

Charts and tables source:  
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Most respondents belong to bodies involved in the implementation of evaluated policies.

80% of respondents had already taken part in a public policy evaluation, either as the evaluator or the evaluatee, and therefore have good knowledge of the topic.

*Share of respondents involved in public policy evaluation*

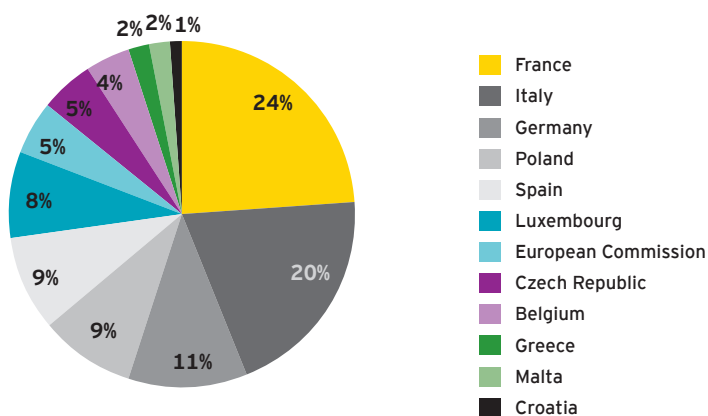


■ Involved  
■ Not involved

The sample was composed of 11 European nationalities, comprising 3 new Member States and an EU accession candidate country, as well as representatives of the European Commission. 44% of respondents were French or Italian.

The data collected through additional interviews and research (which comprised numerous insights from British and Scandinavian stakeholders) ensured that the study was geographically representative.

*Nationality of respondents*



The final sample covers 11 European nationalities, plus the European Commission.

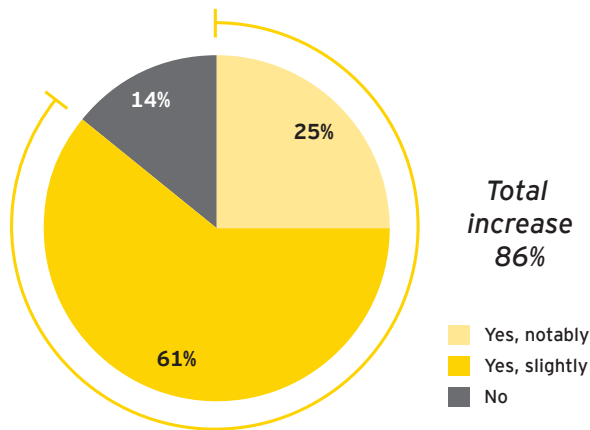
# A growing practice in Europe

Public policy evaluation practices are in a developmental stage across Europe

Sensitivity towards public policy evaluation has increased in Europe

*Has awareness to public policy evaluation increased in your institution?*

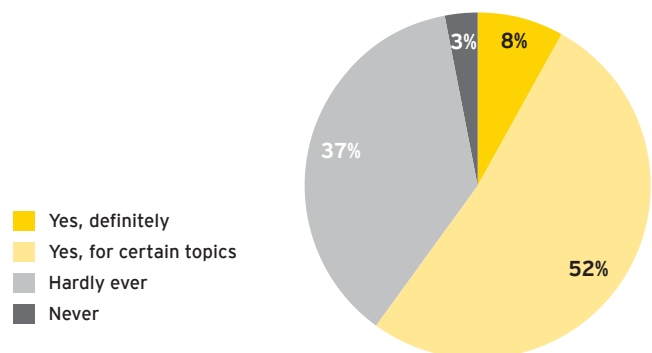
86% of respondents consider that awareness to evaluation practices has increased.



This increase in awareness to evaluation corresponds to a real need for a new public governance

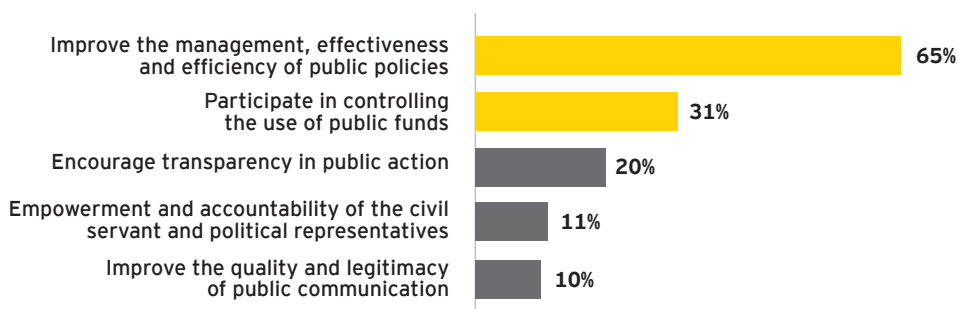
More than 50% of elected representatives express a need for public policy evaluation: this is strongly linked to a call for a new results-based public governance.

*Do you think there is a need for public policy evaluation expressed by elected representatives?*



### **What are the main roles of public evaluation?**

*(Several possible answers)*



**For a large majority of respondents (65%), the primary purpose of evaluation is to improve the management, effectiveness and efficiency of a policy.**

This opinion reflects an acknowledgment of the need for evaluation in a global context of public finance constraints and economic slowdown.

So far, improving transparency and communication in public actions is not a priority ascribed to evaluation.

The survey also demonstrates that controlling the use of public funds is no longer the major objective assigned to evaluation.

# Evaluation developments echo the need for a renewed public governance in a new legal framework

Evaluation practices in Europe vary significantly according to the organizational models in which public policies are framed, and reflect a diversity of political cultures and institutional structures.

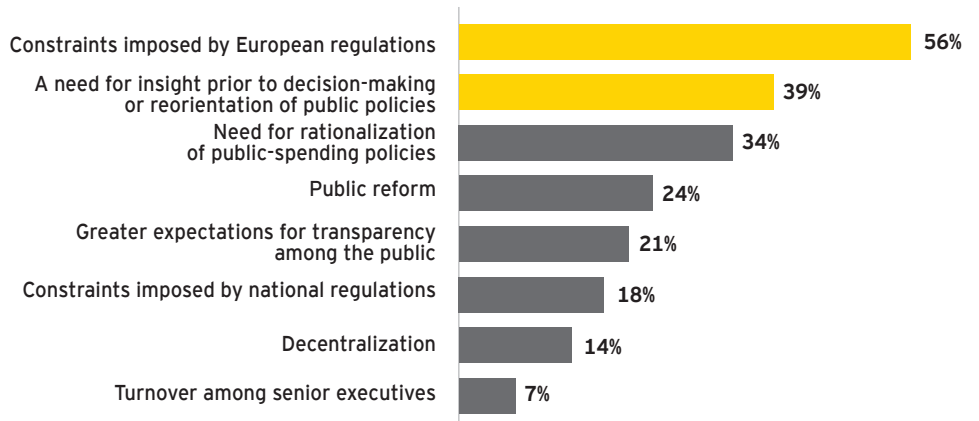
The growing need for evaluation in Europe has been prompted by regulation and the pursuit of performance

The survey brings into light two significant phenomena that coexist in a number of countries:

- ▶ Legal constraints -originating both from EU institutions and Member States- are often considered as the major catalyst in the development of evaluation;

- ▶ The growing need to back public decision-making with impact assessments and to master public spending also acts as a major determinant in this growing interest in evaluation.

*What are the main reasons for the increasing sensitivity to public policy evaluation?*



## Focus

### Major developments for evaluation in France

Historically, the European legal framework has played a key role in the development of evaluation practices in France. More recently, the urge to balance public accounts has encouraged a shift towards evaluation.

- ▶ At level of the central government administration, two recent developments illustrate this trend :
  - A Comprehensive review of public policies (Révision générale des

politiques publiques) was initiated by the government in July 2007 in order to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of French public policies and organizations as a whole.

- A Secretary of State in charge of forward planning, evaluation of public policies, and development of the digital economy established in the government. His role is to give impetus to, and coordinate, public policy assessment in France.
- ▶ The responsibility of the French Parliament in the field of evaluation was strengthened

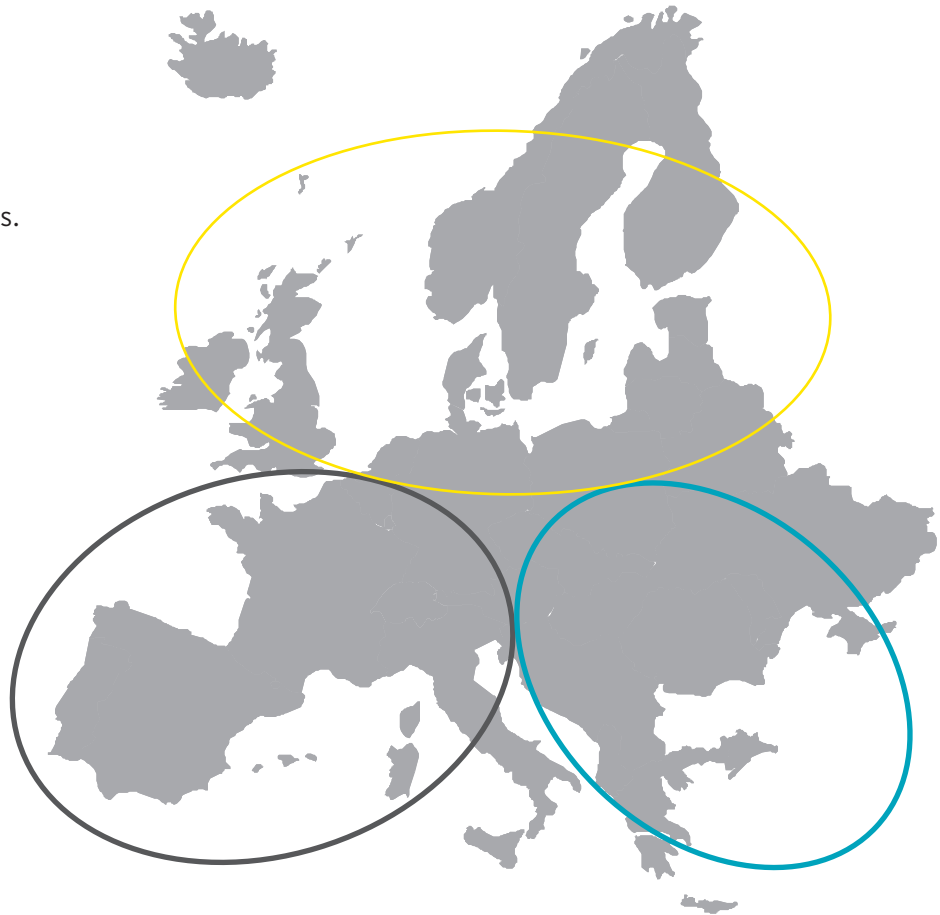
by the new Constitutional bylaw on Budget Acts which set the framework for the budget and public accounts from 2006. A dedicated evaluation team may soon be appointed to carry out impact assessment studies prior to policy implementation as well as ex post evaluations.

- ▶ The French Court of Auditors is in charge of ensuring sound budget management and issuing reports on selected public policies in a spirit similar to that of evaluation, with an emphasis on cost-effectiveness.

## A contrasting situation across Europe

The two trends do not operate as significantly in all Member States, and their impacts vary greatly according to the national historical, institutional and cultural backgrounds.

Three groups of countries can be identified in this respect.



► **In Continental Europe,** notably in Italy, France and Germany, EU regulations have played a significant role in the development of evaluation practices. These countries currently initiate policies which reflect a desire to ensure the coherence, quality and cost-effectiveness of public programmes.

► **In the UK and Northern European countries,** an Anglo-Saxon model of evaluation is widespread, enacting the principles of the New Public Management and the “value for money” approach. Its development is backed by a strong political will, motivated by the need to ensure performance under growingly stringent budgetary constraints.

► **In Eastern Europe** and especially new Member States, evaluation, while remaining a rare practice, is gaining momentum as a consequence of the regulations shaping the use of cohesion funds.



## Focus

### The central impetus behind evaluation in Spain

Since its creation in 2006, the State Agency for Evaluation of Public Policies and Service Quality (AEVAL) has enabled the institutional development of evaluation in Spain.

The AEVAL is a public organization attached to the Ministry for Public Administration through its office holder. The Ministry for Public Administration, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of the Presidency, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, as well as representatives of autonomous communities, trade unions and independent professionals are members of the governing board.

The main functions of the AEVAL are to:

- ▶ Perform the evaluation of public policies and programmes assigned yearly by the Council of Ministers
- ▶ Perform an annual evaluation on the results of the National Reform Programme's main activities
- ▶ Prepare and broadcast an evaluation report of all the public services analysed yearly by the Observatory and on the quality of public services as a whole

Coordination at the central level has provided greater leverage for the development of evaluation. This has also been the case in Italy.

### United Kingdom

New Public Management theories have led to the development of managerial evaluation practices in the United Kingdom, promoting cost-efficient public spending.

Gradually, the various government departments (e.g., health, security, education) also started defining their own evaluation objectives and methodologies. In all fields of public policies, the expertise of academics, professionals and members of public administration played a key role in the methodological strengthening and institutionalization of evaluation.

Performance tools and criteria are now focused on improving the quality of public services and on the growing need to evaluate the success of policy in terms of effective changes and improvements for the beneficiaries.

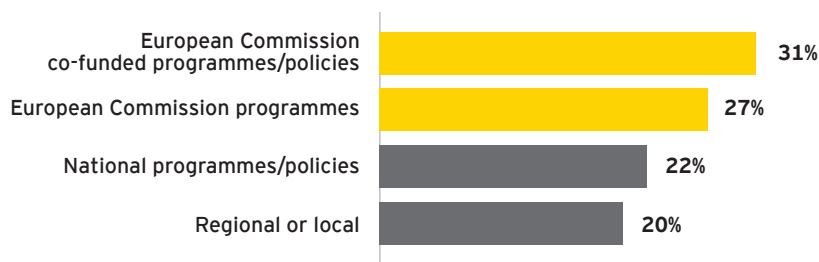
## This need for evaluation finds its best application within European Commission programmes

For 31% of respondents, the main types of programmes to be evaluated are European Commission - or co-funded). A majority of evaluations (58%) deals with European policies at European or national levels.

National policies are less subject to evaluations (according to 22% of respondents).

### *What kind of programmes or policies are evaluated most frequently in your country?*

Rank in order from 1 (the most frequently evaluated) to 4 (the least)



## Focus

### **The European Commission still represents a best practice for evaluation**

Within the European Commission, each Directorate General (DG) is in charge of organising the evaluation of the policies and programmes it implements. Evaluations are usually published and communicated to the European parliament.

Evaluation is mandatory for all EU-spending at different stages (ex ante, mid-term and ex post) and impact assessments for new regulations are almost systematically performed.

Most DGs have their own specialized evaluation unit and the Directorate General for Budget (DG Budget) is responsible for providing the impetus, coordination and methodological tools necessary for the proper conduct of evaluations.

The DG Budget coordinates and plans evaluation activities through a yearly *Commission Forward Evaluation Programme* that foresees the number of evaluations to be carried out over the six years following the period in which the programme is published. The DG Budget contributes to the planning of evaluation activities but also participates in improving evaluation methodologies.

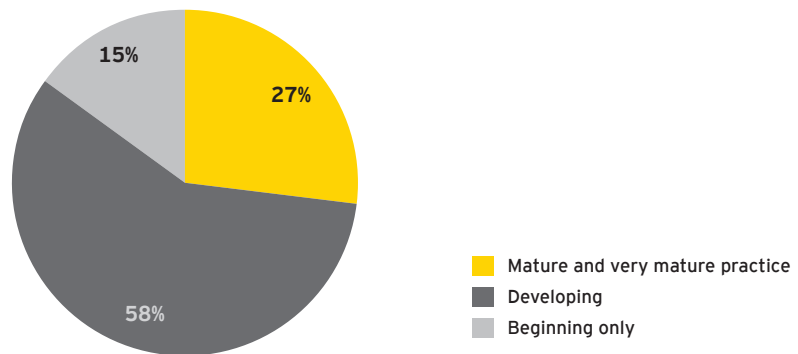
## Evaluation practices remain incomplete and are characterized by various levels of maturity

Public policy evaluation practices are still in a stage of development

Only 27% of respondents consider that public policy evaluation is already a mature or very mature practice. For 58% of respondents, public policy evaluation is still in a stage of development.

This situation shows how New Public Management is being implemented progressively throughout Europe. The difference in development stages may be linked to the variation in the history of public governance across Europe.

*What is the overall situation of public policy evaluation in your country?*



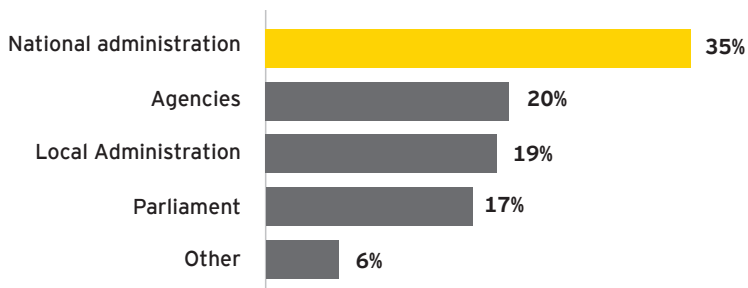
The level of awareness to evaluation varies among stakeholders...

For one-third of respondents, national administrations are the institutions most aware of policy evaluation in their countries.

Parliaments seem more cautious in that field, taking little advantage of evaluation to strengthen their roles.

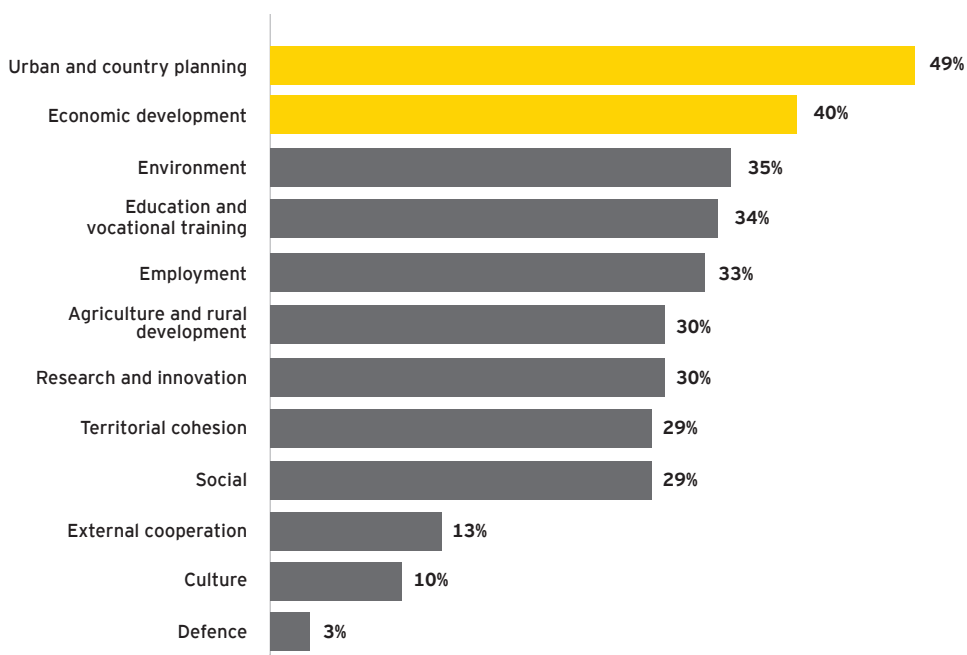
*Which public institutions are the most aware of public policy evaluation?*

Rank in order from 1 (the most aware) to 5 (the least)



## ... and among sectors and policies

### Which sectors are evaluated most frequently in your country?



Territorial development programmes (urban and country planning, economic development) are most often evaluated.

- ▶ A first category is made up of commonly evaluated sectors, usually linked to territorial policies that are co-funded by the EU funds :
  - Urban and rural planning
  - Economic development
  - Environment protection
  - Education and employment
- ▶ A second category corresponds to dynamic sectors - research and innovation, territorial cohesion and social sector - that are increasingly subject to evaluation; this sector, as a priority for most European governments, has historically been the most evaluated sector since the early development of public policy analysis.
- ▶ Finally, a third category gathers less commonly evaluated sectors, such as cooperation, culture and defence.

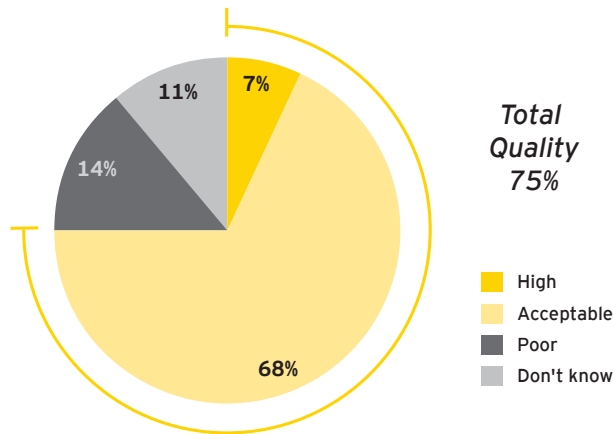
# Strengths and weaknesses of evaluation practices

Quality and methodology are on the rise but there is still room for improvement

The overall quality of evaluation reports is improving

*How do you generally rate the quality of the evaluation reports?*

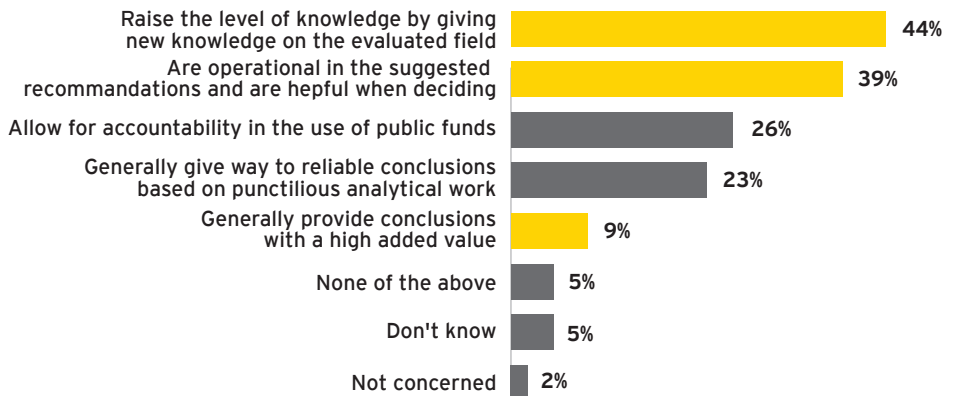
On the one hand, the quality of evaluation reports is rated positively by 75% of the respondents (high quality - 7%; acceptable quality - 68%).



On the other hand, the survey shows that, for only 9% of the respondents, evaluation reports provide high added value.

These findings reveal the difficulty in evaluating complex public policies and emphasize the high level of expectations of civil servants and elected representatives.

*In your opinion, evaluation reports...*



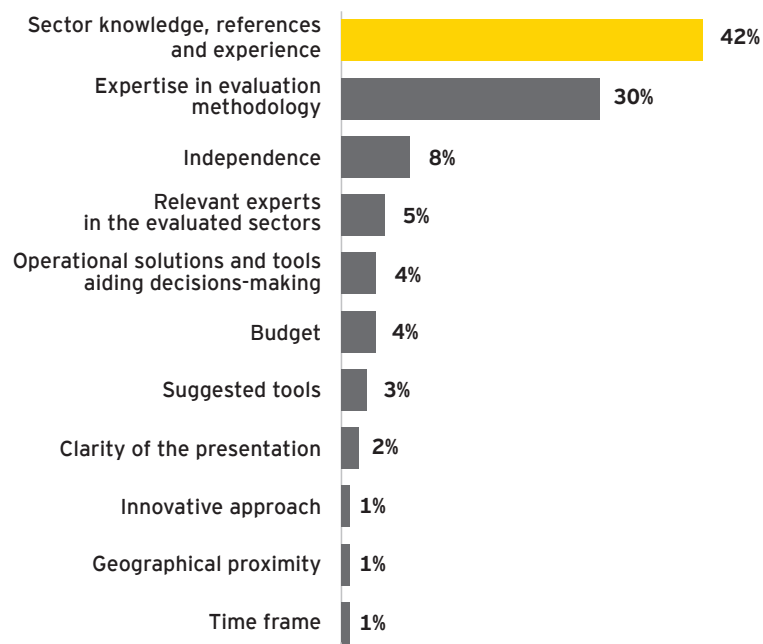
## Improving quality in evaluations requires a combination of sector-related knowledge and methodological expertise

The survey shows that the most decisive criteria for choosing an evaluator are:

- ▶ Sector-related knowledge which is essential to understand policy objectives, specifications and complexity.
- ▶ Evaluation methodology expertise which must be adapted to these specifications.

### *What are the main quality criteria for an evaluator?*

*Rank in order from 1 (the main quality criteria) to 11 (the least)*



## Main methodological approaches and tools are still standard

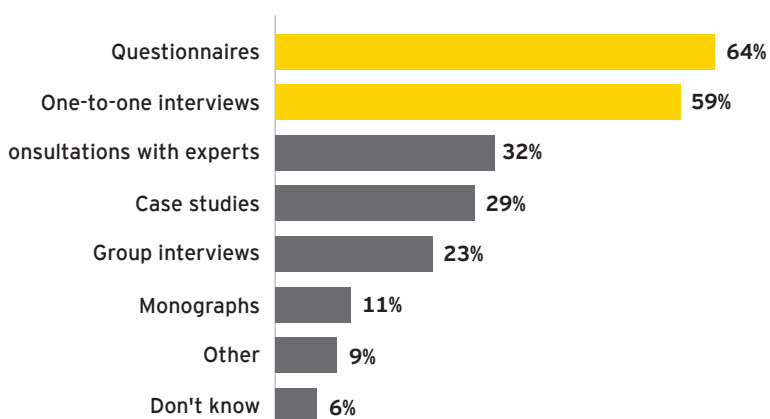
### Most data collection and data analysis tools used by evaluators are standard tools.

Evaluators mostly rely on questionnaires and in-depth interviews to collect data.

Expert consultation, case studies and group interviews are less frequently used.

However, these tools are proven to be complementary, particularly where qualitative and quantitative approaches are used in tandem.

### *What are the main data collection tools used?*



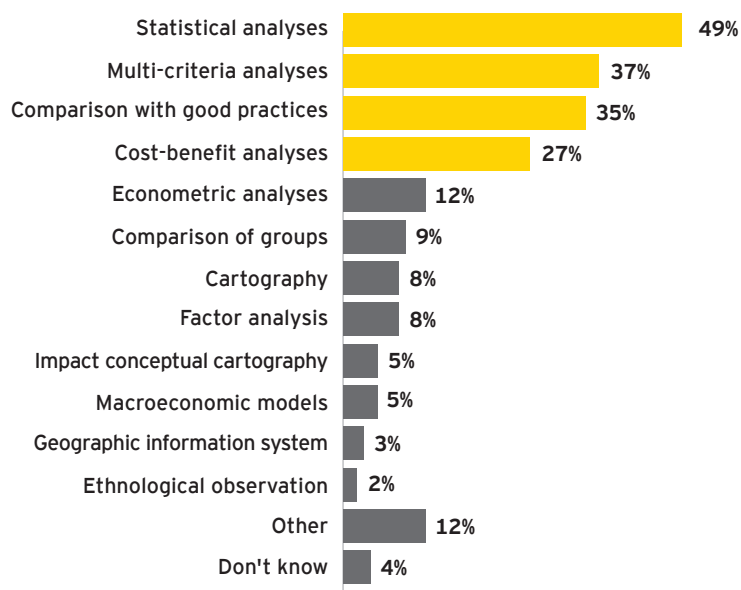


The most complex analysis tools (economic and econometric models, mapping, econometric tools, geographical information system) appear to be underused by evaluators, although they may strengthen the

results of evaluations and provide better support for conclusions.

Lack of data and limited resources dedicated to the evaluation process may explain this low level of use.

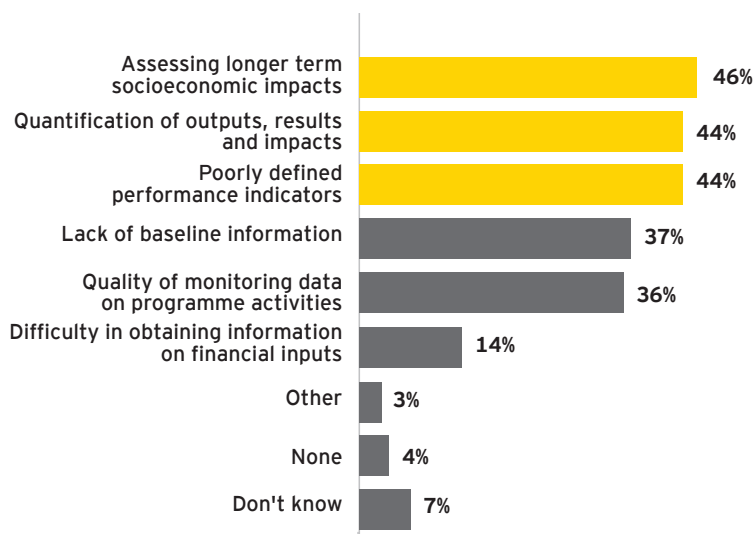
*What are the main advanced tools used for evaluation?*



The greatest expectations are the most difficult to satisfy: evaluating impacts is difficult as previous quantification and definition of performance indicators are rarely performed and data rarely available.

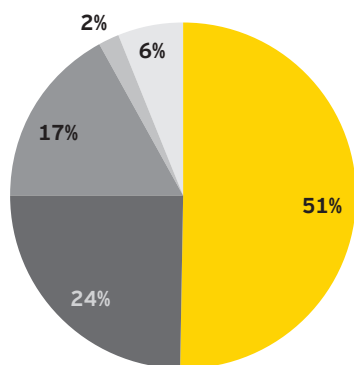
The lack of use of elaborate evaluation tools contributes to the problem in reaching an accurate measure of the impacts of public policies.

*What are the main methodological difficulties that you have already faced?*

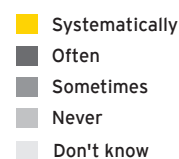


After sector-related knowledge and evaluation methodology, independence is the third most-quoted criterion for an evaluator

*Do you think public policy evaluation should be carried out in an independent way?*



According to 51% of respondents, public policy evaluation should be systematically carried out in an independent way. Therefore, most evaluations are performed by external bodies, either public or private.



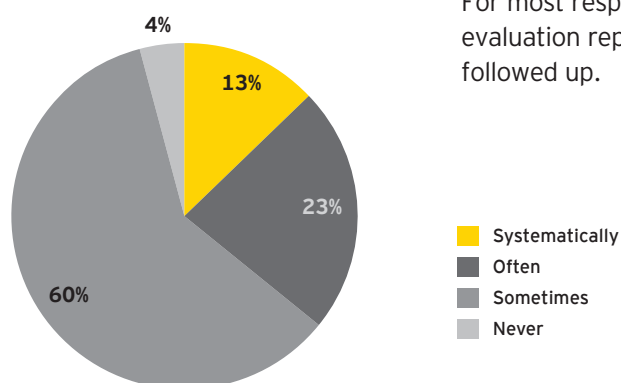
## The part played by evaluation in the policy-making process remains insufficient

**Although public policies evaluation practices are extremely diverse across Europe, evaluation does not systematically help in improving decision-making processes.**

To incorporate evaluation successfully into public governance, not only should evaluation reports be of high quality, but conclusions and operational recommendations should also be implemented, disseminated and taken into account when considering future policy developments.

### Effective follow-up of recommendations is not systematic

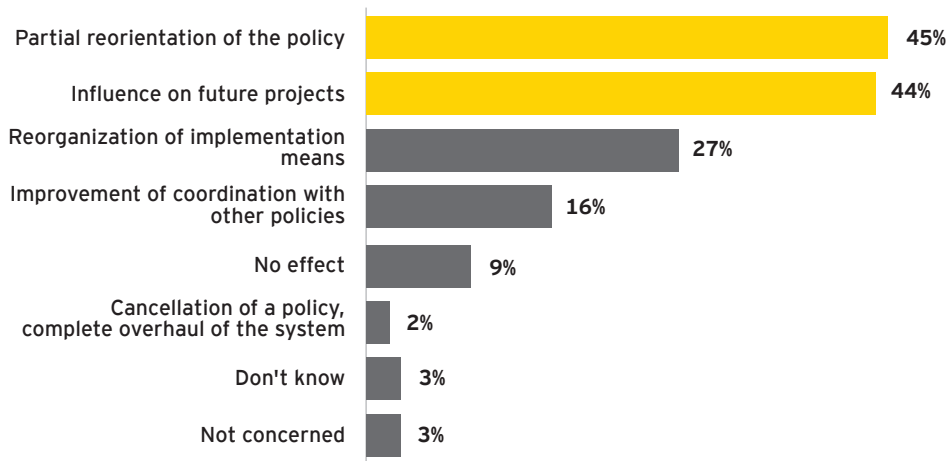
*Is there an effective follow-up of the evaluation report?*



For most respondents (60%), the evaluation reports are only partially followed up.

However, most of the respondents recognize the importance of the consequences brought about by evaluation, i.e., a partial reframing of policies (45%) and an influence on future projects (44%).

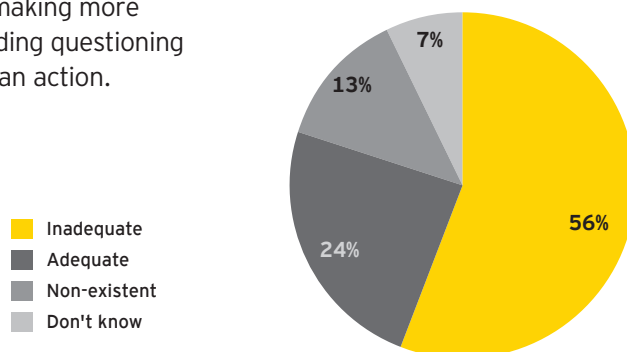
*What are the most frequent consequences of the conclusions?*



**The use of evaluation reports in the policy-making process is still inadequate**

It is crucial that evaluation practices and conclusions be appropriated at the level of elected representatives in order to make evaluation a helpful tool. They should be used, for instance, to adjust the implementation of an intervention or in making more radical changes, including questioning the existence of such an action.

*Would you say the evaluation in your country is taken into account in the policy-making decision in a way that is...*



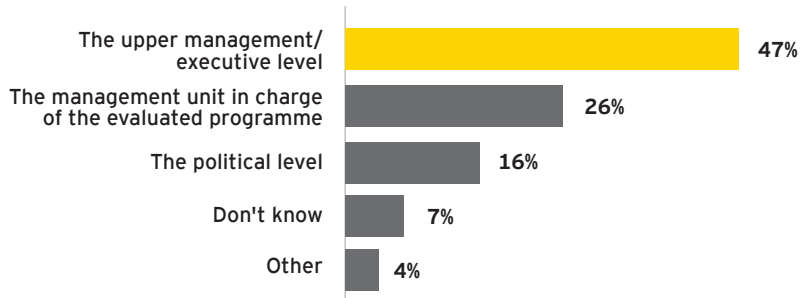


## Consideration of evaluation practices at political level is lacking

Evaluations are first and foremost launched following a decision by upper-level managers (47%).

Governments and parliaments are rarely involved in initiating evaluation processes (16%), suggesting a lack of appropriation.

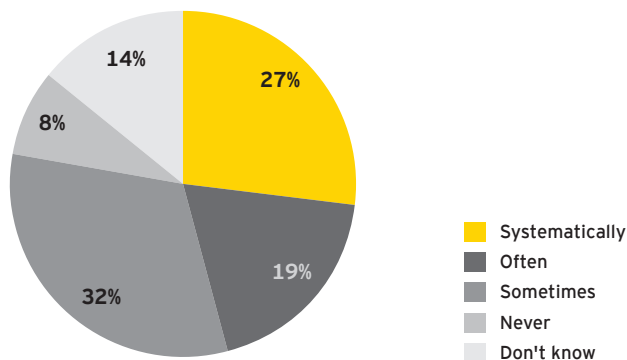
### Who is in charge of deciding to launch evaluation?



## Communication and dissemination of results remain unsystematic

The survey shows that the publication of evaluation results is rarely systematic (27%) even though this dissemination seems to play a critical part in improving transparency in public governance.

### Do you publish evaluation reports?



# Moving forward: recommendations to improve evaluation practices

## Evaluation practices should be systematic and mandatory

Experience shows that rules and regulations are a major driving force behind the promotion of public policy evaluation by political decision-makers. Through the evaluation of EU funds, a strong evaluation governance has been established in the European institutions and among the stakeholders involved in the management of EU funds at national level.

This system has generated an evaluation practice that is now mature, systematic and organised at the European Commission level.

In many countries, it has enabled the gradual implementation of an evaluation culture whereby policies are submitted to periodic evaluation in accordance with regulation.

Such conclusions should encourage policy-makers to make evaluation practices systematic and mandatory, as soon as evaluation is deemed necessary, at the various levels of public intervention, i.e., local, territorial, regional and national.

### Focus

#### Evaluation and the experience of a new Member State

The past few years has seen an exponential increase of evaluation activities in Malta. The need for independent evaluations have come about mainly as a result of EU assistance to Malta in the run up to, and following EU membership. These activities have covered not only programmes such as the Pre-Accession, Transition Facility Programmes but also projects falling under the Structural and Cohesion Funds.

Moreover, independent evaluation is not only being carried out on the larger national projects but also at a local level in various EU co-financed projects, in areas such as education, environment, justice and home affairs and equal opportunities.

This illustrates the need for public authorities to be sensitized to independent evaluation processes. EU accession has thus provided a large impetus in the development of both evaluation activities and service capacity in Malta.



## A semi-normative framework should be set up

By nature a complex discipline, public policy evaluation draws from various fields, including social sciences and economic modeling. Moreover, evaluation targets policies that concern numerous and heterogeneous sectors, and involve different approaches, depending on the type of evaluation required (e.g., ex ante, ex post, cost-benefit analysis, impact analysis).

Therefore, although the survey shows that evaluation practices are spreading throughout Europe, some features are being criticized, such as the kind of data collection and analysis tools used and the effective appropriation of the results.

**This paradox makes it necessary for evaluators to strive to achieve a semi-normative framework.**

Such a framework could enable:

- ▶ The harmonization of certain rules
- ▶ The elaboration of common principles and approaches

- ▶ The standardization of tools (as provided in the European Commission's reference guides)
- ▶ The elaboration of common guidelines on the types of data that are required to perform an evaluation exercise (e.g., financial and physical data on the outputs, socioeconomic data regarding the context).

In this field, the European Commission plays a key role in developing innovative methodological approaches and tools, such as a systematic evaluation of national and/or regional programmes, a mandatory final evaluation before the renewal of any programme, methodological investigations, definitions of quality standards or working papers about new analysis tools.

## Greater professionalization of stakeholders is needed

The improvement of evaluation tools should go hand in hand with greater professionalization.

Gradually, the required skills and typical profile of evaluators are becoming clearer. New academic programmes devoted to evaluation are being created and integrated into comprehensive university courses or specialized master's degrees. These initiatives contribute to the development of practices and the professionalization of methods and tools.

**However, although the evaluation profession is gradually achieving greater structure, the challenge of the years to come, beyond the afore-mentioned development, is to give policy evaluation the status of a peer-recognized discipline in the academic, scientific and consulting worlds.**

### Focus

#### **The coordination of the structural funds evaluation in Italy**

The National Evaluation System (NES) constitutes a set of support activities, technical and methodological guidelines aimed at improving and enhancing evaluation activities. The system is responsible for putting forward proposals on the methodology, guidance and monitoring of evaluation activities linked to European Structural Funds.

Both managing authorities and evaluators agree that the NES made a significant contribution to the Mid-term Evaluation of Structural Funds 2000-06, given that:

- ▶ The NES defined the schedule for the various stages of the mid-term evaluation process. The award of the national performance reserve was linked to the observance of deadlines and the quality of the mid-term evaluation reports
- ▶ The NES drafted guidelines to support the mid-term evaluation process

The importance of Structural & Cohesion funds in Italy and the linked obligation to evaluate these programmes have been a key driver for an elaborate evaluation organization.



## The use of impact assessments should be generalized

In the future, it would be useful to back all new regulation projects with ex ante evaluations in order to demonstrate their contribution and usefulness clearly, as performed by the European Commission and some European countries.

**This obligation to perform rigorous impact assessments should be extended to all countries.**

Such a crucial tool could dramatically improve the quality of regulatory decision-making, by providing a framework for the systematic assessment of potential or actual impacts resulting from regulations and policies.

### Focus

#### Regulatory Impact Analysis (RIA) in the United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom, RIAs must be completed for all policy changes, whether European or domestic, that could affect the public or private sectors, charities, the voluntary sector or small businesses. In the vast majority of cases, consultation periods are at least 12 weeks long, enabling more time for responses and more people to be involved.

Draft RIAs are published on internet sites for maximum public access, and test panels are also consulted in order to collect opinions from relevant stakeholders.

Since 2005, the United Kingdom has restructured and strengthened its RIA review and challenge capacities. As an incentive to monitor RIA adequately, a Public Service Agreement target (i.e., performance measure) was set, requiring the Cabinet Office to achieve 100% compliance with RIA requirements.

## Evaluation results should be disseminated to the general public

**The implementation of evaluations should entail cooperation and communication with different stakeholders and with European citizens and taxpayers. It is an essential part of the political process which contributes to dialogue, debate and transparency.**

Evaluation often brings to light the achievements of policy actions and abstracts of these data can be used to demonstrate the added value of public policies.

Communication to the public and media should take the form of short summary reports focusing on results, the impact on daily life and sustainability.

For this purpose, evaluation units and operational units need to cooperate closely with the information and communication units.



## Political appropriation should be strengthened

As they are involved in major political orientations, it is in the best interest of political decision-makers to encourage a responsive environment for evaluation. This enables them to respond to requests for transparency and accountability, by ensuring that:

- ▶ Their political goals are translated into a set of measurable objectives
- ▶ The expected results are clearly defined
- ▶ The resources needed are adequately assessed
- ▶ Implementation is indeed taking place
- ▶ The results and outcomes of policies are clearly communicated

On the other hand, political decision-makers need to have a clear idea of what they expect from public policy evaluations, to set precise terms of reference, to assume responsibility for their outcomes and to take them into consideration in the decision-making process.

**Ultimately, political decision-makers have a key role to play in promoting the culture of evaluation in public institutions and administrations. Parliaments could also seize this opportunity to require the realization of impact assessments and regular evaluations to strengthen their position towards governments.**

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This survey was carried out by Ernst & Young, under the direction of Arnauld Bertrand with the participation of Gaëlle de Carmantrand, Christina Castella and the marketing team.

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0804SG384 - Studio Ernst & Young

Printed on ecological non-chloride paper.

EYG no. DK0009

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