



# ► Implications of COVID-19 on evaluations in the ILO

## ► Practical tips on adapting to the situation

20 March 2020 (v.1)

24 April 2020 (v.3)





## 1. Introduction

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**The current COVID-19 pandemic severely restricts the mobility of staff and consultants. The ILO has introduced teleworking arrangements and strict travel restrictions for ILO staff depending on the criticality of the mission and the risks associated with it.**

The need for teleworking and restrictions on travel make it nearly impossible to move staff and consultants across regions. Before the onset of this crisis, the Evaluation Office (EVAL) had already been reviewing how it could reduce travel for evaluation work based on environmental concerns. **Experience so far suggests that network technology clearly only provides a partial answer to the dilemma of distance and that the human element in data collection techniques cannot be underestimated.**

In response to the crisis and building on past experience EVAL has identified key scenarios on how to conduct decentralized evaluations. Within those scenarios, reliance on online methods (online surveys, telephone or skype interviews) and the use of national consultants to facilitate fieldwork have taken higher prominence. **Enhanced and considerate engagement and collaboration with Country Offices and project teams throughout the evaluation process will be required.**

While evaluation has to adjust to the COVID-19 response and the focus of ILO is now on how to repurpose activities, the role of evaluation remains valid in documenting the results of past investment. This includes their relevance to the COVID-19 response as ILO moves forward and how ILO has adapted its programmes in response to the Covid19 crisis and the results of that response. Credible independent evaluations at all levels in the midst of the crisis can be an important input into future decisions within ILO and by development partners post Covid19.

This document provides internal guidance to Regional Evaluation Officers (REOs), Departmental Evaluation

Focal Points (DEFPs), Senior Evaluation Officers (SEOs) and other colleagues involved on in the planning, conducting and managing of ongoing and planned decentralized evaluations. **As a context driven document in a rapidly changing environment, pragmatism and common sense will need to prevail and guidance adjusted as the context changes.** It is important to point out as well that the [formal ILO procedure](#) on how to operate during the crisis takes priority.

See also: [COVID-19: Guidance on Development Cooperation project implementation and delivery](#)

Three steps are suggested in order to assess the required level of adaptation:

- ▶ Evaluate the assumptions in terms of “constraints/limitations”: Assessment of the probability of no occurrence of each assumption (low, medium, high).
- ▶ Evaluate the assumptions in terms of “mission critical”: Relative importance of the assumption in relation with the achievement of the decentralized project’s outcomes (low, medium, high).
- ▶ Use the matrix (found below) to determine the scenario and the corresponding adaptations that apply to the evaluation in question.

## ▶ 2. Definition of terms

The X-axis of the matrix, found below, is labelled “constraints/ limitations”. The Y- axis is labelled “mission critical.” Those terms are defined below:

- ▶ **“Constraints and limitations”**: Relates to travel restrictions, connectivity issues for online data gathering, the absence of qualified or available consultants, the absence of reliable contact lists, instances when there is no ILO country presence, etc.
- ▶ **“Mission critical”**: Relates to the importance of the evaluation and the timeliness of its results to the continuity of ILO activities, inputs into critical decisions to support the continuation of projects, inputs into critical governance documents, etc.



**Risk matrix: Constraints and risks as measured against the criticality of the evaluation to the ILO**

<b>Mission critical</b>	High	Operations continue with enhanced priority <b>3</b>	Hybrid - remote/ face-to- face <b>5</b>	Totally remote <b>7</b>
	Medium	Operations continue with caution <b>2</b>	Hybrid- remote/face-to- face <b>4</b>	Totally remote <b>6</b>
	Low	Operations continue with caution <b>1</b>	Reschedule <b>8</b>	Cancel <b>9</b>
		Low	Medium	High
		<b>Constraints/Limitations</b>		

### Nine key scenarios emerging from the risk matrix

	SCENARIO	ADAPTATION	ROLES	TOOLS
Adaptation	1.	Operations continue with caution	No change	
	2.			
	3.	Operations continue with enhanced priority	No change	
	4.	Hybrid— remote/face- to-face data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ International consultant to conduct remote interviews</li> <li>▶ International consultant to conduct remote interviews</li> <li>▶ Project management to provide stakeholder contact information</li> <li>▶ National consultant to conduct limited face-to-face interviews or</li> <li>▶ Phased interview and data collection process to allow remote interviews during travel restrictions and face-to-face interview and data collection at a second stage</li> </ul>	  
	5.	Hybrid— remote/face- to-face data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ International consultant to conduct remote interviews</li> <li>▶ Project management to provide stakeholder contact information</li> <li>▶ National consultant to conduct limited face-to-face interviews</li> <li>▶ Phased consultation process to allow remote interviews during travel restrictions and face-to-face consultation at a second stage</li> </ul>	  
	6.	Totally remote	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ International consultant and national consultant conduct remote interviews</li> <li>▶ Web-based surveys</li> </ul>	
	7.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Project management to provide stakeholder contact information</li> </ul>	
Reschedule	8.	Reschedule (with EVAL's sign off)	To be negotiated	 
Cancel	9.	Cancel (with EVAL's approval)	No roles	No tools

**KEY:**

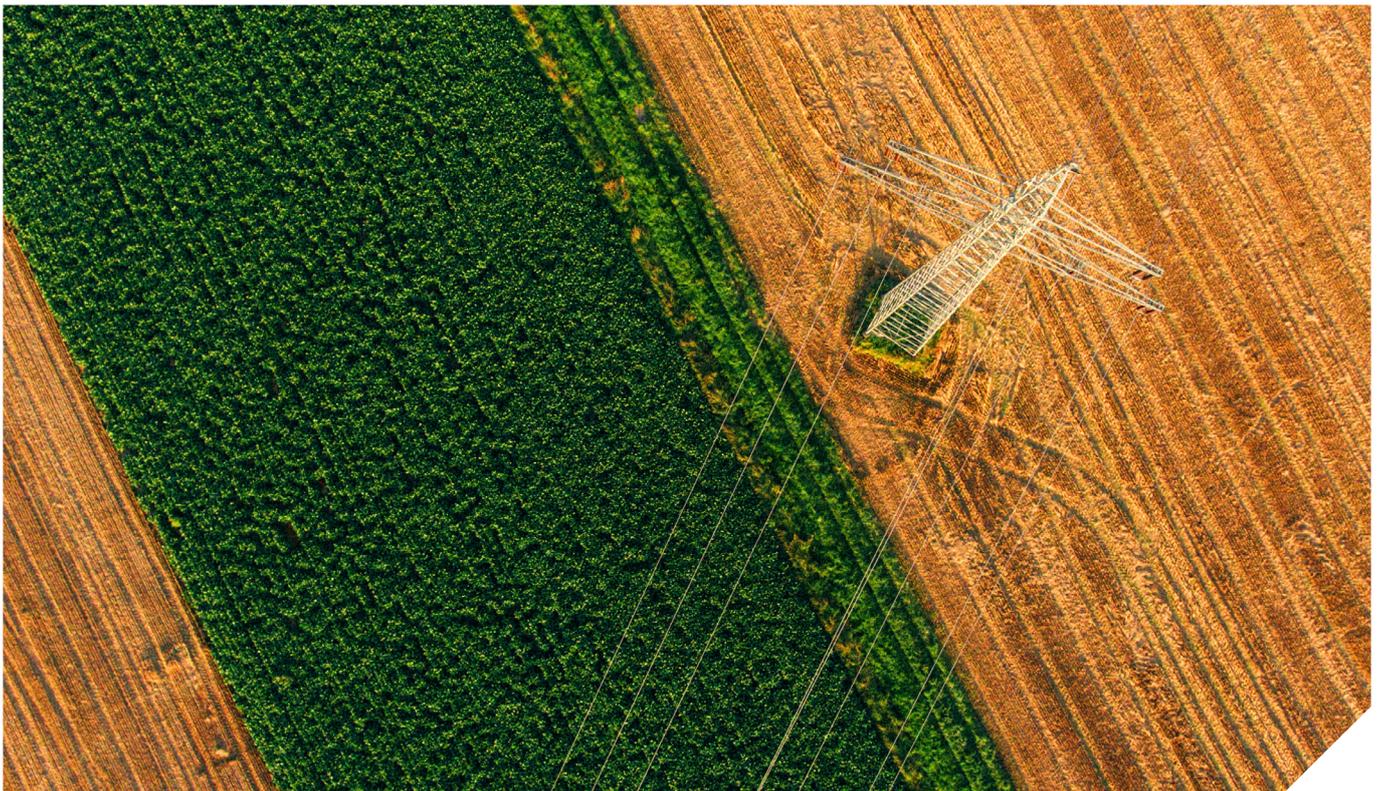
-  Usual toolkit
-  Skype, S4Biz or ZOOM
-  Survey Monkey or similar tool
-  IOCE website to help identify national consultants
-  Doodle or similar planning tool
-  Ensure budget is secured. See also Annex II

### ▶ 3. Strategic considerations for adaptation:

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**Any strategy to be put in place in order to cope with the challenges posed to evaluative work needs to ensure the following:**

- ▶ Clarity on the functions and responsibilities of the REO/DEFP, SEO and the Responsible Official for the development, implementation and follow-up of the revised evaluation strategy in a timely manner.
- ▶ The constraints as measured against importance, deadlines and timelines including implications for a possible backlog and accountability gap when rescheduling or in worst-case scenarios cancelling evaluations.
- ▶ A good understanding of the conditions to be achieved to have an acceptable level of adaptation. The resources needed to carry out the planned adaptations.
- ▶ The identification of possibilities to cluster evaluations so the numbers of evaluations and interactions between evaluators and stakeholders in a given country can be reduced (always in coordination with REOs or DEFPs and EVAL).
- ▶ The understanding that the decisions to reschedule or to cancel cannot be taken in isolation and should be endorsed by EVAL as the accountability entity for application of evaluation policy ([eval@ilo.org](mailto:eval@ilo.org)).
- ▶ An assessment of whether the adaptation will compromise minimum quality standards for the type of evaluation and whether it will still lead to a credible evaluation.



## ▶ 4. Lessons learned, methodological considerations and opportunities

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Part of the reason crises do not always receive the attention they deserve from an evaluation perspective is because gathering data during such period is not easy. **When things are going well interlocutors are keen to share success stories and strategies but when a crisis hits and a turnaround is needed there is less time and interest to look into evaluative questions** as the focus is on the response. EVAL has collated [experience and lessons learned from evaluations of projects that addressed the fall-out of the 2008 economic crisis](#). Whether some of the lessons learned during that crisis are transferable to the current one is debatable but certainly worth to assess.

A process of **gathering experience to share real time lessons learned and innovative practices** in terms of relevant questions and approaches with undertaking evaluations under the current challenging conditions has started as well on [EVAL's Knowledge Sharing Platform](#).

### Process focussed learning we need to take into account:

- ▶ The challenges faced by our constituents and colleagues in coping with the crises and formulating a response is overwhelming. The importance of evaluations as an essential part of results-based management and continuous learning needs to be reiterated throughout the process. Projects are encouraged to document, to the extent possible, learning about how the repurposing and adjustment of activities to be place and what good practices have come out of this. Techniques such as **bundling of interviews for various evaluations to reduce the burden on colleagues and constituents need to be considered whenever possible**.
  - ▶ The **use of online methods** requires good connectivity, tools, and most of all a robust database with contact details of constituents and stakeholders. The latter may not always be available while the former can be problematic in certain countries or regions.
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- ▶ While EVAL has good networks with national consultants and their associations, the growing demand for national consultants and domestic travel restrictions is also bound to put pressure on their availability. Ethically we also need to be very careful not to put them in harm's way.
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### Methodological issues: Looking ahead based on past and emerging experience:

There are a lot of potential lessons learned about how to cope and adapt during a crisis. Summative and formative parts of the evaluation questions need to be considered in combination.

- ▶ How has the programme or project performed so far in terms of past achievements and are these achievements at risk in terms of sustainability? (Summative)
  - ▶ How are we (or can we) adapt and repurposing to the crisis –flexibility and resilience to redirect assistance and address crisis situations (formative).
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A note with (regularly updated) methodological reflections on the implications for evaluations as a result of COVID-19 can be found on [EVAL's Knowledge Sharing Platform](#). You are encouraged to share your experience on the implications of COVID-19 on evaluations in this forum. Regular updates and summaries will be produced by the moderator to extract key learnings. Key learnings will also be used for any further adjustment in evaluation approaches in the ILO in response to environmental concerns and possible efficiency gains in the evaluation process. The table below shows some of the categories of learning EVAL is exploring and some of the current pointers within these categories related to the phase of the evaluation. The note on methodological reflections will include details of the specific examples to support the key learning(s).

PHASE/STEP OR ELEMENT	POINTER/KEY LEARNING
<b>FOR EVALUATIONS BEING PLANNED AND IMPLEMENTED NOW</b>	
Terms of Reference	To include appropriate reference to the need to adjusted methodology and how the inception report will include such provisions including a revised evaluation matrix.
Planning: level of effort	The setting up of virtual interviews, preparing, and documenting these could potentially take up any level effort gains from not travelling. The evaluation team should, to the extent possible, be supported in this by a dedicated focal point if possible, and ideally an M&E function or similar based on where the evaluation is taking place.
Using national consultants –	When using national consultants, the level of effort to brief them to carry out virtual interviews in line with the requirements of the evaluation and consistently enough in terms of quality to achieve a credible evaluation needs to be considered. National consultants might also not be familiar with virtual interviews. Ensure good briefing and team formation process between international and national consultants in mixed teams, particularly as these are not likely to have worked together before, and a clear division of labour.
Identification of stakeholders	List of stakeholders should clearly indicate the role and degree of involvement of each stakeholder in the project to facilitate any prioritisation of interviews and the effort to be placed into trying to connect with those stakeholders. This should also include stakeholders that would be considered users of the project outcomes (broader contribution and sustainability) and who can provide context to the project. Brief initial electronic surveys targeted to identified stakeholders might also be possible with then more detailed virtual interviews with a sample (based on some key responses) or those indicating willingness, availability and ability (in terms of being online) to be interviewed.
Sampling	For multi-country projects – different sampling strategy - more comprehensive coverage at a more overall level in each country versus the planned detailed work in selected countries.
Inception report	Reference to flexibility to address the evaluation matrix and methodology to respond to evolving situation
Evaluation matrix (questions) – for inception report	Sources of information for each evaluation questions (EQs) – should more clearly identify the type of stakeholders that would be in the best position to provide input on the specific EQs. Methodology for each EQ – clearly reflect on whether online/virtual methodologies are justified here and can provide sufficient data. Reflecting on sources of information and methodology could lead to a decision not to address a particular EQs Consider explicit new EQs (see full note on methodological considerations for examples of such EQs): Adaptability (adaptive management) and response to changes Implications of crisis on the project – on the contribution to DWCP and national strategies – on the future DC implementation environment?
Data collection	Two-staged approach with brief interviews with the priority stakeholders initially identified and then conduct a follow-up with those identified as being able to provide detailed input, including those possibly identified in the first round of stakeholders (for instance, users of the project outcomes beyond the project). Phased approach to interviews and data collection so that different methods can be used at different stages as COVID-19 restrictions adjust. Two stage approach to explain the process and purpose of the evaluation with representatives of key stakeholder such as institutions and community leaders followed by face-to-face interviews if possible and if not, hold remote interviews with the individuals.
<b>FOR EVALUATIONS LATER AS PART OF REPURPOSING ACTIVITIES (LATER DOWN THE ROAD)</b>	
Monitoring data	Is monitoring data still being collected sufficiently and of “good enough” quality to be useful for evaluations - whether these are done now, rescheduled or in the future – is there a need for new monitoring data to be collected?
Post-crisis evaluability	Once projects (those still in place) are back to some form of normal operations, how have they changed in ways that will affect evaluability – from changes in intended/realised outcomes in response to the crisis and in particular to the changed environment and focus in national policies, priorities ? Do we need to consider some form of new evaluability assessment particularly for bigger projects? Have theories of change been adjusted or will they need to be adjusted?

## ▶ 5. In summary

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The general principle is that **evaluations are an essential part of the ILO's core business and they need to continue with proper risk-assessments and considerations of workload of constituents and staff.**

Reinforced preparations for **planned evaluations is needed**, keeping in mind constraints on constituents and colleagues;

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**Enhanced coordination** particularly between EVAL, DEFPs and REOs is fundamental to optimize evaluation processes and resources.

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Situations and conditions need to be **reviewed real-time** to determine the severity of the impact caused by COVID-19, including travel restrictions.

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▶ Contract clauses should be included to reflect the required flexibility on the part of consultants in terms of mission and data collection timelines. The contract conditions should make clear ILO's liabilities clarifying what it can cover and not cover. See also: [Instructions for contract management during the COVID-19 conditions](#).

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▶ When travel and direct contact is limited or impossible:

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▶ Look for national evaluation consultants;

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▶ Opt for interviews using videoconference technology or plain phone in lieu of face-to-face interviews;

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▶ Negotiate longer evaluation timeframes to allow phased consultation processes for remote and on-site interviews;

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▶ Ensure other data collection methods are considered by the evaluators (surveys, desk-review of secondary information) to ensure triangulation;

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▶ Explore options for bundling interviews of various evaluations to reduce the burden on ILO staff and constituents;

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▶ In all instances, follow [ILO/WHO recommendations on health advice, and UNDSS country information on security and emergency operations and requirements](#).

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▶ Seek support from ILO CO in identifying key stakeholders and gathering contact details keeping in mind that they may already be overstretched.

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▶ If conclusions from the risk assessment indicate that the evaluation needs to be re-scheduled, the parameters stipulated in the Minute Sheet dated 16 July 2018 concerning budgeting of decentralized evaluations should be observed (see Annex 2). REOs and DEFPs are requested to engage proactively in discussions with ILO Responsible Officials to identify any project end date extension.

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▶ Any decision on rescheduling or cancelling an evaluation should be approved by EVAL.

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TYPE OF EVALUATION	RESPONSIBILITY	RECOMMENDED APPROACH
Self-evaluation	Project	Business as usual
Internal evaluation	Project with support from REO/DEFP	Business as usual but desk- based (document review and tele-conversations)
Mid-term and final independent evaluation	REO/DEFP with support from project team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Review scenarios that apply. As a general rule if the domestic situation allows face to face meetings, explore the possibility of using national consultants, either as the lead evaluator or as a team member with an international evaluator.</li> <li>▶ If both domestic and international travel are not recommended, the eligibility criteria for consultants can be the same as in normal circumstances.</li> <li>▶ For data collection, follow the approach suggested in Annex I- note for data collection.</li> </ul>
High-level evaluation	EVAL	EVAL will take appropriate decisions. Greater support might be required from REOs to facilitate remote data collection. This may include coordination support to narrow down the list of constituents and remote data collection, on a case by case basis.

As per IGDS 224 on External Collaboration Contracts<sup>1</sup>: in all instances, check [latest development on COVID-19 Office policy](#), continue ensuring that consultants get UNDSS BSAFE certificate and Security clearance, and inform them about travel restrictions, the need to get their own health and travel insurance coverage and the fact that ILO cannot take any responsibility for travel cancelations, repatriation, etc.

1. <https://intranet.ilo.org/apps/igds/en-us/Pages/DocumentDetails.aspx?igdsnumber=224>



## Annex 1. Note on facilitating remote data collection

In the scenarios where primary data collection through missions is not an option, the dependency on document review and remote data collection is very high. This also means that greater effort should be made in organizing documents and scheduling remote interviews. The following section outlines key tips on these matters:

### Practical tips in organizing data for desk review by evaluators

- ▶ Enhanced coordination between EVAL, DEFPS and REOs is fundamental to optimize evaluation processes and resources.
- ▶ Create a separate folder in advance to share documents (in coordination with the Evaluation Manager)
- ▶ Be selective in sharing documents: Share what seems to be most relevant
- ▶ Make sure that the documents provided to consultants are complete and not outdated
- ▶ Specify if a document cannot be quoted for any reason
- ▶ For documents being provided in electronic form, provide indicative filenames for easy identification
- ▶ Ensure that hyperlinks work
- ▶ A typical set of required documents is presented below:

### Type of document

DWCP (if available)

Country diagnostics for the most recent DWCP, if available

Any overview document or description of work of ILO in the country (Country brief or fact sheet etc)

DWCP Review (most recent), if available

Relevant project documents of project(s) being evaluated. This includes:

- ▶ Project proposal document (Original and other versions in case changes were made to the original document and log frame)
- ▶ List of partners with contact details
- ▶ List of project staff with their designation and contact details
- ▶ List of project advisory committee/management committee (PAC/PMC), including their contact details
- ▶ Minutes of meetings of the PAC/PMC
- ▶ Any internal or mid-term evaluation, as relevant
- ▶ Knowledge, training, communication products generated as part of the project

- ▶ Reports of trainings, workshops, consultations organised as part of the project
- ▶ Progress reports organised by reporting period
- ▶ Financial data relating to the project: Budget, expenditure details, delivery rates etc
- ▶ Any documents that give specific information on gender equality, disability inclusion, tripartite engagement in project strategy and implementation
- ▶ Any other document that is considered useful for the evaluation

Any special document such as Memorandum of Understanding, tripartite resolution etc. that supports the results reported by the project.

Any other documents relevant for understanding the coordination and coherence with other ILO departments/projects or external partners such as UN agencies, academic institutions etc.

Contacts of constituents, stakeholders and staff members/specialists who can be part of the interview and/or online survey.

### Practical tips for developing agenda for remote data collection

Agenda for collecting primary data through remote means (digital calling and conferencing platforms such as Skype; telephone; tele-calling apps etc.) should be prepared just as they are prepared for evaluation missions. Indeed, a number of additional factors need to be considered, including a justifiable narrowing of the number of interviewees. ILO evaluations usually cover the following stakeholders:

- ▶ Project staff: CTAs, project managers, focal points, national project coordinator

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- ▶ Constituents: Representatives from Workers' Organizations, Employers' Organisations and Governments

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- ▶ Regional/DWT or HQ based technical specialists

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- ▶ Key implementing and knowledge partners

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- ▶ Donor representatives

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- ▶ Other partners and collaborators (UN agencies, academic institutions, national institutions relevant to the project)

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- ▶ Representative of direct beneficiaries, as relevant

In order to narrow down the number, it is important to use the 'criticality' in terms of their engagement with/role within the project.

- ▶ Focus on those who can provide substantive information and feedback. You should have a prior discussion with project team and constituents to have a consensus on who would represent them in the evaluation. Maintain balance in including women and persons with disabilities to the extent possible.

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- ▶ Avoid including people for the sake of courtesy or protocol.

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- ▶ Remember that feedback from a broader set of stakeholders can be obtained by sharing key evaluation products such as the inception report and the draft evaluation report.

When enlisting stakeholders for digital or remote interviews, it is necessary to consider the following:

FACTORS TO CONSIDER	YES/NO	POSSIBLE MITIGATION FOR THOSE WHO FACE A BARRIER BUT ARE STILL CRITICAL
Can access digital platforms with ease		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Office can offer its own IT facilities</li> <li>▶ Can use a telephone. The project can offer to compensate for phone or data use related expenditure, if necessary.</li> </ul>
Is less likely to face language barrier		Arrange for a neutral interpreter or take prior consent for recording so that the transcription could be translated at a later stage.
Can manage time difference (in case the evaluator is located in another time zone)		Explain well the time difference. In the interview schedule, mention both GMT and local time.



## Annex 2. Budgeting for evaluation of development cooperation project

### minute sheet

**Ref.:** 104/18  
**Initials:** AKC/cg  
**Date:** 16 July 2018

**To:** Directors of DDG/P and DDG/FOP  
Regional Directors  
DWT Directors  
Country Office Directors

**cc:** C/RAS  
EVAL  
PARDEV

**From:** A.K. Chughtai, Chief BUDFIN

**Subject:** Budgeting for Evaluation of Development cooperation projects

1. This minute is issued to remind all offices of the importance of funding evaluations of projects as specified under the Director General's Announcement, *Evaluation in the ILO* (IGDS No. 75) and Office Directive, *The ILO Evaluation Office* (IGDS No. 74 version 2). All responsible officials are required to ensure that they follow the evaluation policy of the ILO and ensure that appropriate funds (2%) are identified and reserved in the appropriate budget line (BL 16.50). Any deviation from the policy or reduction in the concerned budget provision needs to be done in coordination with the Evaluation Office prior to the project finishing its "activities complete" status.
2. For any planned evaluation an encumbrance should be raised in IRIS (or a commitment in FISEXT), prior to the end date for completion of activities stipulated in the donor agreement of the project. After this date the evaluation costs incurred can be charged against the registered encumbrance, at any point up to the transmission of the final financial statements, normally a period of 10 weeks after the agreement end date. This should be confirmed in advance by the responsible official and should also be checked to ensure consistency with any specific donor conditions that may be applicable in each particular case.
3. For any questions specific to key donors or agreements, focal points in BUD/CT or PARDEV should be consulted.

A.K. Chughtai  
Chief, BUDFIN



International  
Labour  
Organization

Evaluation  
Office



Operating procedures

