

*Key Horizontal Principles*



*Cultivate a Culture in Evaluation*

**Strengthening VOPEs' capacities in Europe: A practical approach for streamlining the evaluation of Key Horizontal Principles (KHP)**

*Common Reference Framework*

**A project funded by IOCE- EvalPartners Peer-to-Peer (P2P) Grants Program 2021:**

*Evaluation as an agile tool for an appropriate response in uncertain times*

February 2022

## Information Note

The Common Reference Framework (hereafter CRF) was developed within the project “*Strengthening VOPEs' capacities in Europe: A practical approach for streamlining the evaluation of Key Horizontal Principles (KHP)*”, funded by IOCE Peer-to-Peer (P2P) Grants Program 2021. The following VOPEs were involved in the realization of the project activities including development of the research methodology and instruments and the drafting of all project reports:

- DeGEval – Evaluation Society (Gesellschaft für Evaluation e.V.)
- Hellenic Evaluation Society (HES)
- Iberian Association of Professional Evaluators (APROEVAL)
- Informal Network of Evaluators Serbia (INES)
- Macedonian Evaluation Network (MEN)
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# Strengthening VOPEs' capacities in Europe: *A practical approach for streamlining the evaluation of Key Horizontal Principles (KHP)*

## Position Paper on the enhancement of VOPEs capacity to promote the evaluation of KHPs

### 1 Introduction

Horizontal (cross-cutting) issues are those relevant to all aspects of development. In the evaluation context, they have become increasingly important following global efforts towards achieving human development goals incorporated into the fundamental idea behind the Millennium Development Goals – MDGs, and the Sustainable Development Goals - SDGs.

The rationale for assessing horizontal principles stems from the fundamental documents and founding values of the EU such as Treaty on European Union and the Charter of Fundamental Rights. Other important EU documents and guidelines covering evaluation rationales and methodologies envisage mandatory involvement of horizontal issues into evaluation practice as well. Core values are spelled out in the Global Evaluation Agenda 2016-2020 and revolve around equity, gender equality, and social justice and on shared principles of partnership, innovation, inclusivity, and human rights.

The Common Reference Framework, hereafter CRF, has been prepared within the project “*Strengthening VOPEs' capacities in Europe: A practical approach for streamlining the evaluation of Key Horizontal Principles (KHP)*”. The project is funded by IOCE and EvalPartners and the CRF aims to provide guidance for action in order to facilitate the development of the related culture and the promotion of evaluations that are sensitive to cross-cutting development issues.

The scope of the CRF is also to become a position paper to create the basis for strengthening their capacities of VOPEs in promoting KHP in national evaluation communities. Additionally, the CRF should support IOCE and NESE (Network of Evaluation Societies in Europe) in advocating on the key principles and in coordinating related action throughout Europe.

For the sake of better understanding, the following definitions are taken into consideration:

Key Horizontal Principle	Definition	Source
<i>Equity</i>	<p>Equity is related to the existence of disparities between population groups. Some of these disparities may be unavoidable (e.g., driven by biology). The disparities between population groups that are avoidable and unfair are termed inequities. Equity is therefore based on notions of fairness and social justice.</p> <p>Equity is distinguished from equality. The aim of equity-focused policies is not to eliminate all differences so that everyone has the same level of income, health, and education. Rather, the goal is to eliminate the unfair and avoidable circumstances that deprive people of their rights.</p>	UNICEF

Key Horizontal Principle	Definition	Source
<i>Gender Equality</i>	Gender refers to the roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society at a given time considers appropriate for women and men ... In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities	UN Women Gender Equality Glossary
<i>Social Justice</i>	Social justice refers to the equitable sharing of social power and benefits within a society	Osborn, 2006
<i>Partnership</i>	Partnership refers to the collaborative relationship and/ or a strategic alliance between different actors to work towards mutually agreed objectives with a shared understanding of roles and responsibilities based on the comparative advantage of each entity	UN
<i>Governance</i>	<p>Governance refers to the process of decision making and the implementation (or not) of those decisions. It can take place in different settings/levels. An analysis of governance requires then to review the diverse actors and structures involved in decision making and processes. Good governance should be participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law (UN ESCAP)</p> <p>Kaufman and Kray from the World Bank Institute defines Governance as the traditions and institutions by which authority is exercised. This is composed by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) The process by which those in authority are selected and replaced: of which indicators are voice and accountability and political stability and violence</li> <li>2) The capacity of governments to formulate and implement policies: which indicators are government effectiveness and regulatory burden.</li> <li>3) The respect of citizens and state of those that govern interactions among them: rule of law and corruption</li> </ol>	UN, WB
<i>Innovation</i>	<p>Innovation refers to the use of new ideas, products, services or methods where they have not been used before</p> <p>Social innovation refers to new ideas (products, services and models) that simultaneously meet social needs (more effectively than alternatives) and create new social relationships or collaborations</p>	EUROSTAT Glossary EC
<i>Inclusivity</i>	Inclusivity refers to the process of improving the terms of participation in society, particularly for people who are disadvantaged, through enhancing opportunities, access to resources, voice and respect for rights	UN
<i>Democracy</i>	Democracy refers to “a universal value based on the freely expressed will of people to determine their political, economic, social and cultural systems and their full participation in all aspects of their lives (...) while democracies share common features, there is no single model of democracy and democracy does not belong to any country or region” (United Nations, General Assembly 2010). Other important concepts related to democracy that have been highly validated worldwide by the General Assembly are the need to respect the sovereignty and the right to self-determination, and to see the links between democracy, development	UN

Key Horizontal Principle	Definition	Source
	and respect for all human rights as they are interdependent and mutually reinforcing (United Nations, General Assembly 2010)	
<i>Human Rights</i>	Human rights refer to the moral principles and norms that recognize that human rights are universal, inalienable and inherent to all human beings, regardless of their nation, location, language, religion, ethnic origin, or any other status, meaning that we are all equally entitled to our human rights without discrimination	UN
<i>Sustainable Development</i>	Sustainable development refers to the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs	UN

## 2 What is the CRF

### 2.1 Scope of the Common Reference Framework

The Common Reference Framework - CRF' for Key Horizontal Principles in Evaluation is a Position Paper for setting the necessity and the ground for developing quality and credible evaluations, respectful of all their stakeholders, "leaving no one behind", and applicable to each and particular cultural and political context.

The CRF is a practical tool not only for VOPEs in Europe to identify appropriate action in enhancing their current capabilities and ensure the sustainability of professional competences regarding the key principles but also for NESE in order to undertake coordinated action for exchange and monitoring of progress in the field.

The Key Points presented and analysed in the document are based on the findings of a field survey among 15 European VOPEs and a resulting GAP analysis.

## 3 The survey and its results

### 3.1 The survey in the European VOPEs

Qualitative field research was performed among European countries. The Survey Tool consisted of 8 sections. In the first section, VOPE representatives were asked about their overall perception of the KHP evaluation practice in their respective countries. They provided self-assessment on whether KHPs were systematically evaluated in all/several/some sectors, are they usually included as cross-cutting issues in the evaluation tenders, are there any guidelines resulting from the EU documents for their evaluation, etc. Second section provides self-assessment of the activities that specific VOPE perform to promote the evaluation of KHPs in practice including advocacy, collaborations, declarations, documents developed, etc. In the third and fourth section, VOPE representatives were inquired to provide and elaborate in more details specific areas through which they contributed to greater use of KHPs in evaluation matters. Within the fifth section, VOPEs provided specific documents developed to tackle KHP in the local evaluation practice. In the sixth section, VOPEs were asked to suggest elements to be included in development of the common reference framework (e.g. support to readiness, to knowledge intensity, etc.) based on their experience. Finally, seventh and eight sections provided national regulative and other important documents that could be useful for understanding the existing policy environment and for developing common standards.

### 3.2 The Findings

#### 3.2.1 SWOT analysis

SWOT analysis was performed based on the findings of the countries' questionnaires to identify the key points in relation to the KHPs practice and promotion in evaluation. The synthetic analysis has shown that currently the Weaknesses prevail over Strengths. The former refer to the lack of clarity on the perception of the KHPs throughout European VOPEs (due to limited visibility of the KHPs evaluation practice) and on the commitment of the VOPEs to the promotion of the KHPs; fragmentation in VOPEs-related activities; very small correlation to evaluation standards and professionalisation framework; disparate evaluation practices used at national level; documents and/or guidelines, that support advocating for greater use of evaluation evidence in local policy making processes or help local evaluators dealing with diverse contemporary challenges, yet to be developed by many VOPEs and NESE members. Among the Strengths dedicated IOCE funded project, acting as a tool for 'as is' assessment in European countries, European acquis and advanced methodological approaches for certain KHPs (e.g., gender) are listed.

The analysis has come up with a considerably long list of Opportunities, among which are: greater use of evaluation evidence in policy processes requiring greater awareness about the benefits of evaluation, as well as fundamental principles that should be followed; IOCE, EES and NESE action in order to promote the KHPs in evaluation practices; development of a guidance document for VOPEs capacity building and for streamlining KHPs in evaluation; exchange of good practices shared by more advanced countries; Thessaloniki Declaration expansion in more countries and a specific action plan could be undertaken in close monitoring by NESE for its implementation. Finally, lack of focused and/or integrated approach throughout Europe and no further action to change the current situation are identified as Threats.

#### 3.2.2 GAP analysis

The responses provided within the questionnaires were treated also through a GAP analysis, performed by country, with the aim to explore the current situation throughout Europe and identify the least

commonly addressed in evaluation practices KHP(s). The GAP analysis revealed that almost all KHPs lag behind in evaluation practices and in the visibility of the VOPEs dedicated action. The KHPs overpassing the average threshold by a small difference are Gender and Partnership, as followed by Inclusivity and Sustainable Development, that are at the average level, whereas Innovation and Social Justice are among the least addressed principles. The analysis demonstrates that a lot needs to be done at the level of VOPEs and country level to embed the KHPs in evaluation practices.

### 3.2.3 Key Conclusions

Key conclusions, resulting from the survey, are the following:

1. KHPs in evaluation are topics that are gaining such importance with respect to the objectives of the cohesion policy that they should be considered and integrated into all interventions' and policies' evaluation.
2. The current analysis revealed disparities among 14 European VOPEs, participating in the related survey. In the vast majority of countries, surprisingly enough, there is no clear perception of the KHPs and limited visibility of the KHPs in their promotion or in the evaluation practices.
3. There seems to be a lack of clear commitment in VOPEs strategic documents. A fragmentation has been identified in VOPEs activities since many VOPEs and NESE members still do not have developed documents and/or guidelines to support advocating for greater use of evaluation evidence in local policy making processes or to help local evaluators dealing with diverse contemporary challenges.
4. Moreover, there is limited evidence for the integration of KHPs in evaluation standards and in the professionalisation framework, even though trainings and development of tools are undertaken by a small share of VOPEs.
5. The most common approach relates to the principles being evaluated in specific/thematic evaluations and not as cross-cutting issues embedded in all evaluation tenders. Greater progress has been identified for principles related to issued methodological guidance documents, such as gender, inclusivity, partnership and sustainable development where there is a clear request for their evaluation.
6. From the gap analysis, there seems to be an important need for streamlining the KHPs and for effort to be put in increasing awareness and visibility activities of the KHPs, along with specific action for commitment to their promotion.



## 4 Practical Guidance to Enhance Capacity at VOPE Level

**Recommendation 1** *Increase awareness regarding the relevance of KHPs as quality criteria for evaluation within the VOPE.*

**Rationale:** Survey results show that in most cases requirements regarding the KHPs are formulated by external stakeholders (e.g. EU or UN institutions funding programs). This depicts a lack of a discourse regarding the relevance of KHPs as quality criteria within VOPEs.

**Proposed Action:** To start a discussion within the VOPE regarding the relevance of KHPs as quality criteria for evaluations (e.g. by organizing a session at the annual conference). Existing commitments of the VOPE to individual KHPs or to KHPs in specific contexts (e.g. sustainable development) could be used as a starting point for such a discussion. In case the VOPE has adopted the Thessaloniki declaration, this commitment could also serve as an entry point for the discussion which leads to an expansion of the list of KHPs included. Similarly, standards in specific evaluation fields (e.g. SDGs, UN- or EU-funded programs support the integration of KHPs in standards as cross-cutting issues.

**Recommendation 2** *Declare VOPE's commitment in embedding KHPs in evaluation practice through the formulation and adoption of a specific declaration.*

**Rationale:** The formulation of an explicit commitment to KHPs supports professionalization processes in the field of evaluation.

**Proposed Action:** To develop a commitment to KHPs and to have it adopted by VOPE's decision making bodies. This may include a discussion of the commitment with VOPE members and thus contribute to awareness raising.

**Recommendation 3** *Organize specific VOPE activities to promote KHPs in general or specific KHPs in evaluation.*

**Rationale:** The survey showed that several VOPEs address specific KHPs in ad-hoc initiatives or trainings. However, only in exceptional cases KHPs are considered in the working plan of the VOPE or in specific structures.

**Proposed Action:** Organize specific VOPE activities to promote KHPs in general or specific KHPs in evaluation. Such activities should be integrated in the action plans of VOPEs and in the long term become part of the strategic goals of the VOPE. As a first step, it is suggested to consider existing activities and to reflect where KHPs could be integrated (e.g. in existing training programs for evaluators) or where the focus of specific KHPs could be expanded.

**Recommendation 4** *In case there is a National Evaluation Policy/Plan in place use this as a starting point for a discussion regarding the relevance of KHPs with relevant national authorities.*

**Rationale:** In some countries a national evaluation policy or evaluation plan has been formulated which defines standards for evaluation – at least for specific fields. These policies or plans consider specific KHPs but do not cover the full range of KHPs.

Proposed Action: To start a discussion with relevant national authorities to expand the list of KHPs considered in the national evaluation policy or evaluation plan. It is suggested to use existing forums of exchange between the VOPE and relevant national authorities for such a discussion which may lead to an adaption of the national evaluation policy or evaluation plan.

**Recommendation 5** *Support advocacy and a discourse about the relevance of KHPs within the VOPE.*

Rationale: Survey results show that the level of awareness differs for specific KHPs (e.g. in some VOPEs the awareness for gender equality is high but other KHPs have been considered to a lower extend in the past). Furthermore, in some countries requirements regarding KHPs have rather been formulated by external stakeholders (e.g. commissioner of evaluation) than by the evaluation community.

Proposed Action: To develop an argumentation (e.g., position paper) why the KHPs are relevant for evaluation in general and how they contribute to quality of evaluation. If such an argumentation exists for specific KHPs consider expanding it to other KHPs or start a similar process for other KHPs.

**Recommendation 6** *Provide support on how to consider KHPs when commissioning or conducting evaluation.*

Rationale: Survey results show that in some countries for specific KHPs guidelines are available how to consider the relevant KHP in evaluation practice. Examples for specific guidelines focus on sustainability or gender equality. They provide a set of typical evaluation questions, adequate methodological approaches, or indicators.

Proposed Action: To develop a guidance document for KHPs in general or guidelines focusing on specific KHPs which aim at supporting those commissioning evaluation (e.g. when formulating evaluation questions) as well as evaluators which aim at considering KHPs adequately as a cross-cutting dimension when designing and implementing an evaluation.

**Recommendation 7** *Provide good practice examples and dedicated resources focusing on KHPs as a cross-cutting issue.*

Rationale: Based on the survey, for some countries key documents have been identified which provide a guidance on how to consider KHPs. However, no comprehensive repository is available in the field of KHPs.

Proposed Action: To establish a repository which includes good practice evaluation reports, literature, guidelines, and relevant policy documents in the context of KHPs. In case documents are not available in national language, consider a translation of key documents. In case a VOPE already runs a repository, it is suggested to consider procedures which allow to identify also KHP related documents (e.g. to include them as a specific section or to introduce additional keywords).

## 5 Practical Guidance to Enhance Capacity at IOCE Level

**Recommendation 8** *Increase awareness among VOPEs regarding the relevance of KHPs which goes beyond focusing on selected KHPs. Provide support to VOPEs which aim at developing concrete actions to consider KHPs as a cross-cutting issue in evaluations.*

**Rationale:** Survey results indicate that VOPEs neither consider KHPs as a priority in general nor as a quality criterion for evaluation. Even though some VOPEs established structures or actions for specific KHPs, the engagement with KHPs as a cross-cutting issues remains rather low.

**Proposed Action:** To establish a discourse regarding the relevance of KHPs and to provide support for VOPEs which commit themselves to KHPs and which aim at developing concrete actions. Support may include providing a platform for exchanging good practices as well as funding for joint initiatives of VOPEs (e.g. in case several VOPEs aim at revising their standards for evaluation with a focus on KHPs).

## 6 Practical Guidance to Enhance Capacity at NESE Level

**Recommendation 9** *Increase the visibility of the Thessaloniki Declaration among NESE members and communicate the relevance of KHPs.*

**Rationale:** The survey shows that only VOPEs which have been involved in the project which served as a basis for the Thessaloniki Declaration are aware of it and have it adopted as a strategic document.

**Proposed Action:** Present the Thessaloniki Declaration to NESE members and start a discussion with NESE members regarding the relevance of KHPs for evaluation standards. This could be done by presenting existing good practices regarding KHPs among VOPEs and by organizing a consultation regarding the recommendations for VOPEs.

**Recommendation 10** *Expand the list of KHPs included in the Thessaloniki Declaration.*

**Rationale:** The Thessaloniki Declaration formulates a commitment of VOPEs to specific KHPs. The current project and the presentation of its results could support a discursive process which leads to an expansion of the number of KHPs included.

**Proposed Action:** Organize a session at the next EES conference or a webinar for NESE members focusing on the relevance of KHPs. Such a session/webinar should include a presentation of the Thessaloniki Declaration and start a process of revising the Thessaloniki Declaration (to include more KHPs) and adopting it among additional VOPEs.

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