



ENHANCING EVALUATION TENDER QUALITY: INTEGRATING GENDER FOR ROBUST RESULTS

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ABSTRACT

Evaluations play a key role in assessing the effectiveness of strategies, programmes and projects and drawing conclusions for their future development. Standards have been introduced to improve the quality, focusing mainly on the evaluators. However, essential conditions for the evaluation are specified in advance, particularly in the calls for proposals. Tenders are expected to clearly communicate requirements and expectations, ensuring that proposals can be effectively compared, while allowing evaluators sufficient flexibility in their design and interpretation. However, evaluation standards often lack the integration of gender and diversity considerations, particularly in the initial stages such as in calls for proposals. This article assesses the inclusion of gender analysis and intersectionality within evaluation standards, with a focus on tender processes. The necessity for a systematic approach to embed gender and diversity considerations in evaluation practices is discussed, highlighting the gap in current standards. The article references a guideline developed by the Working Group on Gender Mainstreaming (AK GM) of the German Evaluation Society (DeGEval) as an example of efforts to address this gap. It exemplifies a framework aimed at guiding evaluation practitioners and those issuing tenders towards more inclusive evaluation practices. In this way, evaluations not only comply with legal requirements, but also fulfil societal commitments to promote gender equality, especially in the field of research, technology and innovation.

INTRODUCTION

Evaluations are instrumental in determining the success and effectiveness of strategies, programmes, or projects. The quality of evaluations is - among others - dependent on the requirements and standards established during the tendering process. A crucial aspect of this process is the recognition of stakeholders as diverse groups, each with specific needs and perspectives. It is essential to understand and address the varied impacts of a strategy or intervention on these different stakeholder subgroups. This involves a detailed approach to stakeholder engagement, careful data collection and analysis, and transparent reporting of potential discrepancies. Such a methodology starts by considering gender as important variable and thereby not only ensures evaluations of higher quality but also aligns with legal requirements and supports societal commitments to promoting gender equality.

The importance of gender-specific analysis in evaluations is emphasised by various frameworks, also relevant for research, technology and innovation. Already in 1979 the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW 1979, see also <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw>) mandated the integration of gender perspectives in all policy areas, including research, technology, and innovation. In Europe frameworks relevant for gender-specific analysis in research and innovation include the European Commission Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 and the mandatory Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) for organisations applying for funding under Horizon Europe (see also https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/strategy/strategy-2020-2024/democracy-and-rights/gender-equality-research-and-innovation_en). The shift from policy formation to practical application underscores the necessity for robust evaluation mechanisms. Evaluations that incorporate gender perspectives ensure decisions are made considering the diverse needs and experiences of all genders, leading to more equitable policies and programmes (Wroblewski, 2019).

The “Gender-and diversity-sensitive tendering of evaluations – a guideline” (GeD-Call-Eval, 2023) offers a foundational framework for incorporating gender and diversity considerations into evaluation processes. This guideline underscores the significance of integrating gender and diversity as central quality criteria in tenders, proposals, and resulting evaluations. By doing so, evaluations should become more comprehensive, socially responsible, and impactful. They aim to provide a nuanced understanding of programme effectiveness and societal impact, potentially leading to more informed decision-mak-

ing and policy development that genuinely reflects and meets the needs of a diverse society.

By emphasising the importance of gender and diversity in evaluation tenders, the guideline addresses a crucial gap. It advocates a shift in evaluation practices, urging the integration of gender and diversity as central quality criteria in all stages of evaluation. The guideline thus plays a pivotal role in fostering comprehensive evaluations that capture the diverse experiences and needs of all involved stakeholders regardless of their power, direct involvement or indirect effected by a development or intervention.

EVALUATION STANDARDS FOR RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY POLICY EVALUATION

Evaluation societies are professional networks for organisations tendering evaluations, researchers, and practitioners. These organisations are typically formed to promote and advance the field of evaluation, and as such often establish and promote quality standards. The standards of the evaluation organisations take gender into account to varying degrees. For example, in the standards of SEVAL (Evaluation Society of Switzerland, 2016) gender is only included in the explanations on ethical aspects. The standards set by the Austrian Platform for Research and Technology Policy Evaluation (fteval, 2019) emphasise a comprehensive approach to RTI policy evaluation, integrating principles like joint understanding, commitment, participation, utilisation and benefits, feasibility, impartiality, independence, professionalism, and gender. A notable aspect of the fteval standards is their explicit focus on gender. They mandate the inclusion of gender-specific questions in the Terms of Reference (ToR), require the collection and interpretation of gender-specific data, and insist that the language used for reporting should be gender neutral. This means avoiding gender-specific language by using gender-neutral terms or including at least masculine and feminine forms. Additionally, they explicitly state that *“if there is no apparent gender dimension in the evaluation object, this fact should be indicated and explained”*. This aspect ensures that gender considerations are not overlooked and are explicitly addressed, whether they are present or absent in the context of the evaluations. By outlining what constitutes professional and competent practice in RTI policy evaluation the fteval standards, aim at both, evaluators and those who tender evaluations in research, technology, and innovation (RTI) policy evaluation. **For organisations or individuals tendering**

evaluations, they provide a basis to ensure that the evaluations they commission are comprehensive, ethical, and consider gender. However, while the fteval standards acknowledge the relevance of integrating gender considerations into the evaluation of RTI policies as crucial for enhancing quality and maintaining relevance they do not provide detailed instructions on how to incorporate these aspects into the tendering process of evaluations.

THE GUIDELINE FOR GENDER AND DIVERSITY SENSITIVE TENDERING AND ITS RELATION TO EVALUATION STANDARDS

This is where the guidelines for “gender and diversity sensitive tendering” (GeD-Call-Eval-Guideline) fill a critical gap by offering practical steps and examples for including gender and diversity considerations in the evaluation process, right from the tendering stage. This ensures that the expectations and requirements around these aspects are clearly communicated to potential evaluators. While not explicitly focusing on technology and innovation, they offer a framework for systematically incorporating these aspects into evaluation tenders and include a template for systematically considering gender and diversity specific analysis Terms of Reference (ToR), which covers the following sections:

- **Object of Evaluation:** This section details general and specific objectives, time frames, phases, and locations. It offers insights into the cultural and social context, highlighting gender dimensions relevant to the evaluation’s scope. Further, users of the ToRs are reminded to carefully identify the various stakeholders and their roles and influences on the evaluation object, such as decision-makers (e.g., ministries, supervisory boards), implementers (e.g., agencies, partner organizations), target groups/beneficiaries (primary audience), and unintentionally affected persons (indirectly impacted groups).
- **Underlying Understanding of Gender and Diversity:** According with DeGEval and fteval standards the ToR request that a tender Defines and explains how gender and diversity are conceptualized within the context of the evaluation object.
- **Aim, Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation:** These sections within ToR too, should be clearly set the expectations for gender- and diversity-

sensitive evaluation outcomes. This involves assessing how different genders or demographic groups are affected and ensuring all needs are addressed, aiming for equitable and effective evaluation results. Potential evaluation teams should be reminded that all relevant data and groups, especially marginalized ones, are considered in the methodological approach. To enable evaluators to develop a suitable design, potential constraints such as resource limitations, data availability, and stakeholder interactions must be outlined as early as possible.

- **Methodology and Evaluation Team:** To offer a gender and culturally sensitive methodological design the evaluation team must possess diverse skills and backgrounds, including gender, equality, and intersectionality expertise, with at least one member specializing in gender. – and the tenderers must request such expertise.
- **Evaluation Criteria:** the ToR included suggestions how to consider gender and diversity when applying standards like DeGEval or OECD-DAC to evaluate tenders.

It is important to emphasise that these guidelines are not intended to provide uniform definitions of gender, diversity and intersectionality or inclusion. Rather, it is the responsibility of the tenderers to clarify which definitions guide their actions and to demand this from the bidders. For those not familiar with the relevant gender and diversity research, the guidelines provide short explanations and further references. It refers to the evolving understanding of gender as a non-binary concept and the importance of intersectionality and broader perspective on diversity. Intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (Crenshaw 1989), refers to the interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, class, and gender, which can lead to overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage. This broader understanding is crucial in evaluations, ensuring that programmes and projects do not inadvertently exclude or misrepresent non-binary and transgender individuals or marginalised groups (Kubdqvist et.al 2019; UN Women 2018)

This GeD-Call-Eval-Guideline was aligned with the DeGEval standards for evaluations (DeGEval, 2016), which emphasise best practices in evaluation methodology and ethics. It reflects several key DeGEVal standards, including “G3 – Description of Purposes and Procedures”, which underlines the importance of clearly defining the evaluation’s objectives and methods. Additionally, “N1 – Identification of Involved and Affected Parties” underscores the need to consider the perspectives and needs of all stakeholders, a principle echoed in this guideline. The guideline also aligns with “G8 – Substantiated Assessments and

Conclusions”, emphasising the analysis of how evaluation subjects contribute to gender equality and diversity. By adhering to these standards, the guideline emphasises that Gender and Diversity are integral components of the evaluation process, promoting inclusivity and rigorous evaluation practices.

The explanatory introduction can easily be adapted to explain how gender and diversity should be considered for tendering RTI evaluations by referring to the fteval standards which already mandate the inclusion of gender-specific questions, data collection and interpretation. The following paragraphs relate the original explanation to the fteval standards accordingly:

1. **Clearly defined aim and purpose of the evaluation:** This corresponds to the fteval principle “Utilisation and Benefits” (Section 5.4). The recommendation emphasises the need to describe the understanding of gender and diversity in the measure. The ToR should clearly describe the object of the evaluation and the specific objectives and purposes. The ToR should also address the understanding of gender and diversity with which the evaluation object was developed and/or implemented.
 - a. **Differentiated consideration of participants and those affected:** This corresponds to the fteval principle “Participation” (Section 5.3). The specific perspectives and needs of those directly and indirectly affected must be presented in a differentiated manner. All social and gender groups should be named or included.
 - b. **Analysis of effectiveness:** What contribution do evaluation objects make to the promotion of equal opportunities and gender equality? This corresponds to the fteval principle “Feasibility” (Section 5.5).
 - c. If evaluators are unable to establish a gender and/or diversity reference, this must be explicitly justified.
2. **Time frame and resources:** This corresponds to the fteval principle “Professionalism” (Section 5.8). The ToR should contain a clear timetable for the implementation of the evaluation as well as information on the available resources, such as financial resources, personnel, and data – this applies in particular to resources for sufficient consideration of the gender dimension as a quality criterion.
3. **Indication of the methodological approach:** This corresponds to the fteval principle “Professionalism” (Section 5.8) and “Transparency” (Section 5.10). The ToR should contain information on which evaluation methods are expected. This includes methods and tools for considering gender and diver-

sity: evaluators should explain how they will incorporate gender and, where appropriate, other relevant dimensions into their methodological approach and how gender and diversity sensitivity will be taken into account in the evaluation.

- 4. Clear information on the available database:** This corresponds to the fteval principles “Credibility” (Section 5.12) and “Transparency” (Section 5.10). It is important to explain the extent to which the available sources and data enable a differentiation of the gender dimension and which data gaps need to be taken into account.
- 5. Clearly defined responsibilities, roles, required expertise:** The ToR should clearly define the responsibilities of the actors involved, including the evaluators, commissioning parties, and other stakeholders.
 - a. Commitment to consider gender and diversity:** This is in line with the fteval principle “Ethics” (Section 5.11) and the legal basis, which is why tenderers and evaluators should make their commitment to gender-sensitive and diversity-conscious evaluation clear.
 - b. Expertise and experience:** This corresponds to the fteval principle “Professionalism” (Section 5.8). Evaluators should demonstrate their competence and experience in gender-sensitive, inclusive, and diversity-conscious evaluation. This can be done through references, case studies, or training in this area.
 - c. Inclusion of gender and diversity in the evaluation team:** When selecting the evaluation team and conducting the evaluation, a diverse composition should be sought that takes into account different genders and experiences. This should ensure that different perspectives are brought in and that a comprehensive assessment takes place.
- 6. Communication and reporting:** This corresponds to the fteval principles “Transparency” (Section 5.10) and “Utilisation and Benefits” (Section 5.4). The ToR should define the expectations regarding communication and reporting during and after the evaluation. This includes the type of interim reports, the timing of reporting, and the target groups for the communication of results.

The GeD-Call-Eval-Guideline includes on pages 6–13 a template for tendering organisations (Grasenick et al 2023). It aims to cover all essential aspects like objectives, methodologies, expected outcomes, and stakeholder engagement. This ensures a thorough approach to tendering, including gender and diversity

considerations. Generally, the template is sector independent as the guiding questions on how to consider gender and diversity are relevant across various fields. However, the template will always need to be adapted to specific terminologies and challenges. The key is to maintain the essence of gender and diversity sensitivity while making it relevant to the specific context of the sector.

CRITICAL REFLECTION

The GeD-Call-Eval-Guideline was presented and discussed at the DeGEval annual conference 2023 in a focus group setting attended by 6 evaluators from various sectoral backgrounds. Additionally, 4 evaluators provided written feedback directly in the first version of the document or via email. Overall, all evaluators were members of the DeGEval, and 5 evaluators were members of the AK-GM. The feedback can be summarised as follows:

1. The GeD-Call-Eval-Guideline primarily focuses on the practical application of gender and diversity considerations for tendering evaluations. However, a more profound exploration into the theoretical basis of these concepts could significantly enhance its depth and applicability.
2. The GeD-Call-Eval-Guideline, especially the template for ToR, is structured in a way that prompts clear and detailed responses. However, it could benefit from more explicit instructions or practical examples to guide users, especially those less familiar with gender and diversity issues on how to practically implement these principles. While the template is comprehensive, it will need to be adapted to different sectors, like e.g. research and technology. Moreover, the broad scope of intersectionality is complex and difficult in its practical application.
3. The GeD-Call-Eval-Guideline is clearly linked with the DeGEval Evaluation Standards. However, some sectors refer to different standards. This could be addressed and further, internationally recognised evaluation standards could be incorporated, such as those set by the OECD.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This article has demonstrated that the GDT-EVAL guidelines align well with the fteval standards, while complementing the scope to include tendering. They extend the fteval standards by incorporating a non-binary understanding of gender, recognising intersectionality, and broadening the scope of diversity to ensure more inclusive evaluations. This is particularly important as the technology and innovation sectors are generally less informed about gender bias and often assume that programmes and projects are gender neutral. However, implementation challenges may arise, particularly in contexts less familiar with these issues.

The feedback received at the DeGEval Annual Conference has so far only partially been considered. The next version should expand the theoretical background, add more references to international standards, as well as incorporate case studies or examples, e.g. from the technology sector, to further enhance the usability of the guideline. These adaptations could significantly support policies and practices in promoting more equitable and socially responsive RTI outcomes.

Future research should focus on the practical implementation of the guidelines and assess their impact on the inclusiveness and effectiveness of RTI evaluation tenders. This is essential for the development of more bias-conscious, equitable and inclusive RTI policies, programmes and projects.

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