

# STRENGTHENING EVALUATION CAPACITIES FOR EFFECTIVE PUBLIC POLICIES

## ABOUT THE RESEARCH

The project “EVALUATION AS A BASIS FOR CREATING INFORMED PUBLIC POLICIES IN SERBIA” is being implemented within the program “Strengthening National Evaluation Capacities”. It is funded by the International Association of Evaluators - EvalPartners - <https://www.evalpartners.org/>. The project in Serbia is implemented by SeConS Development Initiative and Informal Association of Evaluators – INES. The main goal of this research refers to mapping evaluation capacities in the Republic of Serbia and create a basis for further dissemination of the practice of conducting public policy evaluations and strengthening evaluation capacities in Serbia. Methodology included desk research based on analysis of the elements of EVALSED

network resources related to the evaluation architecture (location, structure, and coordination of evaluation functions in selected state institutions). Additionally, it has been developed online questionnaire aiming to assess attitudes and experience of the state administration officials towards public policy evaluation. More details available online at: <http://evamreza.rs/flagship-program-1-strengthening-national-evaluation-systems-evaluation-as-the-basis-of-the-evidence-based-policy-making-practice-in-serbia/>

In Belgrade, July 2021

## THE ROLE OF EVALUATION IN ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – WHAT YEARS OF RESEARCH TELL US ABOUT IMPORTANCE OF EVALUATION?

Evaluation could be defined as systematic determination of the value of something as per defined criteria or standard (Scriven, 1991). It represents an important phase of developing evidence-based policies (EBP), important foundation of democratic societies. The whole EBP concept is based on the idea that public policies should be developed within transparently organised informed discussions based on data and independent research evidence rather than intuition, ideology or short-term political interests. Through evidence-based policy making scientists could find a way to enter the political arena and improve the quality of public policies. For a policy to be considered evidence-based, it is necessary to be evaluated, since only an independent monitoring and evaluation

(M&E) could verify its effectiveness and help gathering evidence for the following policy cycles. Evidence based policy requires reliable data, strong analytical skills and political support. Everyone in favour of this approach is referring to rigorous research evidence as policy arguments to support or dispute certain public policies (Head, 2010). Benefits of effective policy evaluations have been confirmed in many research studies (Marulanda and Tancredi, 2010; Parkhurst, 2017; Eliot and Salomon, 2002). However, evidence-based policy initiatives are facing various challenges including lack of political support, absence of the coherent and effective policy evaluation strategy and weak human capacities (Bowers and Testa, 2019; OECD, 2020).

## THE ROLE OF EVALUATIONS IN CREATING PUBLIC POLICIES IN SERBIA – CURRENT STATE

M&E practice in Serbia is not sufficiently developed, neither recognised by decision makers as necessary precondition for developing effective public policies. M&E have been often initiated and funded by international donors interested in assessing the impact of their projects, programmes, strategies or action plans (especially those referring to the EU accession agenda). They have been conducted for the purpose of learning and/or redesigning new development interventions. Over the recent years, as a part of the public administration reform, there could be noticed certain systematic improvements (referring to adoption of the Law on Planning System in April 2018), which might result in a wider use of M&E practice in the future. Such a practice has been particularly encouraged by

the Republic Secretariat for Public Policies that produced several very important documents providing guidance for local evaluation commissioners and evaluation experts for conducting evaluations. Capacities of public administration in the field of both supply and demand for M&E are still questionable. Desk research results obtained within this research are as follows:

- M&E institutional framework is not anymore representing a crucial barrier for conducting evaluations of crucial programmes, policies and strategic documents in Serbia. Law on Planning System, related bylaws, guidelines and handbooks produced by both civil society and state institutions (Social Inclusion and

Poverty Reduction Unit - SIPRU and Secretariat for Public Policies) provide solid basis for further institutionalisation of evaluation within the national political system.

- Insufficient political will (no political consensus over the importance of evaluation) and low evaluation culture are crucial impediments. Demand for independent evaluations in Serbia is still relatively low. Excluding those funded and required by

international donors, on the webpages of the state institutions there is almost no available independent evaluation reports.

- Analysis of the evaluation reports ordered by donors in Serbia and produced by local experts (independently or in a team consisting of international experts) indicate that solid capacities for conducting evaluations of the researchers in academia and civil society organisations.

## EVALUATION CAPACITIES IN SERBIA – POLICY MAKERS’ SELF-ASSESSMENT

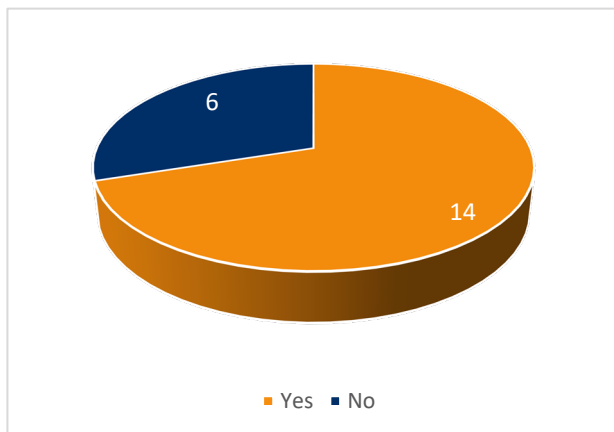
In total, out of the 80 targeted state institutions 20 questionnaires were filled out. In overall, results of the survey suggest that the evaluation system in Serbia is in the initial phase of development. Results of the empirical research are as follows:

- Policy makers in Serbia are still not commissioning evaluation on a regular basis. Results indicate that 14 out of 20 analysed institutions commissioned external evaluations over the last 5 years (Graph 1). Evaluation reports are confirmed to be publicly available by 13 out of 20 respondents (Graph 2).
- Evaluation is not recognized within organizational structures of the state institutions. Separate evaluation organizational units in charge of internal evaluation exist in 6 out of 20 surveyed institutions (Graph 3).
- Funds for conducting evaluations are by rule provided by external donors. Evaluation assignments have been conducted by diverse institutions – research institutes, civil society organisations, consulting companies and individual experts. Respondents are

in general satisfied by the quality of the submitted evaluation reports.

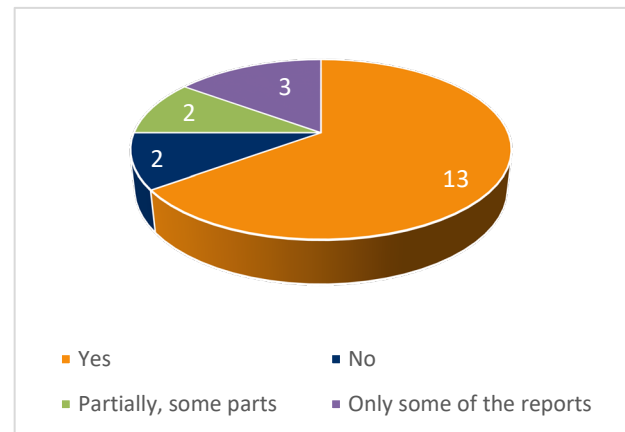
- Use of evaluation results for the purpose of public policy development is still not considered as an important policy making issue. Therefore, 8 out of 20 respondents did not have enough information to answer the questions related to the extent of using evaluation findings for the public policy development in Serbia (Graph 4). Representatives of the state institutions seem not still fully aware of the benefits which further development and promotion of the evaluation could bring to the policy makers.
- There is a still significant space for capacity building and delivery of the public policy evaluation courses. Although survey results (self-assessment of the state capacities) did not provide clear answers in terms of current capacities for commissioning evaluation assignments and use of evaluation findings, almost half of the respondents responded not being familiar with capacity building possibilities in Serbia, including those provided by the National Academy of Public Administration.

**Graph 1.** Has your institution commissioned external evaluations of the programmes/policies/projects/strategic documents?



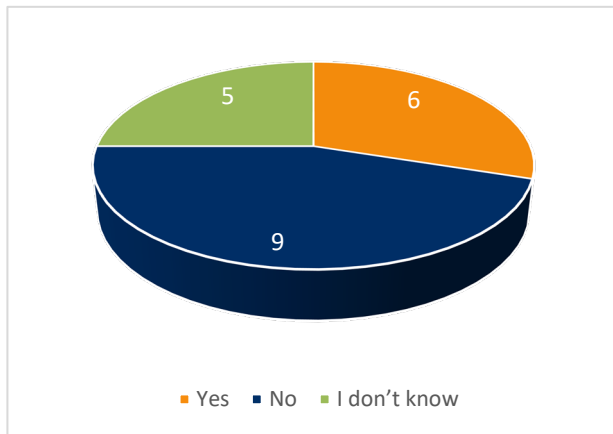
Source: Results of the survey – “Evaluation capacities in the Republic of Serbia”

**Graph 2.** Is any of the evaluation reports commissioned by your institution publicly available?



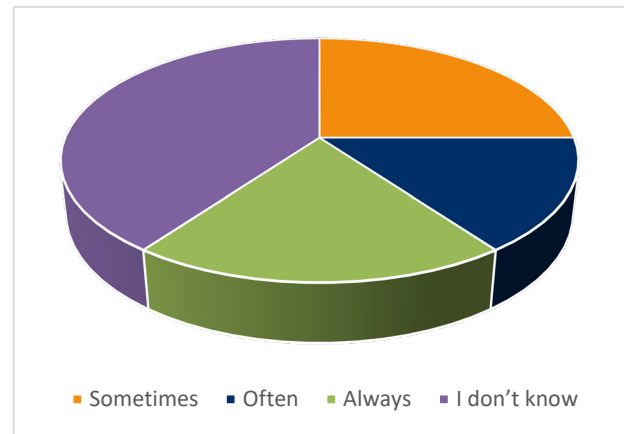
Source: Results of the survey – “Evaluation capacities in the Republic of Serbia”

**Graph 3.** Is there an internal evaluation unit in charge of conducting internal evaluations of the policy/programme/project/strategy, etc. being implemented by your institution?



Source: Results of the survey – “Evaluation capacities in the Republic of Serbia”

**Graph 4.** By your opinion, to what extent are evaluations in Serbia used in strategy and policy formulation at sectoral / ministry level?



Source: Results of the survey – “Evaluation capacities in the Republic of Serbia”

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS - HOW TO ENHANCE EVALUATION PRACTICE FOR DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE EVIDENCE-BASED POLICIES IN SERBIA?

- Fully respect existing legislative and provisions stated within the Law on Planning System and related bylaws and guidelines including strengthening capacities for their implementation
- Implement mandatory courses in monitoring and evaluation for public servants aimed at building capacities for commissioning evaluation assignments and use of evaluation findings
- Develop transparent and professional monitoring and evaluation systems in state institutions
- Independent external evaluation reports should be available at the webpages of the state institutions
- Promote evaluation culture and adopt evaluation standards

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