Synthesis of Decentralized Evaluation reports 2022 – 2024

OSCE
Organization for Security and
Co-operation in Europe

Office of Internal Oversight
EvaluationUnit

Acknowledgements

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List of Abbreviations

AI   Artificial intelligence

ODIHR   Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

OSCE   Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

RFoM   Representative on Freedom of the Media

SALW   Small Arms and Light Weapons

1. Introduction

In accordance with the OSCE Evaluation Policy (Administrative Instruction 3/2022), the Office of Internal Oversight periodically conducts synthesis reviews of decentralized evaluations commissioned by the OSCE's executive structures. These reviews aim to distil Organization-wide insights from evaluation evidence and support both accountability and learning across the Organization.

Building on the two previous synthesis reviews (2020 and 2022), the current report examines decentralized evaluations conducted between 2022 and 2024. A quality assessment of 54 decentralized evaluations underpins this synthesis, 28 of which achieved a score above the 2.5 threshold on a four-point scale based on the United Nations Evaluation Group's Quality Checklist for Evaluation Reports. These higher-quality evaluation reports form the evidence base for the current review and provide a robust foundation for assessing the OSCE's relevance, added value, performance strengths and areas for improvement.

The findings and recommendations stemming from the 28 decentralized evaluations are synthesized to strengthen accountability, promote organizational learning and encourage the systematic use of evaluation insights across the OSCE. A structured analytical framework was applied, covering the evaluation criteria of relevance, added value, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability, as well as OSCE-specific cross-cutting priorities related to gender equality and human rights. The impact criterion was not included, as most evaluations in the sample were mid-term or final project evaluations rather than ex post assessments capable of capturing long-term results.

Lessons learned, replicable best practices and recurring recommendations have been highlighted to identify systemic gaps and opportunities for organizational improvement.

2. Purpose and scope

The purpose of this synthesis is twofold:

- **To strengthen accountability for results** by identifying recurring findings related to the evaluation criteria and the mainstreaming of gender and human rights; and

- **To promote organizational learning and knowledge-sharing** by highlighting recurring challenges, frequently observed evaluation recommendations, lessons learned and replicable good practices that can inform the OSCE's future strategic positioning and programming work.

Where possible, a comparison is made with the findings of the previous synthesis reviews (2020 and 2022) to assess how the OSCE's project design, implementation and performance have evolved over time.

The primary intended users of this synthesis are OSCE staff and stakeholders responsible for strategic decision-making, programme design, operational implementation or accountability oversight, namely:

- The Secretary General, heads of OSCE executive structures and heads of institutions

- Programme and project managers

- Participating States

Other stakeholders, such as members of the OSCE Evaluation Network, may also benefit from insights into the diversity of evaluation evidence and the collective performance trends observed across the decentralized evaluations.

3. Synthesis approach and methodology

This synthesis presents the results of a desk-based analytical review drawing exclusively on the 28 decentralized evaluations that scored above the 2.5 quality threshold in the preceding quality assessment of 54 evaluation reports commissioned between 2022 and 2024.

Using a combination of deductive and inductive qualitative analysis, the review identified recurring findings regarding the OSCE's performance against the main evaluation criteria. Cross-cutting findings related to gender mainstreaming and human rights integration are also summarized. Lessons learned, good practices and the most frequently repeated recommendations were consolidated to build a broader evidence base that supports organizational accountability, institutional learning and continuous improvement.

The synthesis reviews conducted by the Office of Internal Oversight in 2020[1] and 2022[2] were used to compare findings across the three cycles and identify OSCE performance trends since 2017.

Several limitations affected the analysis presented in this report; however, awareness of these limitations and respective mitigation measures helped to reduce potential bias and strengthen the credibility of the synthesis:

- **Reliance on secondary data:** The review relied exclusively on secondary data from the decentralized evaluations commissioned by OSCE executive structures and collected by the Office of Internal Oversight, without complementary primary data collection, such as interviews with project managers, evaluators or beneficiaries.

- **Variations in the quality and format of evaluations:** The 28 decentralized evaluations differed in quality, structure, methodological rigour and reporting formats, affecting the

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[1] OSCE Office of Internal Oversight, "Evaluation Synthesis 2017–2020", Report No. IE 2020/2, March 2021, https://www.osce.org/oio/486445.

[2] OSCE Office of Internal Oversight, "Evaluation Synthesis 2020 – 2022", Report No. 2022/1, 12 May 2023, https://www.osce.org/oio/544285.

consistency and depth of evidence available across the evaluation criteria.

- **Uneven coverage of evaluation criteria:** Certain criteria, particularly long-term outcomes and impact, were less consistently or insufficiently assessed, resulting in varying levels of detail across evaluation reports.

- **Divergent or incomplete results frameworks and indicators:** The absence of an OSCE-wide results-based management framework, coupled with inconsistent indicators and monitoring systems across projects, limited the potential for a quantitative comparison of performance.

- **Uneven evaluation coverage across OSCE security dimensions:** The decentralized evaluations varied in their representation of the politico-military, economic and environmental, and human dimensions, which affected cross-dimensional comparability (Figure 1).

- **Uneven coverage across executive structures:** The distribution of evaluations across the OSCE Secretariat, institutions and field operations was uneven, influencing the representativeness of findings (Figure 2).

- **Partial representation of the full OSCE project portfolio:** Although the synthesis is based on the highest-quality decentralized evaluations, the findings do not represent the full breadth of OSCE projects and activities implemented during the review period.

- **Limited comparability with prior syntheses:** Unlike the 2020 and 2022 reviews, which included both independent and decentralized evaluations, the current review draws solely on decentralized evaluations that met the United Nations Evaluation Group's quality threshold. While this approach strengthens the credibility of the findings, cross-year comparisons must be interpreted with caution.

Despite these limitations, the 28 decentralized evaluations provide a rich and credible basis for the synthesis.

4. Limitations

Several limitations affected the current analysis; however, awareness of these limitations and respective mitigation measures, helped to reduce potential bias and strengthen the credibility of the synthesis:

- **Reliance on secondary data:** The review relied exclusively on secondary data from the decentralized evaluations commissioned by OSCE Executive Structures and collected by OIO, without complementary primary data collection, such as interviews with project managers, evaluators or beneficiaries.

- **Variations in evaluations' quality and formats:** The 28 DEs differed in quality, structure, methodological rigour, and reporting formats, affecting the consistency and depth of evidence available across the evaluation criteria.

- **Uneven coverage of evaluation criteria:** Certain criteria, particularly long-term outcomes and impact, were less consistently or insufficiently assessed, resulting in varying levels of detail across evaluation reports.

- **Divergent or incomplete results frameworks and indicators:** The absence of OSCE-wide Results Based Management (RBM) framework, coupled with inconsistent indicators and monitoring systems across projects, limited the potential for quantitative comparison of performance.

- **Uneven evaluation coverage across OSCE security dimensions:** The DEs varied in their representation of the politico-military, economic and environmental, and human dimensions, which affected cross-dimensional comparability (Figure1).

- **Uneven coverage across executive structures:** The distribution of evaluations across the OSCE Secretariat, Institutions, and Field Operations was uneven, influencing the representativeness of findings (Figure 2).

- **Partial representation of the full OSCE project portfolio:** Although the synthesis is based on the highest-quality DEs, the findings do not represent the full breadth of OSCE

projects and activities implemented during the review period.

- **Limited comparability with prior syntheses:** Unlike the 2020 and 2022 reviews, which included both Independent and Decentralized evaluations, the current review draws solely on DEs that met the UNEG quality threshold. While this strengthens the credibility of findings, cross-year comparisons must be interpreted with caution.

Despite these limitations, the quality and diversity of the 28 DEs are deemed as representative and sufficiently reliable to provide a credible basis for drawing organization-wide conclusions.

5. Portfolio coverage

The 28 decentralized evaluations reviewed in this synthesis cover all three OSCE security dimensions — politico-military, economic and environmental, and human — as well as several cross-dimensional thematic areas. Geographically, the evaluated projects span South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia, and encompass initiatives implemented across the broader OSCE region. Commissioning structures include the OSCE Secretariat, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the Representative on Freedom of the Media and various field operations.

The portfolio reflects the OSCE's diverse and multifaceted areas of work, including:

- Election support and electoral reform

- Justice sector and human rights initiatives

- Community policing and security sector governance

- Control of small arms and light weapons (SALW)

- Border security and management

- Media freedom and journalist safety

- Youth and minority issues

- Cybercrime capacity-building and

- Programming focused on gender equality and human rights

Of the 28 evaluations, 17 were final evaluations and 11 were mid-term evaluations, providing insights at different stages of project implementation and results achievement.

In terms of coverage across security dimensions:

- 14 evaluations (50 per cent) focused on the human dimension;

- 8 evaluations (28 per cent) examined the politico-military dimension;

- 3 evaluations (14 per cent) addressed the economic and environmental dimension; and

- 3 evaluations assessed cross-dimensional projects (Figure 1).
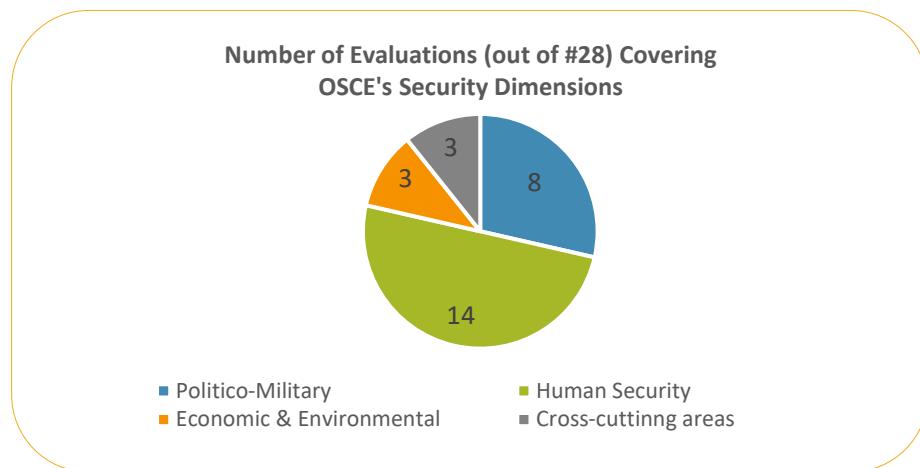
FIGURE 1: EVALUATION COVERAGE OF OSCE SECURITY DIMENSIONS

Synthesis/Dimension	Human dimension	Politico-military dimension	Economic and environmental dimension	Cross-dimensional	Total number of projects
2020	17 (53%)	8 (25%)	2 (6%)	5 (12%)	32
2022	12 (38%)	12 (38%)	4 (13%)	3 (11%)	32
2024	14 (50%)	8 (28%)	3 (11%)	3 (11%)	28

TABLE 1: OSCE SECURITY DIMENSIONS COVERED BY DECENTRALIZED EVALUATIONS INCLUDED IN THE 2020, 2022 AND 2024 SYNTHESIS REVIEWS

A comparison across the three synthesis reviews (2020, 2022 and 2024) shows that evaluation coverage of the OSCE's security dimensions has varied slightly over time, with the largest share of decentralized evaluations consistently focused on the human dimension. Across the three cycles, from 38 per cent to 53 per cent of all evaluations focused on the human dimension, reflecting the breadth and maturity of programming in this area. By contrast, the economic and environmental dimension was the least frequently evaluated, including in the current set of 28 decentralized evaluations (Table 1).

The distribution of decentralized evaluations across the OSCE's executive structures also shows notable variations. Among the 28 evaluations, field operations commissioned the largest number (12 in South-Eastern Europe and 3 in Central Asia). These were followed by OSCE Secretariat units (Conflict Prevention Centre, Transnational Threats Department, Gender Issues Programme, Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities / Economic Crime Unit), which commissioned 7 evaluations; ODIHR, with 4 evaluations; and the Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM), with 2 evaluations (Figure 2).

Geographic and Instututional Coverage by the 28 Evaluations
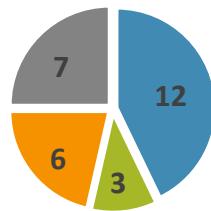
- Field operations in Western Balkans
- Field operations in Central Asia
- OSCE Institutions
- OSCE Secreatriat

FIGURE 2: DECENTRALIZED EVALUATIONS BY COMMISSIONING STRUCTURE

6. OSCE performance against select evaluation criteria

6.1 RELEVANCE

Relevance refers to the extent to which OSCE projects respond to the needs and priorities of participating States and align with the Organization's mandates and commitments. This section summarizes evidence of relevance strengths, recurring gaps and areas where improvements are required.

✓ **Finding 1:** OSCE projects remain highly relevant to the Organization's mandates and participating States' priorities, but alignment gaps persist in donor-driven projects and those without adequate consultation.

Across the portfolio, OSCE projects consistently demonstrate high relevance, grounded in strong alignment with national reform agendas and OSCE-wide mandates and commitments. In 92 per cent of the reviewed evaluations (26 out of 28), relevance was rated as satisfactory or highly satisfactory.

Relevance was particularly strong in countries undergoing reforms related to EU accession, democratic governance and human rights protection. For example, the OSCE's support for Serbia's security sector reform showed strong alignment with national legal frameworks and EU Chapters 23 and 24. The Women's Resource Centres project in Tajikistan successfully embedded support services for survivors of domestic violence into national institutional structures.

However, several evaluations noted that donor-driven projects or those designed without adequate participatory consultations risked reducing contextual relevance and weakening national ownership. In such cases, project logic appeared shaped more by donor priorities than by the needs of national stakeholders or beneficiaries. For example, the Security Sector Governance/Reform project in Armenia was aligned with EU frameworks but was insufficiently tailored to the country's specific needs. The Small Arms and Light Weapons Awareness-Raising campaigns in Serbia were relevant to national policy priorities but did not effectively reach grass-roots communities, limiting local impact.

These examples underscore the importance of systemic needs assessments, robust baseline analyses and inclusive consultation processes to ensure that OSCE interventions remain responsive, context-specific and nationally owned.

✓ **Finding 2:** The OSCE's neutrality, credibility and convening power significantly enhance project relevance, particularly in sensitive and politically complex environments.

The OSCE's long-term field presence, impartiality and ability to operate in sensitive political contexts strongly enhance the relevance of its interventions. The OSCE's convening power enables engagement with diverse stakeholders across political or institutional divides, uniquely positioning the Organization to support sensitive reform processes.

For example, the evaluations of the OSCE's support for electoral processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Kosovo emphasized that impartiality was central to stakeholder trust and credibility. The evaluation of the OSCE's support for Serbia's Vocational Police Association showed that the OSCE's convening role contributed to improved relations and trust between minority communities and authorities.

To sustain this high relevance, evaluations emphasized the need for strong project design, including clear theories of change, logical results pathways and iterative adaptation to evolving political and security conditions. Without such design rigour, even highly relevant initiatives may struggle to remain aligned with changing national priorities.

> **Examples of project relevance**
>
> **Tajikistan Women's Resource Centres (DE17)**
> The evaluation of Women's Resource Centres in Tajikistan demonstrated strong relevance. The project directly supported the implementation of Tajikistan's domestic violence legislation and created access to justice and support services for women in remote areas. Relevance was reinforced by alignment with both the OSCE's gender equality commitments and national legislative frameworks. Factors facilitating relevance were strong grass-roots ownership, partnerships with government agencies and the OSCE's role as a trusted broker between communities and the state.

Anti-trafficking programmes in Eastern Europe (DE08)

The evaluation of an anti-trafficking project in Eastern Europe showed relevance at the legislative and policy levels, where the OSCE's support helped with the drafting and aligning of anti-trafficking laws with international standards. However, gaps were registered in addressing reintegration and protection services for victims. The OSCE's technical expertise in legislative reforms was a strong contributing factor, while insufficient consultations with victim support organizations and lack of a holistic approach to survivor reintegration were noted as factors reducing the project's relevance for the most vulnerable groups.

Youth engagement initiatives (Western Balkans) (DE13)

Youth engagement projects in the Western Balkans were well aligned with the OSCE's human dimension commitments and the needs of young people in fragile post-conflict societies. The projects provided platforms for dialogue and participation and responded to local demands for greater youth inclusion. Relevance was strong for the immediate participants but less clear at the broader policy level. The participatory design of youth councils was a strong contributing factor, while insufficient linkages to the broader institutional reforms in the participating States were noted as a significant limitation to the projects' scalability and sustainability.

6.2 ADDED VALUE

Added value refers to the unique role that the OSCE plays in politically sensitive environments where few other organizations can operate effectively. Evaluations consistently highlight the Organization's neutrality, convening power and long-term presence as central to its legitimacy and comparative advantage. This section reviews how the OSCE's added value is recognized across the decentralized evaluations, and where opportunities remain for its more strategic articulation and communication.

✓ **Finding 3:** The OSCE's added value lies in its neutrality, trusted relationships, long-term presence and convening power. However, these strengths are not always effectively communicated or leveraged.

Nineteen of the 28 decentralized evaluations explicitly referenced the OSCE's added value in comparison with other international actors. Evaluations consistently emphasized that the Organization's most distinctive assets are its neutrality, credibility and continuous field presence. In contrast to larger institutions such as the EU or the UN, whose influence often derives from their considerable

human and financial resources, the OSCE's contribution is grounded in its ability to build trust, facilitate dialogue and engage on sensitive political and security issues.

For example, in Bosnia and Herzegovina's electoral support project and Kosovo's electoral assistance, the OSCE's impartiality was cited as essential to the credibility of the interventions. In the Stabilization of Tajikistan's Southern Border evaluation, the Organization's long-standing presence and trusted relationships were identified as critical factors enabling cross-institutional and cross-border cooperation.

The OSCE was described in several evaluations as a critical friend and a partner able to provide honest, technically sound advice while remaining politically neutral to both state authorities and civil society.

However, some evaluations found that the OSCE does not always communicate or demonstrate its added value effectively to donors, participating States and external audiences. For instance, in the RFoM's Safety of Female Journalists Online project, the evaluation found that, while the OSCE's substantive contributions to global

normative debates were significant, they were often overshadowed by actors with greater communications capacity. Resource limitations and short donor-driven funding cycles also sometimes diminished the OSCE's ability to fully leverage its comparative strengths.

These findings suggest that, while the OSCE's added value is recognized, it is not systematically articulated or communicated, resulting in missed opportunities for organizational visibility and influence. Unless the OSCE strengthens the articulation of its unique role, both internally and externally, it risks being perceived primarily as a technical assistance provider rather than the trusted political and institutional broker it is. Enhancing the visibility and understanding of its added value is therefore a strategic imperative for maintaining donor confidence, sustaining political support from participating States and reinforcing the Organization's long-term relevance.

Neutrality and impartiality
Bosnia and Herzegovina Elections (DE15): Stakeholders emphasized the OSCE's impartiality as the key reason why its election monitoring findings were broadly accepted.

Strengthening National Justice Systems to Protect Persons
Deprived of Liberty (DE10): ODIHR acted as a "critical friend", enabling dialogue in contexts where EU or UN involvement might be seen as political.

Trust and credibility
Serbia Judiciary Reform (DE22): Judicial institutions praised the OSCE's credibility, impartiality and technical competence.

Field presence and long-term engagement
Tajikistan Women's Resource Centres (DE17): The OSCE's engagement beyond the capital enabled access to rural communities overlooked by other actors.

Patrol Field Capacity-Building of Tajik Border Troops – Phase II (DE16): The OSCE's continuous presence allowed gradual confidence-building with border agencies.

Technical expertise and normative frameworks
Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Freedom of Expression (DE12): The RFoM was recognized internationally for embedding human rights perspectives into artificial intelligence (AI) and media freedom debates.

Support for Electoral Reforms in the Western Balkans (DE07):
ODIHR's election observation methodologies were recognized for integrating gender and minority participation in ways that exceeded common practice.

6.3 COHERENCE

Coherence refers to the extent to which OSCE interventions are aligned internally — across institutions, Secretariat departments and field operations — and externally with the strategies of international partners. Coherence reflects not only technical coordination but also the Organization's ability to present itself as a unified, credible and strategically aligned actor. This section synthesizes the evaluation findings related to the OSCE's external and internal coherence.

✓ **Finding 4:** The OSCE demonstrates strong external coherence with international partners but continues to face challenges in

leveraging its internal capacities and expertise across executive structures and security dimensions.

Coherence was assessed positively in the majority of evaluations, though with a clear distinction between internal and external coherence.

External coherence

Twenty-three of the 28 evaluations highlighted strong alignment with the strategies and frameworks of international partners such as the EU and the UN and other key actors, particularly in areas such as border management, policing, rule of law and democratic governance. A few examples illustrating the OSCE's alignment with international partners include the following:

- The Tajikistan Border Stabilization project demonstrated strong alignment with EU programming and broader international efforts in the region.

- The Security Sector Governance/Reform project in Armenia complemented initiatives by the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance and EU-supported SSR programming.

- The Patrol Field Capacity-Building in Tajikistan project was effectively coordinated with the Border Implementation Group donor platform.

- The Decreasing the Risk of Weapon Proliferation and Misuse of Small Arms and Light Weapons project in North Macedonia established sound coordination with the World Bank's SALW road map.

These examples also demonstrate the OSCE's ability to position itself as a complementary actor capable of filling political, institutional or technical gaps and contributing added value to broader international efforts.

Internal coherence

By contrast, internal coherence remains more uneven. While 19 evaluations found generally positive collaboration across units, the remaining reports identified systemic weaknesses, including fragmented planning, siloed programming, activity overlaps and missed opportunities for cross-dimensional collaboration.

For example, the evaluation of Combating Trafficking in Human Beings identified duplication between ODIHR and the Office of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings. The evaluation of the Democratic policing in multi-ethnic societies in North Macedonia project found weak integration with broader OSCE initiatives.

These findings point to recurring challenges for the OSCE in creating unified, cross-dimensional approaches despite its broad mandate and presence across all three security dimensions. Addressing these gaps through more integrated planning, strengthened coordination and deliberate cross-dimensional collaboration is critical for enhancing organizational performance.

Examples of coherence

Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Freedom of Expression project (DE12)

The evaluation of the RFoM's Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Freedom of Expression project illustrated strong external coherence. By influencing global debates on AI and human rights, the project positioned the OSCE as a credible voice alongside the UN and the EU. The project was coherent with the OSCE's mandate on media freedom and complemented broader international initiatives. A limiting factor, however, was the modest visibility of the OSCE's contribution compared with that of larger organizations, which overshadowed the OSCE's niche expertise.

Support for the development and adoption of a code of ethics for local officials (DE23)

This project demonstrated strong internal coherence, effectively linking rule of law programming with human rights and governance initiatives, supported by clear work plans and participatory strategies that aligned with OSCE mission priorities. Externally, coherence was a notable strength: the initiatives were well anchored in Serbia's EU accession agenda and co-ordinated with national counterparts such as the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities and the Assembly of the Association of Ombudspersons in Serbia, thereby reinforcing the OSCE's comparative advantage and legitimacy. However, weaknesses were identified in limited gender-sensitive monitoring indicators and the lack of a steering mechanism to formalize co-ordination structures.

Central Asia environmental initiatives (DE03)

Environmental security projects in Central Asia revealed misalignment between the Secretariat and field operations. While technically aligned with the OSCE's environmental commitments, projects were not always linked to broader organizational strategies. This lack of a clear connection resulted in fragmentation and limited opportunities for cross-dimensional coherence, mostly due to insufficient strategic planning.

6.4 EFFECTIVENESS

Effectiveness refers to the extent to which OSCE interventions achieve their intended objectives and contribute to broader outcomes. It is central to the Organization's credibility and legitimacy, reflecting the OSCE's ability to translate resources and activities into meaningful results for participating States and communities. This section summarizes evaluation evidence of the OSCE's performance, including its strong track record in delivering outputs, its contributions to institutional and systemic reforms, and persistent challenges in demonstrating long-term results.

✓ **Finding 5:** The OSCE delivers outputs consistently and effectively, but longer-term outcomes remain uneven and

heavily dependent on local political will, sustainability planning and adequate monitoring frameworks.

Across the portfolio, 24 out of 28 evaluations confirmed that OSCE projects successfully achieved their planned outputs, and 18 evaluations documented contributions to outcomes. Evaluations repeatedly noted that OSCE interventions routinely deliver high-quality technical assistance, capacity development, training, and policy advice — often described by stakeholders as "unique" or "indispensable" in politically sensitive contexts.

Evidence of longer-term outcomes was present but variable. Positive results were most frequently observed in multi-year interventions that combined training with institutional strengthening, policy reform or normative support. Evaluations documented emerging or sustained changes, such as:

- Shifts in judicial evaluation culture

- Strengthened democratic policing practices

- Increased inclusion of national minorities in law enforcement structures

- Enhanced oversight and accountability mechanism and

- Sustained youth civic engagement

These examples demonstrate that OSCE projects have the potential to contribute to systemic change when interventions are embedded within national institutions, supported by legal frameworks or implemented over sufficiently long time horizons.

Despite these positive results, many evaluations reported that impact remained difficult to assess. This difficulty was particularly evident in mid-term evaluations or projects with short implementation periods, where insufficient time had elapsed for systemic change to take root.

The portfolio of decentralized evaluations also revealed significant variability in evidence quality and recurring gaps in results frameworks and monitoring systems. The most common challenges in achieving long-term effectiveness included:

- Weak or overly output-focused indicators

- Insufficiently developed results frameworks

- Lack of baseline data and outcome-oriented monitoring

- Fragmented inter-institutional cooperation and

- Political volatility or limited government ownership

These factors often constrained the translation of outputs into sustained outcomes, resulting in several "mostly unsatisfactory" ratings of the evaluations for long-term effectiveness. They also underscore the need for:

- Improved results-based management and monitoring, evaluation and learning systems

- More robust and outcome-oriented indicators

- Longer-term or programmatic approaches where appropriate and

- Strategies that deliberately link individual-level changes to institutional or systemic transformations

Strengthening these areas will be essential for enhancing the OSCE's ability to demonstrate longer-term effectiveness and impact.

Examples of project effectiveness

Consolidating the democratization process in Serbia's security sector (DE24)

This project helped enhance democratic governance within Serbia's security sector. The project's multifaceted approach effectively led to consolidation of the democratic relationship between citizens and the government. However, ongoing challenges, such as weak connections between the main security actors, undermined the sustainability of these gains.

Support for electoral reforms in the Western Balkans (DE07)

Election support projects were effective in shaping reforms and strengthening electoral institutions. The OSCE's long-term engagement, coupled with its recognized impartiality, enabled meaningful contributions to institutional change. The evaluation concluded that the OSCE's effectiveness lay not only in technical monitoring but also in its ability to influence broader democratic reforms.

SALW awareness campaigns (DE27)

SALW awareness campaigns achieved immediate outputs, such as high surrender rates of small arms, but were less effective in creating long-term behavioural changes. The evaluation noted that effectiveness was undermined by the lack of follow-up strategies and weak integration into broader security sector reforms.

Armenia security sector governance (DE01)

The Armenia Security Sector Governance/Reform project was assessed as highly relevant for the development of training curricula; however, the uptake of the curricula at the policy level was limited due to political resistance.

6.5 EFFICENCY

This section summarizes evaluation findings on how effectively the OSCE uses its financial and human resources to deliver results in a timely and cost-effective manner.

> ✓ **Finding 6:** OSCE projects are generally efficient, but systemic constraints, such as short funding cycles, procurement processes and staff turnover, limit their ability to deliver results smoothly and on time.

Efficiency across OSCE projects shows significant variation, reflecting both strong project-level management practices and persistent system-level challenges. Efficiency was rated "satisfactory" or "mostly satisfactory" in 20 of the 28 evaluations and as "mostly unsatisfactory" in 3 evaluations.

Evaluations consistently identified several structural bottlenecks that hindered timely and cost-effective project implementation, such as:

- **Short-term and unpredictable funding cycles**, complicating planning and disrupting continuity;

- **Complex and time-consuming procurement procedures**, frequently cited as slowing down implementation;

- **High staff turnover**, leading to the loss of institutional memory and interruptions in project delivery; and

- **Bureaucratic administrative processes**, reducing responsiveness and limiting operational flexibility.

These findings suggest that improving efficiency is less about adjusting individual project designs and more about strengthening institutional systems, funding mechanisms and administrative processes. Addressing these systemic barriers would significantly enhance the OSCE's capacity to deliver timely, cost-effective and sustainable results across its portfolio.

Examples of project efficiency

Cybercrime capacity-building in Central Asia (DE06)
Cybercrime capacity-building initiatives in Central Asia demonstrated highly efficient use of resources through train-the-trainer models. By training a small group of national trainers who could then cascade knowledge, the OSCE maximized outreach at a minimal cost. The model was praised in the evaluation as a replicable good practice. The OSCE's technical expertise and ability to partner with national training institutions were major contributing factors for efficiency. Limiting factors included donor dependency, making the scaling up of the model uncertain.

Consolidating the democratization process in the security sector in Serbia (DE24)
Despite delays caused by external factors, primarily the COVID-19 pandemic, the project was able to adapt and maintain progress by effectively utilizing its budget. The project's human and financial resources were reportedly sufficient to facilitate the successful implementation of planned activities. The sound management system and the detailed work plans further facilitated the efficient and timely implementation of the project. The main factors contributing to efficiency were the incorporation of results-oriented annual plans, which provided a solid basis for scheduling, resource allocation and budget control, as well as the sound monitoring and reporting system.

Capacity-building for Tajik border troops (DE16)

Phase 2 of the Patrol Field Capacity-Building border management programme in Tajikistan provided an example of mixed efficiency. While train-the-trainer approaches created efficiencies in capacity-building, infrastructure components such as the construction of border posts faced major procurement delays. The OSCE's established presence and trust with national agencies facilitated the implementation of the training, but rigid procurement systems and short-term funding caused major delays.

6.6 SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability refers to the likelihood that the benefits of OSCE interventions will continue after project completion and the withdrawal of external support. This section reviews how sustainability was assessed across the 28 decentralized evaluations, highlighting both the enablers of durable results and the recurring weaknesses that limit long-term impact.

✓ **Finding 7:** Sustainability remains the weakest performance area, with little evidence of results lasting beyond the OSCE's direct support, yet examples demonstrate the potential for more durable results when project-initiated reforms are nationally

owned, institutionally embedded or supported by domestic resources.

Sustainability was assessed in 23 of the 28 evaluations. While it was rated as "satisfactory" or "mostly satisfactory" in 18 of the evaluations, many reports also pointed to weak sustainability planning and uncertain prospects for long-term continuation of results.

A few evaluations highlighted the achievement of meaningful outcomes; however, the ability of beneficiaries or national institutions to sustain these achievements after the OSCE's withdrawal was frequently questioned.

Based on the evaluation findings, the potential for the sustainability of results was greatest when:

- Project-initiated reforms were embedded in national institutions;

- Local stakeholders assumed ownership of processes and results; and

- Domestic resources were allocated to continue activities once the OSCE's support came to an end.

Where these enabling conditions were absent, sustainability tended to be limited or uncertain.

✓ **Finding 7:** Few projects included clear exit strategies or handover mechanisms, leaving results vulnerable after project completion.

One of the most commonly identified reasons for the weak sustainability of results was the absence of explicit exit strategies, transition plans or handover mechanisms. Evaluations also repeatedly noted that sustainability considerations were not systematically built into project design from the outset.

Sustainability was more evident when projects applied approaches that fostered local ownership and capacity retention. Examples of such projects are:

- The RFoM's media freedom initiatives, where training provided to journalists and civil society organizations

enabled continued monitoring of activities after OSCE funding ended;

- Capacity-Building on Combating Cybercrime in Central Asia, where training-of-trainers models ensured knowledge transfer beyond the immediate circle of participants; and

- ODIHR's human rights initiatives in Eastern Europe, which supported the development of national action plans and integrated international norms into legislation, thus creating institutional structures that outlasted individual projects.

✓ **Finding 9:** Short-term, donor-driven funding cycles continue to undermine sustainability, limiting the OSCE's ability to plan for long-term results or to embed reforms in national systems.

Reliance on extrabudgetary funding, typically characterized by short project horizons, remains a significant constraint for the Organization. Evaluations highlighted that unpredictable and short-term funding cycles prevented project teams from planning beyond immediate outputs and limited the OSCE's ability to support reform processes over the longer term.

In countries where local financial or institutional resources were insufficient, even well-designed initiatives struggled to sustain momentum after OSCE support ended. Without mechanisms for continued financing or institutional responsibility, project achievements remain vulnerable and may not endure over time. Strengthening sustainability planning is therefore essential for improving long-term impact and reinforcing the Organization's value to participating States.

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Examples of project sustainability

Tajikistan Women's Resource Centres (DE17)
The evaluation of Women's Resource Centres in Tajikistan showed exemplary sustainability through grass-roots ownership and institutional integration. Services were anchored in both local communities and in national domestic violence legislation, which enhanced their durability. Community members actively contributed to maintaining the centres, reflecting strong ownership. The heavy reliance on external donor support and limited resources for rural expansion were the main risks to sustainability of results.

SALW awareness campaigns (South-Eastern Europe) (DE27)
SALW awareness campaigns achieved short-term successes in collecting and destroying weapons. However, behavioural changes were not consolidated, and local institutions were unable to continue activities after project closure since there were no follow-up strategies, and the awareness-raising campaigns were not embedded in systemic reforms to ensure sustainability.

Extrabudgetary projects in Bosnia and Herzegovina (DE15)
Donor-driven extrabudgetary projects in Bosnia and Herzegovina had serious sustainability gaps. Despite the delivery of relevant and timely outputs, the lack of exit strategies and institutional embedding meant that gains and activities were not sustained once donor funding ended. The evaluations stressed the importance of fully integrating extrabudgetary projects into field mission priorities and national frameworks to ensure durability of results.

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6.7 GENDER EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

This section reviews the extent to which gender equality and human rights considerations were integrated into OSCE interventions, based on evidence from the 28 decentralized evaluations.

> ✓ **Finding 9:** The integration of gender equality and human rights has improved but remains uneven; strong results occur when it is central to project design and not treated as an add-on.

Gender equality and human rights were referenced to varying degrees in 26 evaluations: 12 evaluations demonstrated strong integration, 10 showed mostly satisfactory mainstreaming, and 4 reflected minimal or no visible gender equality considerations.

Projects with explicit gender equality objectives or long-term engagement, such as Women and Men Innovating and Networking for Gender Equality Project and Safety of Female Journalists Online SOFJO PHASE II Decentralized Formative Evaluation, achieved the strongest results. OSCE initiatives with established methodologies, including ODIHR's Electoral Reform project in the Western Balkans, also demonstrated effective gender-sensitive and rights-based approaches.

In contrast, several evaluations found that gender equality was addressed superficially and often reduced to participation statistics rather than being based on needs analysis, barriers or differentiated impact. For example, in Turning Words into Action, gender issues were limited to participation data, and in Support to designing and implementing awareness raising campaigns on SALW control, women's vulnerabilities were totally neglected.

Similar gaps were observed in projects on border management, policing and certain economic and environmental projects, where project designs focused narrowly on technical objectives or short-term donor priorities.

Human rights integration was stronger in projects explicitly focused on minority rights or democratic policing, such as Strengthening institutional capacity of law enforcement agencies with special attention to the principles of democratic policing in multi-ethnic societies, including gender equality and mainstreaming, and ODIHR's project Strengthening national justice systems to protect persons deprived of liberty in the OSCE.

Across the portfolio, evaluations also noted insufficient attention to youth, persons with disabilities and other marginalized groups.

> **Examples of gender equality and human rights integration**
>
> **ODIHR election observation work (DE08, DE23)**
> ODIHR election observation missions provided the strongest examples of gender mainstreaming and human rights integration. Evaluations noted the systematic use of sex-disaggregated data, attention to the participation of women and minorities, and the integration of human rights standards in election assessments. Contributing factors included ODIHR's expertise, established methodology and strong partnerships with civil society, while resource constraints often reduced the ability to follow up on gender-specific recommendations.
>
> **Tajikistan Women's Resource Centres (DE17)**
> The evaluation of Women's Resource Centres in Tajikistan highlighted exemplary gender and human rights integration. The Centres provided direct support to survivors of domestic violence, linking grass-roots services to national policy frameworks. The project was recognized for enhancing women's access to justice and services, while also influencing implementation of Tajikistan's domestic violence law. Contributing factors included strong community ownership, the OSCE's credibility as a neutral actor and its long-term engagement. Financial sustainability was a major limiting factor, as the Centres remained heavily dependent on OSCE and donor funding.

> **Border management projects in Central Asia (DE16, DE18)**
> Border management projects in Central Asia revealed some gender and human rights integration weaknesses. While technically aligned with security objectives, these projects rarely mainstreamed gender and human rights concerns in project design and monitoring. Gender considerations were treated as add-ons rather than as core objectives.

6.8 SUMMARY OF EVALUATION FINDINGS

Figure 3 presents an overview of project performance, aligned with the evaluation criteria, based on a four-point rating scale (satisfactory, mostly satisfactory, mostly unsatisfactory and unsatisfactory). The follow patterns emerged:

- **Relevance** was the highest-rated criterion (**93 per cent** rated satisfactory or mostly satisfactory).

- **Short-term effectiveness** (**86 per cent**) and **external coherence** (**82 per cent**) also scored strongly.

- **Long-term effectiveness** (**64 per cent**) and **sustainability** (**65 per cent**) were the areas where the OSCE demonstrated the weakest performance.

Percent of DE Reports Rated by Evaluation Criteria:

Criteria	Satisfactory	Mostly satisfactory	Mostly unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Not assessed
Equity	43%	36%	14%	0%	7%
Sustainability	29%	36%	14%		18%
Efficiency	43%	29%	0%		29%
Long-term Effectiveness	46%	18%	11%	0%	25%
Short-term Effectiveness	50%	36%	11%	0%	
External Coherence	57%	25%	11%	0%	7%
Internal Coherence	46%	21%	4%	0%	29%
Added Value	43%	4%	4%	0%	50%
Relevance	86%	7%	0%		7%
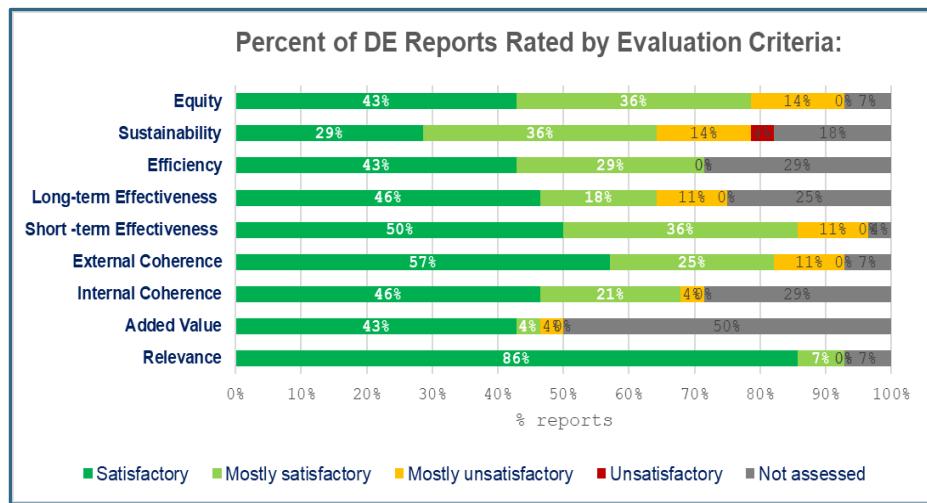
FIGURE 3: EVALUATION CRITERIA RATINGS

7. Recurring lessons learned

Twenty-three of the 28 decentralized evaluations reviewed identified lessons that point to recurring system-wide factors shaping OSCE performance. Many echo findings from the 2020 and 2022 synthesis reviews, underscoring persistent organizational challenges, as well as opportunities for strengthening future interventions.

Across the portfolio, the following lessons emerged consistently:

- Stakeholder engagement and ownership are decisive for success.
- Sustainability must be planned from the outset, not retrofitted.
- Flexibility and adaptability are essential for maintaining relevance.
- Robust results-based management and monitoring, evaluation and learning systems are needed to generate credible evidence of outcomes.

- Gender and human rights mainstreaming must extend beyond participation statistics.

Evaluations repeatedly emphasized that early and continuous engagement of stakeholders, including government institutions, civil society and local communities, significantly enhances project relevance, contextual fit and ownership. Similarly, when sustainability elements such as institutional buy-in, capacity development and clear exit strategies are built in from the beginning, project achievements are more likely to endure after the OSCE discontinues its support.

A number of evaluations highlighted that flexible projects that are adapted to shifting political and security contexts achieved stronger results, especially in elections, rule of law and justice sector support. Flexibility enabled teams to seize emerging opportunities and mitigate risks.

Evaluations also found that training alone was insufficient. More sustainable outcomes were achieved when training was complemented by mentoring, long-term capacity development and

practical mechanisms for knowledge retention, rather than one-off workshops.

Finally, several evaluations noted that weak monitoring, evaluation and learning systems hindered the OSCE's ability to demonstrate outcomes and impact. Strengthening these systems, especially through clearer theories of change, outcome-level indicators and baseline data, was identified as a critical need.

While these lessons are actionable and transferable across OSCE institutions and field operations, their value depends on whether they are systematically embedded into planning and decision-making processes. Unless lessons are institutionalized, they risk being repeatedly rediscovered rather than applied.

Examples of lessons learned from projects

Stakeholder engagement is critical
The evaluation of Skopje's Democratic Policing in Multi-ethnic Societies (DE26) project highlighted that trust-building with local communities and minority groups was essential to the project's success. By involving stakeholders, the initiative fostered a sense of ownership that contributed to the sustainability of results. **Lesson:** Interventions are most effective when co-created with beneficiaries rather than imposed externally.

Sustainability planning must be embedded from the outset
The Serbia judiciary reform project (DE22) showed that sustainability must be built into the project design from the outset. The reforms achieved lasting results because they were embedded in national institutions and legal frameworks. Combining technical expertise with long-term partnerships built resilience into the justice system. By contrast, projects without exit strategies, such as SALW awareness campaigns, struggled with sustainability once OSCE funding ended.
Lesson: Sustainability requires not only training and capacity-building but also institutional embedding and long-term planning.

Systematic monitoring and evaluation enables adaptive management

Several evaluations, including of Armenia's Security Sector Governance/Reform (DE01) and of the Elections Support project in the Western Balkans (DE07), noted that weak monitoring, evaluation and learning frameworks limited the ability to assess outcomes and long-term impact. Without baseline data or outcome indicators, projects risk

Leveraging partnerships and local expertise increases efficiency

Evaluations of cybercrime capacity-building (DE06) and border management projects (DE16 and DE18) demonstrated the importance of partnerships with local training institutions and state agencies. Partnerships reduced costs, increased relevance and supported sustainability.

Lesson: The OSCE should systematically leverage partnerships with governments, civil society and international organizations to increase impact and avoid the duplication of efforts with other actors.

Flexibility and adaptability are key

The RFoM's evaluation of the impact of AI on freedom of expression (DE12) underlined the value of flexibility. By rapidly adapting to emerging debates on AI and media freedom, the project increased the OSCE's global visibility and influence. Flexibility was also seen in media freedom crisis-response initiatives, where the reallocation of resources enabled a quick impact.

Lesson: Adaptive management, supported by flexible funding, is critical in volatile political environments.

Capacity-building and knowledge transfer enhance sustainability

Police reform projects in Central Asia incorporated training-of-trainers models, enabling knowledge transfer beyond the immediate project scope. The RFoM trained local journalists and civil society actors and ensured that results monitoring continued after the project funding ended.

Lesson: Embedding training into institutional structures creates lasting impact beyond the life of the project.

8. Recurring good practices

This section synthesizes recurring good practices identified in 22 of the 28 decentralized evaluations. These practices represent approaches that have worked particularly well and hold potential for replication across the OSCE Secretariat, institutions and field operations. Most relate to the effective use of train-the-trainer models, community and stakeholder engagement, integration of gender and human rights, and the strategic use of the OSCE's neutrality and convening power. These practices illustrate that the OSCE achieves its most impactful and sustainable results when projects are:

- **Grounded in national ownership**, ensuring that reforms reflect local priorities and benefit from sustained commitment;

- **Institutionally embedded**, with structures, procedures or curricula integrated into national systems rather than remaining project-dependent;

- **Inclusive and participatory**, giving space to diverse voices and strengthening legitimacy and long-term impact;

- **Focused on capacity and knowledge transfer**, especially through train-the-trainer approaches that build a pool of local expertise; and

- **Designed to leverage the OSCE's neutrality and convening power**, enabling dialogue, trust-building and reform in politically sensitive contexts.

These practices also show that the OSCE is most effective when it positions itself not only as a technical actor but also as a trusted broker capable of facilitating systemic change. Where political conditions, institutional readiness and resource availability allow, these practices can be scaled and adapted across the OSCE region and security dimensions.

Most commonly identified good practices

Train-the-trainer approaches
Train-the-trainer models were consistently praised for their efficiency and sustainability. For example, cybercrime academies in Central Asia and phase 2 of the Patrol Field Capacity-Building border management programme in Tajikistan adopted train-the-trainer approaches to scale capacity-building with limited resources. By equipping national trainers who could then cascade knowledge, the OSCE maximized reach while reducing costs.

Grass-roots ownership and empowerment
The Women's Resource Centres in Tajikistan (DE17) were highlighted as a best practice in building grass-roots ownership. By embedding services in communities and linking them to national frameworks, the OSCE ensured both relevance and sustainability. This model demonstrated how the OSCE can empower local actors to deliver services while maintaining a bridging role between the state and communities.

Neutral facilitation in sensitive contexts
Several evaluations underscored the OSCE's added value as a neutral facilitator of dialogue. For example, minority rights projects and parliamentary support initiatives demonstrated that the OSCE's credibility as a trusted broker enabled dialogue where other actors could not intervene. Replicability, however, is context-specific, requiring political sensitivity and strong relationships with stakeholders.

Flexibility and responsiveness
The OSCE's ability to adapt project design mid-course to shifting political or emerging security conditions helped with the successful implementation of sensitive projects (e.g. "Strengthening Democratic Control of the Ukrainian Armed Forces" (DE02).

Development of knowledge products and toolkits
Standardized OSCE manuals on media freedom, democratic policing and minority rights enhanced replication and transferability across contexts.

9. Recurring evaluation recommendations

The 28 decentralized evaluations conducted between 2022 and 2024 generated over 150 recommendations. Although the recommendations spanned diverse thematic areas and operating contexts, some clear and consistent patterns emerged.

This section consolidates the most frequent and recurring recommendations, based on the number of evaluations that identified them, into eight thematic clusters: relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, results-based management, gender equality, institutional capacity and knowledge management.

Together, these clusters highlight the priority areas where targeted action by management is required to strengthen the OSCE's overall performance.

1. Relevance (10 evaluations)

- **Strengthen context and needs analysis** by conducting systematic needs assessments and stakeholder mapping to ensure that projects respond to genuine national priorities and avoid donor-driven agendas.

- **Develop participatory designs** by engaging beneficiaries, civil society and state counterparts early in project formulation to build ownership and avoid top-down approaches.

- **Anticipate change and adapt** by integrating foresight and adaptive mechanisms into project design to maintain relevance in dynamic political or security environments.

2. Coherence (10 evaluations)

- **Enhance internal coherence** by strengthening cross-departmental and cross-institutional collaboration, reducing siloed approaches.

- **Institutionalize external coherence** through joint programming and strategic partnerships with the EU, the UN and other key actors.

- **Ensure complementarity** between extrabudgetary and Unified Budget initiatives to avoid duplication and maximize synergies.

3. Effectiveness (15 evaluations)

- **Design realistic theories of change** with clearly defined outcomes and strong institutional anchoring.

- **Scale up proven approaches** and discontinue or redesign models with limited results, drawing explicitly on evidence for adaptation.

  - **Strengthen inclusion and uptake mechanisms** to ensure that results are contextually understood and absorbed by national institutions.

4. Efficiency (15 evaluations)

- **Improve funding predictability** through multi-year commitments and more flexible budgeting mechanisms.

- **Streamline procurement and administrative procedures** to reduce delays and increase responsiveness.

- **Strengthen project management capacities** in field operations to ensure cost-effective delivery.

5. Sustainability (18 evaluations)

- **Integrate sustainability planning at inception**, including explicit exit strategies, handover processes and long-term resourcing pathways.

- **Prioritize institutional embedding**, ensuring that reforms and tools are integrated into national structures and legal frameworks.

- **Promote multi-year planning** and explore **co-financing models** with host governments to reduce dependence on short-term donor funding.

6. Results-based management and monitoring and evaluation (14 evaluations)

- **Require all projects to include a theory of change**, baseline data and outcome-oriented indicators.

- **Improve monitoring systems** to capture medium- and long-term results, moving beyond a focus on outputs.

- **Strengthen evaluation follow-up**, ensuring that lessons learned and recommendations systematically inform new project cycles.

7. Gender and human rights (12 evaluations)

- **Systematically integrate gender and human rights** into project design, implementation and evaluation.

- **Move beyond participation statistics** to incorporate qualitative dimensions of gender equality, power dynamics and differentiated need.

- **Apply intersectional approaches,** ensuring that youth, minorities, persons with disabilities and other marginalized groups are meaningfully included.

8. Institutional capacity and knowledge management (9 evaluations)

- **Reduce reliance on short-term contracts** and strengthen staffing stability, particularly in field operations.

- **Invest in capacity-building** for staff on results-based management, gender equality mainstreaming, partnership development and adaptive management.

- **Strengthen knowledge management systems** to document, store and share lessons learned and good practices across OSCE structures.

These recommendations point to a combination of structural and system-wide issues and a consistent message that the OSCE's ability to deliver lasting, high-quality results hinges on stronger institutional systems, predictable resources and coherent internal processes. Addressing these strategic issues is essential for maximizing the Organization's value to participating States, improving performance across evaluation criteria and ensuring that project results endure beyond the lifespan of individual interventions.

10. Identified trends across the 3 synthesis reviews and implications for the future

A clear pattern emerges across the 2020, 2022 and 2024 synthesis reviews: the OSCE's core strengths in relevance, added value and external coherence remain consistently strong, while systemic weaknesses related to sustainability, internal coherence and results-based management show limited improvement despite repeated recommendations since 2017.

The 2024 review does show modest progress, especially in documenting outcome-level results and more consistent integration of gender equality and human rights. However, across most criteria, the three cycles collectively portray continuity rather than meaningful transformation.

Relevance

Relevance remains the criterion where the OSCE demonstrated the strongest performance across all cycles, reflecting alignment with OSCE mandates and national priorities. Persistent gaps relate mainly to donor-driven or insufficiently contextualized project designs.

2020: Relevance was the strongest criterion. Alignment was high, but many designs were shaped by donor agendas, limited contextual analysis and short-term focus.

2022: Relevance remained strong, with expanded use of needs assessments and stronger alignment with EU accession processes.

2024: Relevance remained high; the OSCE's neutrality and convening role were strongly emphasized, though gaps persisted in participatory.

Implications for the future: To further enhance relevance, the OSCE needs to better tailor its projects to the local needs and specific context of the recipient State or institution.

Added value

The OSCE's neutrality, trust, long-term field presence and convening power are consistently recognized but remain under-leveraged and not sufficiently communicated.

2020: Neutrality and trust were acknowledged, but added value was insufficiently communicated.

2022: There was growing recognition of the OSCE's convening power and unique role in sensitive environments.

2024: Added value was strongly affirmed; however, strategic communication and visibility remained weak.

Implications for the future: The need for increased visibility of the OSCE's activities and better promotion of its comparative advantage was identified.

Coherence

External coherence is strong and improving; internal coherence remains a systemic challenge.

2020: Coherence was weak overall, with pronounced siloing across institutions and thematic areas.

2022: External coherence was strengthened, particularly with the EU and the UN; internal fragmentation remained largely unresolved.

2024: External alignment was further strengthened; internal coordination weaknesses remained largely unchanged.

Implications for the future: The OSCE must enhance synergies and strengthen internal coordination among executive structures, while maintaining its strong external complementarity.

Effectiveness

Outputs were consistently delivered across all cycles, with gradual improvements in outcome evidence, but challenges remain in demonstrating systemic impact.

2020: Output delivery was strong, with limited evidence of outcomes or reform-level change.

2022: Greater use of theories of change and outcome reporting were identified, but attribution issues remained.

2024: Outputs were reliably delivered, with more credible examples of outcomes where reforms were embedded in institutions or legal frameworks.

Implications for the future: OSCE's ability to deliver outputs is proven, but to achieve outcomes, it needs to strengthen local ownership, improve sustainability planning, and develop robust MEL frameworks.

Efficiency

Efficiency remains broadly satisfactory but is constrained by recurring organizational bottlenecks.

2020: Projects achieved results with modest resources; there were delays due to procurement hurdles and short-term funding cycles.

2022: The same constraints persisted, with minimal improvements.

2024: Efficiency remained satisfactory but was still hindered by funding volatility, administrative delays and staff turnover.

Implications for the future: Real gains require predicable funding and streamlined processes. OSCE needs to focus on improving its internal administrative systems and funding modalities, and reduce bureaucracy and procurement bottlenecks.

Sustainability

Sustainability is the criterion where the OSCE demonstrated the weakest performance across all reviews, with limited evidence of lasting results.

2020: Sustainability was the weakest area, with few lasting results beyond OSCE engagement.

2022: Sustainability challenges remained widespread, though some isolated successes were identified where reforms were institutionally anchored.

2024: Sustainability was again the lowest-rated criterion, remaining a systemic gap despite some promising examples.

Implications for the future: Sustainability must be systematically embedded in project design with ownership handover, exit strategies and multi-year planning.

Gender equality

Gender equality integration shows gradual improvement but remains inconsistent across security dimensions.

2020: Gender equality was primarily addressed through participation statistics, with minimal mainstreaming.

2022: Performance in gender quality-focused projects was stronger, though intersectionality was rarely applied.

2024: There were steady gains, particularly in gender-centred initiatives; mainstreaming was still uneven, especially in politico-military and technical areas.

Implications for the future: The evidence calls for better intersectional indicators, systemic integration and institutionalization across thematic areas to ensure inclusiveness and accountability.

The above trends indicate that, across the three synthesis cycles, the OSCE's strengths have remained stable, and so have its weaknesses. Incremental progress is visible in effectiveness and gender equality integration, but sustainability, results-based management and internal coherence remain largely unresolved, despite years of repeated recommendations.

11. Recurring recommendations across the three synthesis reviews

Across the 2020, 2022 and 2024 synthesis reviews, similar systemic challenges recur despite variations in evaluation context or thematic focus. This continuity signals that many issues require Organization-level action in addition to project-specific improvements.

The most frequently repeated recommendations identified in the three synthesis reviews relate to:

- **Sustainability:** Build sustainability into project design from the outset through clear exit strategies, national ownership and multi-year planning.

- **Internal coherence:** Strengthen coordination by reducing silos and institutionalizing cross-unit and cross-dimensional collaboration.

- **Efficiency:** Improve funding predictability, streamline procurement and human resources processes, and reduce staff turnover to support timely delivery.

- **Results-based management:** Apply theories of change, establish baselines and use outcome indicators to better capture medium- and long-term results.

- **Gender and human rights:** Move beyond participation statistics towards genuine, intersectional integration of gender and human rights principles.

These recurring recommendations point to the need for system-level reforms that would enhance planning, coordination, results-based management and organizational learning, forming a coherent road map for improving the OSCE's long-term performance and impact.

12. Conclusion

The three synthesis reviews confirm that the OSCE continues to be a highly relevant and trusted actor, distinguished by strengths that few organizations can replicate, namely its neutrality, long-term field presence and convening power. These qualities enable the Organization to operate effectively in politically sensitive environments and to support reforms that require credibility and impartial engagement.

At the same time, the accumulated evidence from the 2020, 2022 and 2024 synthesis reviews also highlights a persistent set of systemic challenges that remain insufficiently addressed. Despite incremental improvements in areas such as outcome-level reporting and gender quality integration, long-standing weaknesses in sustainability planning, internal coherence and results-based management continue to limit the depth and durability of the OSCE's impact. The repetition of similar findings over successive evaluation cycles indicates that underlying institutional and systemic barriers are at the core of these performance gaps.

A notable trend across the three cycles is the evolution of recommendations. Earlier reviews emphasized improvements in project design and delivery, while more recent evaluations increasingly called for organizational reforms, including stronger planning systems, clearer accountability mechanisms and enhanced cross-dimensional coordination. This shift reflects a growing recognition that project-level adjustments alone cannot resolve systemic constraints.

Looking ahead, meaningful progress will require targeted actions at multiple organizational levels:

- **Leadership commitment** to advancing institutional reforms and enabling the Organization to move beyond short-term, fragmented project delivery;

- **Strengthened accountability** for implementing evaluation recommendations, with clearer ownership at managerial and departmental levels;

- **Enhanced results-based management** through the systematic use of theories of change, baselines and

outcome-level indicators; improved monitoring systems; and an **OSCE-wide framework for results-based management** to support the generation and use of evidence for decision-making;

- **Improved learning and knowledge-sharing**, ensuring that insights from decentralized evaluations systematically inform future design and decision-making across executive structures;

- **Institutionalization of practices** that support sustainability, coherence and robust results measurement rather than relying on ad hoc or project-specific efforts.

Breaking the cycle of recurring recommendations will ultimately depend on the OSCE's capacity to transform evaluation evidence into sustained organizational learning and adaptive change. By addressing structural constraints and embedding long-term, results-oriented practices, the Organization will be better positioned to convert its comparative advantages into enduring, measurable impact for participating States and affected communities.

Annex 1: Report Findings

Finding 1: OSCE projects remain highly relevant to the Organization's mandates and participating States' priorities, but alignment gaps persist in donor-driven projects and those without adequate consultation.

Finding 2: The OSCE's neutrality, credibility and convening power significantly enhance project relevance, particularly in sensitive and politically complex environments.

Finding 3: The OSCE's added value lies in its neutrality, trusted relationships, long-term presence and convening power. However, these strengths are not always effectively communicated or leveraged.

Finding 4: The OSCE demonstrates strong external coherence with international partners but continues to face challenges in leveraging its internal capacities and expertise across executive structures and security dimensions.

Finding 5: The OSCE delivers outputs consistently and effectively, but longer-term outcomes remain uneven and heavily dependent on local political will, sustainability planning and adequate monitoring frameworks.

Finding 6: OSCE projects are generally efficient, but systemic constraints, such as short funding cycles, procurement processes and staff turnover, limit their ability to deliver results smoothly and on time.

Finding 7: Sustainability remains the weakest performance area, with little evidence of results lasting beyond the OSCE's direct support, yet examples demonstrate the potential for more durable results when project-initiated reforms are nationally owned, institutionally embedded or supported by domestic resources.

Finding 8: Few projects included clear exit strategies or handover mechanisms, leaving results vulnerable after project completion.

Finding 9: Short-term, donor-driven funding cycles continue to undermine sustainability, limiting the OSCE's ability to plan for long-term results or to embed reforms in national systems.

Finding 10: The integration of gender equality and human rights has improved but remains uneven; strong results occur when it is central to project design and not treated as an add-on.

Annex 2: List of reviewed decentralized evaluations

Report ID	Report title	Year	Commissioning structure	Dimension	Country
DE01	Strengthening Security Sector Governance in the Republic of Armenia	2023	OSCE Secretariat / Conflict Prevention Centre	Politico-military dimension	Armenia
DE02	Evaluation of ExB Project No. 1102560 "Strengthening Democratic Control of the Ukrainian Armed Forces"	2024	OSCE Secretariat / Conflict Prevention Centre	Politico-military dimension	Ukraine
DE03	Evaluation of the ExB Project "Women, Water Management and Conflict Prevention - Phase II"	2022	OSCE Secretariat, Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities / Economic Crime Unit	Economic and environmental dimension	Central Asia and Afghanistan
DE04	Strengthening the fight against transnational organized crime in South-Eastern Europe through improved regional co-operation in asset seizure, confiscation, management and re-use	2023	OSCE Secretariat / Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities	Cross-dimensional	South-Eastern Europe (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia)

DE05	External Mid-Term Evaluation of the "WIN" project	2023	Office of the Secretary General / Gender Issues Programme	Cross-dimensional	Regional and subregional
DE06	Capacity Building on Combating Cybercrime in Central Asia	2024	OSCE Secretariat / Transnational Threats Department	Politico-military dimension	Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan)
DE07	Support to Electoral Reforms in the Western Balkans	2023	ODIHR	Human dimension	Western Balkans
DE08	Promoting a Human Rights Compliant and Gender Responsive Security Sector - Evaluation of CTHB Mid-term Outcome 2	2023	ODIHR	Human dimension	OSCE region
DE09	Turning Words into Action (WiA II)	2023	ODIHR	Human dimension	OSCE region
DE10	Strengthening national justice systems to protect persons deprived of liberty in the OSCE	2024	ODIHR	Human dimension	OSCE region
DE11	Safety of Female Journalists Online Sofjo Phase II Decentralized Formative Evaluation	2023	RFoM	Human dimension	OSCE region
DE12	Final Formative Decentralised Evaluation of RFoM's Extra-budgetary project "The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Freedom of Expression"	2024	RFoM	Human dimension	OSCE region

DE13	Youth in Focus II - Promoting the role of Youth in Peace and Security in Albania	2023	Presence in Albania	Cross-dimensional	Albania
DE14	Providing assistance to the government and civil society in promoting human rights, strengthening rule of law and enhancing legal framework in 2024- Title in report: Improving the effectiveness of the justice system in Kazakhstan	2024	OSCE Programme Office in Astana	Human dimension	Kazakhstan
DE15	Improving the 2022 electoral process in BiH in line with the ODIHR recommendations	2023	Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina	Human dimension	Bosnia and Herzegovina
DE16	Patrol Field Capacity Building of the Tajik Border Troops – Phase II (PFCB2)	2024	OSCE Programme Office in Dushanbe	Politico-military dimension	Tajikistan
DE17	Supporting and Strengthening the Women's Resource Centres in Tajikistan	2024	OSCE Programme Office in Dushanbe	Human dimension	Tajikistan
DE18	Stabilization of Tajikistan's southern border region with Afghanistan - phase II	2024	OSCE Programme Office in Dushanbe	Politico-military dimension	Tajikistan
DE19	External evaluation of GS engagement in strengthening electoral processes	2023	Mission in Kosovo	Economic and environmental dimension	Kosovo
DE20	External evaluation of projects "The Capacity Development of Inclusive and Effective Parliament (Phases II–V)" implemented by the OSCE Mission to Montenegro (2019–2022)	2023	Mission to Montenegro	Economic and environmental dimension	Montenegro
DE21	Mission's Approach to Safety Councils Evaluation Report	2022	Mission to Serbia	Human dimension	Serbia

DE22	Mission's support to the vocational Police Association "European Police Officers of National Minorities (EPNM) – Europe Police"	2023	Mission to Serbia	Human dimension	Serbia
DE23	Mission to Serbia's support to the development, implementation and adoption of the Code of Ethics for local officials (CoE) and the establishment and capacity building of the Association of Ombudspersons (AOS) in Serbia	2023	Mission to Serbia	Human dimension	Serbia
DE24	Final Evaluation of the Project Consolidating the Democratization Process in the Security Sector in Serbia, Phase V	2023	Mission to Serbia	Human dimension	Serbia
DE25	Support to designing and implementing awareness raising campaigns on SALW control	2024	Mission to Serbia	Politico-military dimension	Serbia
DE26	Strengthening institutional capacity and efficiency of law enforcement agencies, with special attention to the principles of democratic policing in multi-ethnic societies, including gender equality and mainstreaming. (phase 1 – 5)	2024	Mission to Skopje	Politico-military dimension	North Macedonia
DE27	Assisting the National Authorities of the Republic of North Macedonia to Decrease the Risk of Weapon Proliferation and Misuse of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) II	2024	Mission to Skopje	Politico-military dimension	North Macedonia
DE28	Evaluation of the Human Dimension Programmes	2024	Mission to Skopje	Human dimension	North Macedonia