

**Key messages from the participants of the 2018 Executive Training on  
'Evaluating the development, implementation and impact of drug policy'  
for the attention of Permanent Correspondents of the Pompidou Group**

1. Evaluation is an opportunity to reflect on what is done and the value of use of the action for an ulterior goal. Only an honest evaluation produces can lead to improvement. Uncertainty about the outcome of an evaluation must be accepted from the outset. Understanding failures is the first step to improvement. Realising mistakes is probably the most effective way of learning. And targets that are measured by evaluation should always be ambitious because meeting challenges requires trying to rise above limitations. This can be achieved when the people participating in an evaluation are assured that their openness and contributions are not held against them.
2. Evaluation should regularly be part of any drug policy already from its planning stage. Developing and implementing drug strategies and action plans should always include components of formative, on-going, mid-term and final evaluations. It is essential to observe a timing that will allow for sufficient time to incorporate evaluation results into the next policy cycle, action plan or strategy. The results of an evaluation and the recommendations for improvement need to be formulated clearly, as well as in an appropriate length and form for those to whom they are addressed.
3. In the same way evaluation needs to become a routine part of professional practice. Practitioners are well placed to detect evolutions of drug use. Monitoring such trends should form a crucial aspect to any evaluation be it on the policy or intervention level. Only this way it can be ensured that policies and interventions can meet emerging challenges and changing needs of target groups. Communication with practitioners at frontline level and service users is a valuable source for information and also data mining. This will lead to a more proactive instead of reactive approach in policy development and decision making.
4. Preparation, first and foremost the preparation of terms of reference as the starting point for any evaluation (see appendix), and good data are crucial for an evaluation. However this should not stop efforts to evaluate where preparation is short and not all data available. Practice has shown that an evaluation, no matter how limited, is far better than no evaluation at all. In addition any effort to evaluate will bring about some useful insights and results. Communication with all involved from the planning stage and throughout the evaluation process is critical. On-going communication and regular meetings of stakeholders as such already yield evaluative results.
5. It goes without saying that any evaluation needs to be resourced. When designing an evaluation the concept should be based on the available resources. This is a far more effective and time-efficient approach than preparing the all-encompassing evaluation and in the end not being able to obtain the needed resources. Financial limitations can often be overcome by thinking broadly about mobilization. Liberating existing human potential (competences, skills, convictions) within services for the evaluation, pooling resources with other stakeholders of the evaluation, making use of volunteer and trainee capacities for evaluation tasks, making use of data contained in existing IT systems that can serve as indicators or proxies.
6. In the way financial aspects play a crucial role in conducting an evaluation, they require to be also included in every evaluation. Consequently cost-benefit considerations must be addressed in one way or another but cannot be left out. An overview of sound methods to estimate drug-related

public expenditure has been produced by the Pompidou Group. With these methods, together with available statistical data, such estimates allow for calculating the amount of resources spent on implementing different drug policy interventions. In addition they can reveal the extent to which policy intentions are reflected in relevant budgets.

7. Indicators that evaluate drug policy coherence at national level, and also at international level, are important tools to ensure that different policy aspects do not compete with each other. The Pompidou Group has developed a set of 'coherency markers' that present useful too that is cost and time effective in its application. The application of these markers brings about useful and practical information in determining the effectiveness and efficiency of different policies and their components.
8. It is important to take into account unintended and unforeseen consequences when conducting an evaluation in the sphere of drug policy. Not only people who use drugs bear social, health and economic consequences, but also those who do not use drugs, as well as society at large. Therefore these effects reach far beyond the populations targeted by drug policies and have considerable impact. Any evaluation should be sensitive to these aspects and contain appropriate strategies to include these. At the same time it must be understood this applies equally to the evaluations as such, since they may bring unintended or unforeseen results.
9. Since the illegality certain drugs entails the restriction of human rights as part of the consequences for a criminal act, compliance with human rights standards is a crucial aspect in drug policy. Consequently adherence to these standards in drug policy development and implementation should be a component of any evaluation in this area. The work of the Pompidou Group provides a set of indicators that help to assess the compliance of drug policies with legal human rights standards: non-discrimination, accountability, proportionality, the precautionary principle and participation provide clear indicators for an assessment. These indicators can be applied at all levels, from a drug policy as such, as well as for specific interventions.
10. Expectations from evaluation results should be realistic. Firstly it must be understood that evaluation is not about revolution but about small steps for improvement. Secondly it must be borne in mind that even the most accurate evaluation results can be interpreted differently depending on one's expectation of what a policy or an intervention was meant to achieve. In this respect it is useful to correlate the evaluation objectives clearly with expressed policy goals. This requires involving the policy level in one way or another when developing the terms of reference for an evaluation. Those who commission an evaluation should be prepared for unexpected results emerging from an evaluation. But it should always be kept in mind that unexpected results need not only be negative but can certainly contain good news as well.