



SYNTHESIS OF DECENTRALIZED EVALUATIONS 2022 – 2024

This synthesis review draws on 28 decentralized evaluations commissioned by the OSCE's executive structures between 2022 and 2024, and places them in the broader context of two earlier synthesis reviews conducted by the OSCE Office of Internal Oversight in 2020 and 2022. Together, these three reviews provide insights in the OSCE's strengths, recurring challenges, and areas where systemic improvements are needed. Across the three cycles, the OSCE continues to demonstrate what makes it uniquely valuable: its relevance, respected neutrality, long-term presence and convening power. At the same time, it must address systemic issues to deliver more sustainable results.

Main findings on evaluation criteria

The most prominent finding across the 28 decentralized evaluations reviewed in this report is the OSCE's continued relevance. Nearly every project evaluated was aligned with OSCE mandates, host country priorities, and ongoing governance reforms. In contexts linked to EU accession, democratic development or human rights, OSCE support was frequently seen as timely and indispensable. The Organization's thematic breadth — from electoral reform and democratic policing to border management, cybercrime and control of small arms and light weapons — enabled it to respond flexibly to country-specific needs.

Equally important is the OSCE's added value, consistently reiterated in the evaluations. The OSCE's field presence and its mandate to work with state authorities, civil society and international partners uniquely position it as a “critical friend”, a role repeatedly cited by stakeholders as irreplaceable. Evaluations also underscore that OSCE activities remain highly complementary to EU and UN efforts, reinforcing the Organization's credibility as a strategic partner.

These attributes enable the OSCE to operate in politically sensitive environments and to bring together actors that often cannot be engaged through other channels.



CROSS-CUTTING FINDINGS

The 28 decentralized evaluations also show that the Organization has made progress in documenting outcome-level results, especially where OSCE-supported reforms have become part of national laws, policies or institutions. Targeted initiatives also highlight stronger integration of gender equality and human rights, demonstrating the Organization's potential to advance gender equality when these considerations are embedded from the outset.

However, the synthesis results also reveal a striking continuity in several systemic weaknesses that have persisted across three synthesis review cycles. These include sustainability, which remains the criterion where the Organization has demonstrated the weakest performance: many projects lack clear exit strategies or institutional anchoring, leaving results vulnerable once OSCE support ends. Internal coherence also continues to be a challenge, with evaluations highlighting fragmented coordination, siloed planning and missed opportunities for cross-dimensional collaboration. Finally, results-based management needs continued strengthening. Many interventions lack clear theories of change and baseline or outcome indicators, making it difficult to demonstrate long-term outcomes and impact.



LESSONS LEARNED FROM RECOMMENDATIONS

Lessons from the evaluations point to a coherent path forward for strengthening performance and reinforcing the Organization's unique value through a set of priorities:

- **Sustainability must be built in, not retrofitted.** Institutional anchoring and exit strategies should be mandatory elements of project design.
- **Results-based management is critical; Monitoring, evaluation and learning systems must evolve.** Without Organization-wide and outcome-level data, the OSCE cannot convincingly articulate long-term results and impact.
- **Stakeholder ownership is essential.** Projects succeed when national partners are engaged from start to end.
- **Flexibility is vital.** Projects that adapt quickly to evolving political and security contexts are more effective.
- **Training alone is insufficient.** Mentoring, institutional capacity development and knowledge transfer are needed to generate longer-term outcomes.
- **Gender equality integration requires depth.** Counting participants is not gender mainstreaming; substantive analysis of beneficiaries' specific needs is essential.

The overall conclusion of this synthesis is that the OSCE remains a highly relevant and trusted actor, but it must address the systemic issues that have reappeared across multiple synthesis cycles in order to transform short-term achievements into lasting institutional change. Achieving this goal will require leadership-driven, Organization-wide reforms in planning, coordination, funding and results-based management. Without such action, the OSCE risks continuing a cycle of strong outputs but limited long-term impact. The findings of this synthesis review could therefore serve not only as a reflection of past performance but also as a call to strengthen the Organization's capacity to deliver durable and meaningful results across the OSCE region.