Guide to social impact monitoring and evaluation of social innovations

Contents

Developed for the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic

Authors: Mgr. Juraj Mikuš, PhD.
              Ing. Mgr. Dagmar Gombitová, PhD.

The text has not undergone language editing.

Introduction

This methodological and application document serves as a valuable tool for developing a system for the social impact monitoring and evaluation of social innovations. It serves as a foundation for a comprehensive understanding of social impact monitoring and evaluation, the selection of data collection methods, the creation of a system for collecting evidence and the analysis of social impact.

Social innovations are new ideas, concepts, products or processes that address societal needs and contribute to positive changes in society. With their growing importance, it becomes essential to develop and provide effective tools to monitor and evaluate their socal impact.

This guide is just such a tool. It is designed to provide a framework structure and guidelines for collecting relevant data and the evaluation of the socal impact of social innovations. It aims to provide relevant information and methods to monitor and evaluate different initiatives with regard to their success, sustainability, potential scaling and replication.

With this guide, you will be able to learn how to properly define indicators that assess social impact, how to collect and process relevant data, and how to interpret monitoring and evaluation results. It will serve as a guide for evaluating and planning social innovations so that you can identify their strengths, recognize areas for improvement, and support their success.

This guide is intended to be a source of inspiration and a tool for the journey towards societal progress through social innovation.

1. Social impact monitoring and evaluation in the context of social innovations and their scaling

Social innovation is defined as an activity that involves the development and implementation of new products, services, practices and models, addresses societal needs, creates new social relationships or collaborations between public, civil or private organisations, and benefits society while increasing its capacity to act.[1]

Social innovations address societal problems and needs in innovative ways, are interactive, often involve multiple actors from the public, private and non-profit sectors, and create social impact in the process.

By the very nature of social innovations, which is to create systematic change, it is necessary to consider their scaling up and scaling out, in which social impact monitoring and evaluation play an indispensable role. This role can be demonstrated in the social innovation curve.

Figure 1: Social innovation development curve[2]
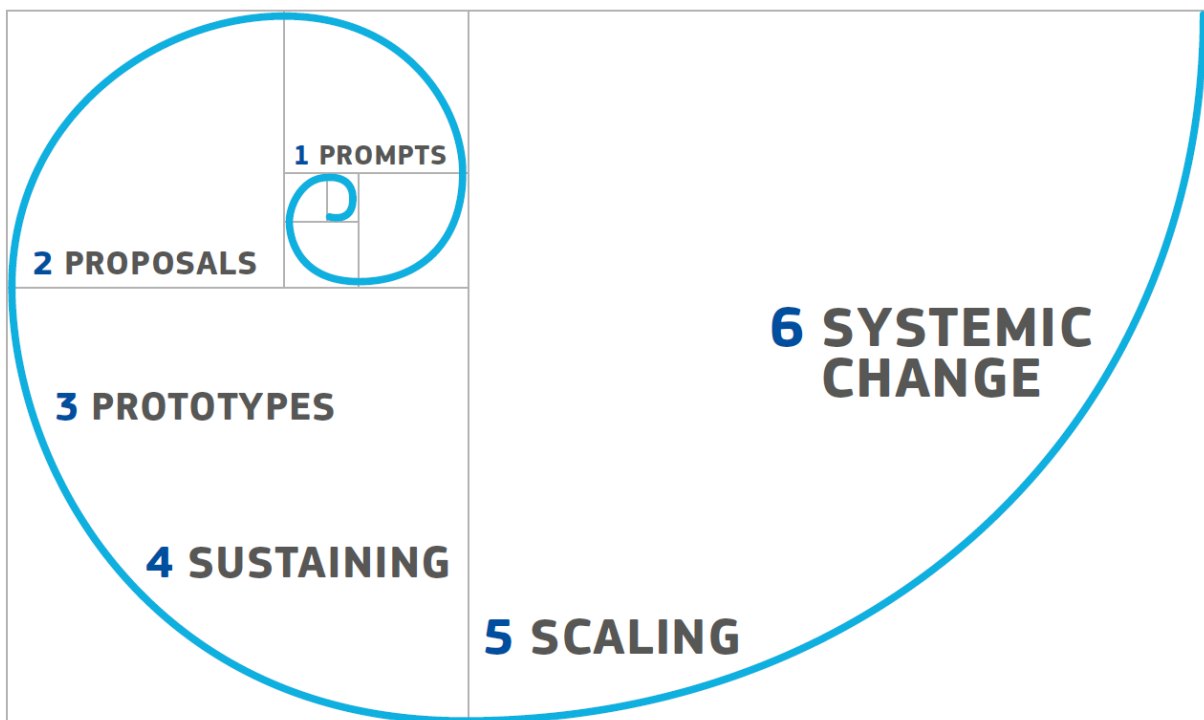
Source: Murray and co.(2010). The Open Book of Social Innovation. London: Nesta and the Young Foundation, p. 11.

---

[1] REGULATION (EU) 2021/1057 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL of 24 June 2021 establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and repealing the Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013, Luxembourg: Official Journal of the EU. p. 35. Available online: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/SK/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R1057

[2] Murray and co. (2010). The Open Book of Social Innovation. London: Nesta and the Young Foundation. Available online: https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/the_open_book_of_social_innovation.pdf

The social innovation curve represents a 6 stage process that social innovations go through to create wider social change.

- The first stage is **prompts**. These represent societal problems and needs that social innovation addresses. At this stage, it is necessary to understand the problem and its causes.
- The second stage is **proposals**, where ideas are generated and available (innovative) options for addressing societal problems and needs are identified.
- The third stage focuses on solutions **prototypes** and testing them in practice. It is an iterative process through which initiatives are refined and stakeholders learn to address a given societal problem or need. At this stage, it is important to develop a way of social impact monitoring and evaluation that can measure the success and effectiveness of the intervention, but also, based on the evidence, take steps internally to improve it in various ways.
- The next stage is **sustainability**. This is a state in which a given social innovation operates over a longer period (ideally several years) and becomes established. This includes identifying and generating revenue streams that ensure long-term financial sustainability of the social innovation. This stage is crucial in terms of social impact monitoring and evaluation as it serves to gather evidence that the social innovation actually works, generates social impact, is viable and effective, and should move to the next stage, which is scaling.
- The **scaling** stage is the creation of strategies for growth and scaling into other environments and contexts. It is not only about scaling social innovations through organisational growth, licensing and franchising, but also about spreading awareness, inspiration, providing support and know-how – an organic and adaptive way of growing a given social innovation. Monitoring and assessment of social impact at this stage is used to improve internal processes, control and external communication with stakeholders.
- The last stage of the process is the creation of **systemic change**, which is the main goal of implementing a social innovation. It usually involves a number of smaller social innovations, changing the way a given societal problem works and is solved, and a broader adaptation of new technologies, practices, processes, business models, or rules to solve it in the long run.

In practice, social impact monitoring and evaluation of social innovations has three roles:
- Demonstrate the viability of the social innovation design and model, i.e. the social impact of a given social innovation is higher than the existing and available solutions.
- Confirm the financial viability of the social innovation, i.e. it is more effective than the existing and available solutions.
- Evaluate the potential of the social innovation to contribute to systemic change in the context of a particular societal problem or need.

Social impact monitoring and evaluation of a social innovation evolves over time and typically moves through levels in the context of how strong the evidence information it provides for the above tasks:

- Level 1: Social innovation leaders can describe and explain why it is important and what societal need it addresses.
- Level 2: Social innovation leaders can describe and explain how it works in a logical, coherent and convincing way, i.e. there is a theory of change.
- Level 3: Social innovation leaders collect data that demonstrates positive change for the participants but cannot demonstrate causality.
- Level 4: Leaders can demonstrate some degree of causality using alternative methods such as process and experience tracing.
- Level 5: Social innovation leaders use a control or comparison group to demonstrate that social innovation causes positive change.
- Level 6: There are one or more independent evaluations that confirm the positive social impacts identified in the previous level.

Social impact monitoring and social impact evaluation are two different approaches to assessing social innovations. Although the concepts are closely linked, there are fundamental differences between them.

Social impact monitoring focuses on collecting and tracking data on different aspects of a specific initiative. It is the process of collecting quantitative and qualitative data that provides information on how an initiative generates social, economic or environmental impact. Social impact monitoring helps identify and track key indicators, trends and developments in social impact. This information is then often used to manage and improve interventions.

Social impact evaluation, on the other hand, is a process that aims to assess and evaluate the results of social impact monitoring. The evaluation is concerned with assessing the effectiveness and success of an organisation in achieving its stated social impact objectives. It is used to assess whether an organisation has achieved its societal objectives and what the overall impact of its activities has been on society.

While social impact monitoring is the process of collecting and tracking data on social impact, social impact evaluation is the process of assessing and evaluating this data to assess the effectiveness and impact achieved by an intervention or its activities on society.

2. Theory of change as a basis for social impact monitoring and evaluation

The theory of change, or intervention logic, is the basis for any social impact monitoring and evaluation. Simply said, it is an explanation of what an intervention (project, programme, policy,...) is supposed to achieve and how it is supposed to achieve it. Evaluators ask whether the inputs of an intervention lead to the desired outputs and whether these outputs, in turn, feed into the outcomes and impacts that the intervention was intended to achieve, i.e. how the intervention achieved its specific objectives and how these objectives contribute to achieving systemic change.
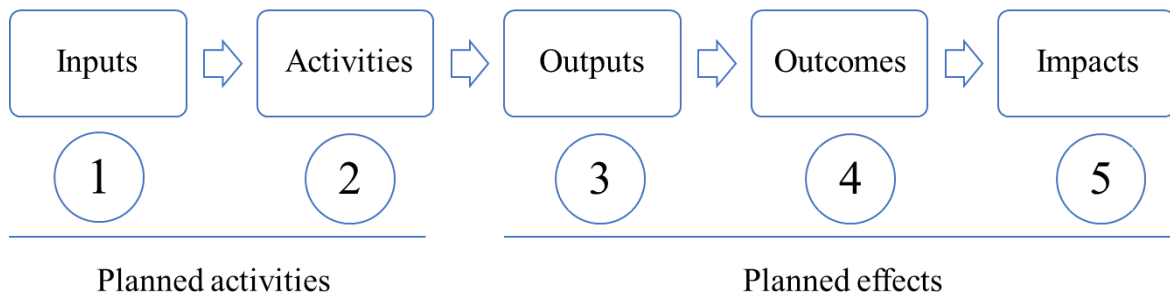
The standard preparation of an intervention has an analytical and a planning stage. Initially, it is necessary to analyse (i) the actors, (ii) the problems, (iii) the objectives, and (iv) select a strategy. In the planning stage, the results of the analysis are translated into a practical implementation plan.

   i.   Any person, group of people, institutions or companies that may have an interest in the success or failure of the project are stakeholders. Since different groups have different interests, size or influence, in the project design process it is necessary to identify the stakeholders and understand their interests, or to find out who and what they have to lose or gain by implementing the intervention. The goal is to maximise the positive and minimise the negative impacts of interventions on the groups that are expected to benefit from the intervention.

   ii.   The problem analysis identifies negative aspects of the status quo and establishes a causal link between causes and effects. The analysis serves to identify the main problem of the target group (what is the problem and who has it). Through a tool, e.g. the so-called "problem tree", we can show the causal links of the problems.

   iii.   The goal analysis shows the opposite and describes what the situation will look like when the problems are solved. The problems are translated into the "solved state", which are essentially the *goals*. The goal tree, thus constructed, should provide a simplified model of reality.

   iv.   However, it is necessary to determine whether all identified problems will be addressed or only a selected few, and what combination of interventions will achieve the desired outcomes and sustainability. The decision will depend on the availability of resources, but also on other factors that will determine the strategy with the best impact.

The initial stages involve synthesising a large amount of information about who is solving what and then selecting the appropriate implementation strategy, i.e. how the problem will be solved. The intervention proposal must clearly specify the changes and effects that the intervention seeks. It sets an objective that describes as precisely as possible what the intervention should achieve (what change). At the same time, it describes for whom, why and how it wants to achieve these changes, what outputs the intervention must deliver and what resources are needed to implement it.

Such a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why the desired change is expected to happen in a particular context is called a theory of change. Every intervention must be described in this way, and we can use one of the tools to describe it, e.g. logic model, logframe, etc.

Figure 2: Logic model

Inputs	⇨	Activities	⇨	Outputs	⇨	Outcomes	⇨	Impacts
1		2		3		4		5

Planned activities   Planned effects

Source: Authors' own elaboration

A logic model consists of inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts. By **inputs** we mean financial, material, human or institutional instruments or resources used by the intervention. Through **activities**, these inputs are transformed into outputs.

An **output** is the product of an activity, whether it is a service or a facility provided by the intervention (e.g. unemployed trained, kilometres of road built). Outputs are fully under the control of the responsible operators, i.e. those who manage the interventions. They regularly report on completed **activities** and their outputs through the monitoring system. Outputs are budgeted.

The **outcomes** are immediate benefits, effects for the direct beneficiaries of the implemented activities (e.g. jobs for the unemployed, reduced transport time). They cannot be fully controlled by the operators, e.g. they cannot force the unemployed to accept the offered job position. Results can often occur during, but also shortly after the end of the intervention and may be planned or unplanned.

Impacts are any consequences of the intervention following the outcome and concern a wider community. They usually only become apparent with the passage of time and can usually only be assessed several years after the intervention has ended. Due to the many factors that can influence an intervention over time, impacts are not under the control of those who implemented the intervention and cannot be held accountable.

Implementation is guided by an activity plan that helps to identify the logical sequence of activities, their interdependence, duration and helps to identify managerial responsibilities. With an activity plan in place, costs and resources can be specified.
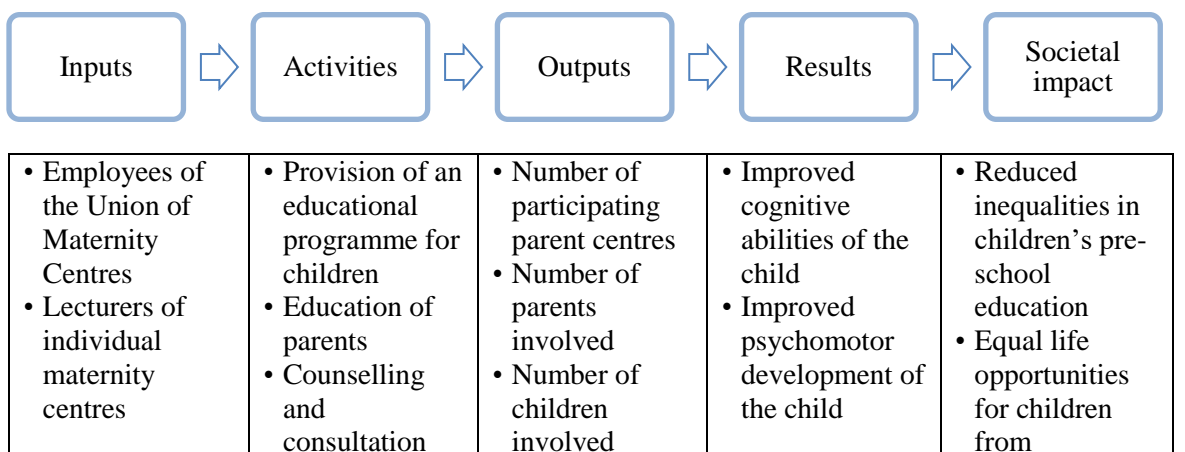
Case Study: Union of Maternity Centres

Learning for Life is an initiative implemented under the umbrella of the Union of Maternity Centres since November 2018. This programme is being implemented simultaneously in 11 maternity centres in different cities across the country. The target groups of the programme are parents with children (0-6 years) from disadvantaged social backgrounds who are educated through the Montessori method.

The Learning for Life programme represents a social innovation because, according to the above definition:

a) It provides an innovative educational program for children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds aimed at developing the child's cognitive skills and psychomotor development through the Montessori method. There are trained professionals who also work with the parents and work together to solve their family and socio-economic problems. It is an intervention that works equally with children from disadvantaged backgrounds and their parents to improve their life situation.

b) The societal need addressed by the Learning for Life programme is to reduce inequalities in education of children from disadvantaged backgrounds who do not have the same opportunities to learn and develop as other children. Another social need that the intervention addresses is to offer equal life opportunities to children from disadvantaged backgrounds and to eliminate negative behavioural patterns of their parents.

c) Learning for Life is a programme implemented under the auspices of the civic association Union of Maternity Centres, which provides methodology and support to 11 member maternity centres that implement the programme in different regions of Slovakia. The programme is co-financed by Generali and is also supported by local governments, thus linking civil, private and public sector organisations.

d) The programme provides opportunities for children and parents from disadvantaged backgrounds for leisure activities, education, as well as assistance in various life situations. Especially pre-school education of children from disadvantaged backgrounds is a long-standing problem in Slovakia that is not addressed by public or private sector organisations, thus generating social impact in this area. It highlights a systemic problem in pre-school education for children from disadvantaged backgrounds and offers a proven model for addressing this societal problem.

Example 1: Application of the logic model to the "Learning for Life" programme

Inputs		Activities		Outputs		Results		Societal impact
• Employees of the Union of Maternity Centres • Lecturers of individual maternity centres		• Provision of an educational programme for children • Education of parents • Counselling and consultation		• Number of participating parent centres • Number of parents involved • Number of children involved		• Improved cognitive abilities of the child • Improved psychomotor development of the child		• Reduced inequalities in children's pre-school education • Equal life opportunities for children from

• Premises of individual maternity centres • Financial resources for the implementation of the programme • Materials (methodological as well as physical) needed for the implementation of the programme	activities for parents	• Number of meetings • Ability of participants to remember • Number of centre visits • Number of individual counselling sessions • Number of group counselling sessions • Number of organised leisure activities • Number of health check-ups • Number of materials and aids loaned	• Parents are more aware of the child's developmental needs and the importance of their parental role • Parents have improved knowledge, skills and ability to provide parental care • Significant changes in family (parents' and children's) lives as a result of using acquired skills, knowledge, abilities	disadvantaged backgrounds • Elimination of negative behavioural patterns of parents from disadvantaged backgrounds

---

Recommendations for the development of a logic model

- Identify the target group and what your main objective is (defining the target group will help you to target your intervention more precisely).
- Analyse and define the problem or challenge that the target group is facing.
- Identify causes, consequences and context (this understanding will help form the basis for designing appropriate actions).
- Involve all interested parties and do an analysis of actors (you will know who to work with).
- Define objectives and results (set clear and measurable goals to be achieved through the intervention).
- Identify inputs and resources (what resources will be needed to implement the activities).
- Break down the intervention into smaller steps that are needed to achieve the objectives.
- Design the activities (the specific activities or measures needed to achieve each outcome).
- Consider whether these activities will lead to the intended change.
- Design the intervention logic (clear relationship between inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and expected social impacts).
- Assess all assumptions and risks that may affect the intervention (for high risk re-plan).

3. Monitoring social innovations at output level

Monitoring is a continuous and systematic process carried out throughout the lifetime of the intervention with the intention of identifying and adjusting any deviations from the plan so that the set objectives are met. Monitoring continuously follows the achievement of the outputs of the intervention (whether they are products, services or outputs of another nature) and the staff involved are fully accountable for the implementation of the intervention and the outputs generated. Monitoring is not an end in itself, but is intended to help with the realisation of the intended outputs so that the intervention achieves its objectives, while helping to inform higher levels of decision-making on the progress of the intervention. It also becomes an organised communication process that should guide all actors towards a common understanding of the intervention and its impacts.

In order to monitor effectively and to evaluate as objectively as possible, we need to have objectively verifiable indicators at the level of outputs and outcomes. These should describe as accurately as possible the expected effects of the interventions, i.e. the state we want to achieve. Output-level indicators are the elements of the intervention that can be counted; outcome-level indicators are the characteristics, attitudes, knowledge, skills, experience and others that we can measure indirectly. These indicators are mostly quantitative, but can also be qualitative. Their specification is essential for a monitoring system because they help to measure the change that has taken place compared to the plan, in terms of quality, quantity and time. They provide an orientation of what was planned and what actually happened/is happening; they verify whether the intervention was successful. In addition to determining what needs to be monitored, it is also necessary to determine who should collect the information; from what source to obtain it, when and how regularly the information should be provided.

Mandatory monitoring means regular reporting of data, which requires a prescribed monitoring report form. However, other indicators that are not included in the report may also be important for project monitoring purposes. The extent of the data collected will depend on the stage at which the social innovation intervention will be implemented. The rules applied in relation to the fulfilment of output and result indicators for standard interventions may not be equally valid for social innovation interventions in the initial stages. Monitoring in the initial stages of this type of projects should be set up in collaboration with an expert in the field of social impact monitoring and evaluation. The process should allow for considerable flexibility and deviation from the original project application, with changes being justified in a comprehensible manner. Social innovations may fail at the testing stage. If the implementation of the intervention shows that the tested solution approach is not effective, this does not imply any penalty for the implementers as long as the intervention has been implemented in accordance with the project application. Interventions may be terminated at an earlier stage, but it is important that they are adequately justified and documented.

For monitoring at the level of outputs and outcomes, it is important to take into account the logic model of the social innovation in question, the specifically defined outputs and outcomes,

and to develop a monitoring tool that will continuously collect the information needed to evaluate the indicators set.

Example 2: Monitoring the outputs of the 'Learning for Life' programme

Programme title:	Learning for Life					
Name of institution:	Klokanček Maternity Centre					
Place of implementation:	Nitra					
Time period:	1 January 2023 – 30 March 2023					
Name of the participant:	Children:	Attendance and activities				
		3 January 2023	Additional activities	10 January 2023	Additional activities	17 January 2023	Additional activities
1. Jana K.	1	Yes	IC, HV	Yes	PP	Yes	PP, ML
2. Silvia P.	1	No		Yes	PP	Yes	PP, ML
3. Petra H.	2	Yes	IC, ML	Yes	PP	Yes	PP, ML
4.							
5.							
6.							

Note: IC – individual counselling, HV – home visit, ML – material loaned, PP – Peer to peer counseling

Recommendations on monitoring
- Set clear monitoring objectives (define what you want to monitor and obtain through monitoring).
- Define measurable outputs and outcomes indicators (what specific outputs and outcomes do you expect from the social innovation).
- Establish a system for tracking outputs and collecting data for outcomes indicators.
- Make sure you have a clear plan for how to collect data (who will collect the data).
- Plan for regular monitoring (determine the frequency and time scale of monitoring).
- Ensure data quality (clear definition of indicators, training of data collectors and data validation).
- Analyse and use data (process and analyse data, compare it to goals and expectations, and assess progress).
- Make outputs accessible and communicated (you can increase engagement, awareness and gain support).
- Adapt and improve monitoring (evaluate the monitoring process and identify opportunities for the improvement).

4. Social impact evaluation of social innovations

Just as **monitoring** is key to ensuring that an intervention works well, successful **evaluation** is dependent on good quality monitoring, as the information and data collected during monitoring are the base for the evaluation. The **evaluation** takes place at some point in the programme cycle and can take place before (ex-ante), during or after (ex-post) the intervention.

The evaluation examines interventions from different perspectives. It observes the validity of the chosen strategy but also whether the objectives are adequate to the problems to be addressed and whether the effects of the intervention are in line with the original expectations. Evaluators need to cooperate with stakeholders to do their work, so that they can gather the necessary information and interpret it correctly. They cannot work reliably unless this cooperation works well.

As with monitoring, evaluating social innovation interventions in the initial stages requires a specific approach. So-called developmental evaluation is an approach used in the evaluation of this type of intervention to help develop societal change interventions in complex or uncertain environments. This type of evaluation is appropriate for innovations, their replication, complex problems or crises, where evaluation helps by framing concepts, testing, rapid iterations, tracking progress and discovering problems. Because innovation occurs in an environment of uncertainty, decision makers and implementers often think about the way forward, testing approaches, reflecting on what is happening, abandoning what is not working, and focusing on what seems to be working. Few evaluation approaches, however, are appropriate for evaluating this kind of trial and error.

According to M. Patton, innovation can take the form of new projects, programmes, products, organisational changes, policy reforms and systemic interventions. Developmental evaluation serves to support the development of innovations and their adaptation in a dynamic environment. It functions as an internal team function integrated into the process of data collection and interpretation, problem solving with frameworks, model display and testing. It applies measures and mechanisms that may change during the evaluation as the process evolves. It thus provides rapid feedback in real time.

Developmental evaluation has five characteristics that distinguish it from other evaluation approaches. These include (i) the focus of the evaluation, (ii) the intention to learn during the evaluation, (iii) the adaptive nature of the evaluation design, (iv) the role of the evaluator, and (v) the emphasis on the whole complex system.

i. The evaluation focuses on social innovations, which are untested problem-solving practices. It examines how, why and with what effect an intervention is designed and implemented, and how it evolves, adapts and responds to internal and external conditions.

ii. Learning, embedded in the evaluation process, is a means of ensuring that all stakeholders not only receive information on how the intervention evolves, but also

integrate evaluation findings into their thinking and decision-making processes. Learning thus serves to improve, adapt or change the social innovation as needed. It provides space, time and resources for dialogue, reflection, questioning, identifying and challenging values, beliefs and assumptions, and generating feedback. It also includes the involvement of the evaluator in ongoing activities.

iii. Adaptive evaluation proposal is intended to ensure that evaluation is responsive to emerging issues and questions. While there will often be a set of evaluation questions and a data collection design at the beginning of a developmental evaluation, this plan is likely to evolve and change as the innovation is proposed and implemented. Some data collection activities or data sources may be added or omitted, some evaluation questions may be revised, or the way evaluation findings are communicated and reported to stakeholders may be rethought.

iv. The role of the evaluator is broadened and becomes a partner and facilitator, which is not common for most evaluators and their clients. Developmental evaluation requires evaluators to have not only the core professional competencies of an evaluator, but also facilitation experience and communication skills.

v. A developmental evaluator brings a systems approach to evaluation in all its complexity. Change does not occur in a linear way and even the best logic models cannot accurately predict the effects that social innovation can have. The evaluator is particularly interested in the way different elements, components and actors interact with each other, as well as in understanding how specific activities and relationships change the system.

Developmental assessment evaluation should be applied to all innovative interventions that are in development, i.e., are in the process of being designed, created, refined, and experimented with different approaches and activities. These interventions operate in some uncertainty about what will work, where and with whom. New questions, challenges, opportunities, successes and activities are always emerging.

As an intervention is fine-tuned/refined and shaped and its outcomes become more predictable, it becomes more stable and consistent. In this case, a standard interim evaluation may already be underway. Not all interventions will automatically move to this phase, in some cases the adjustment and change phase is longer or these attempts may fail.

If the intervention has stabilised and its activities are standardised and fine-tuned, then a follow-up (ex-post) evaluation is sufficient.

4.1. Evaluation methods for social innovations

Methods for data collection and analysis generally fall into two basic categories – quantitative and qualitative. In general, quantitative methods work with "hard data/numbers" while qualitative methods work with descriptive data. Simply put, data is considered quantitative if it is expressed in numerical values and qualitative data may include photographs, videos, recordings and similar data in addition to text.

The boundary between quantitative and qualitative methods, techniques or data is not always clear. Data can be collected qualitatively (interviews, observations) and yet be analysed quantitatively. Similarly, the results of quantitative statistical analysis can only be understood after qualitative interpretation. Therefore, a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques is often used, so called mixed methods of evaluation, which contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the area being assessed.

The choice of method depends on the type of evaluation and the evaluation questions. The approach, choice of methods and tools must take into account the overall context of the intervention being assessed – its form, purpose and timing, and the stage of the evaluation (data collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, etc.). All methods and techniques have strengths and weaknesses that should be taken into account when selecting them. Relying on the use of only one method is not sufficient. A sufficiently valid evaluation requires triangulation, i.e. the validation of results using multiple methods, or the validation of data from multiple sources in the development of answers to the questions in the assignment. The most commonly used methods for data collection and analysis in evaluation interventions include the following:

Interview

An interview is used to obtain specific information and a comprehensive view of the problem. It is a method used to collect qualitative data and the views of those people who are affected (influenced) by the implementation or outcomes of an intervention. The basic forms of interview can be divided into informal interview, semi-structured interview and structured interview, which is guided by well-defined questions.

Questionnaire

Social surveys are often conducted through questionnaires. Questionnaires contain a series of questions in a structured format to which respondents answer. Questionnaires are considered one of the basic tools of social sciences and are commonly used by public, private, research, statistical and other institutions.

Self-assessment

This form is often similar to a questionnaire and consists of questions that are answered on a scale (can be verbal or numerical). Self-assessment is a process in which a person evaluates himself/herself, that is, he/she assesses his/her performance in a task or activity; he/she evaluates or identifies areas/activities in which he/she needs to improve.

Testing

In some cases, tests may also be used to verify, for example, knowledge acquired by writing down an answer or marking a multiple-choice answer.

Focus groups

A focus group is a well-established method – a form of structured discussion where participants discuss a pre-selected topic together. The moderator plays an important role in guiding the discussion. This method is particularly used in order to analyse topics or areas that give rise to divergent views or concern complex issues that need to be thoroughly explored. In general, the composition of a focus group involves a relatively homogeneous group of six to eight people who meet, usually once, to discuss a pre-agreed topic or problem. The length of the meeting varies from 90 to 120 minutes. The group discussion is led by a moderator (evaluator) who raises topics and asks questions. Although focus groups and other types of discussions usually require the physical presence of participants, on-line forms are now also used.

Case study

A case study is a qualitative research method and is used when the evaluator wants to gain a thorough understanding of a process, event or situation and to explain why particular outcomes occurred. It is useful when it addresses how something works or why something happens. It is particularly useful when the intervention is innovative or experimental, or not well understood. Case studies are not just descriptions; they also include explanations of the situations about which we have the most knowledge. A case study is particularly useful for describing what the implementation of an intervention looked like and why things happened the way they did. A descriptive case study can be used to examine typical interventions or program extremes.

All of the above methods can be used for the evaluation at any stage of an intervention, whether ex-ante, interim or ex-post assessment.

Counterfactual impact evaluation

Counterfactual evaluation is most commonly used in ex-post evaluation. For instance, one of the methods used is Difference-in-Differences. The method compares two groups: a control (no intervention) and an intervention group. This form of evaluation is used to determine the net effect of an intervention. The net effect is calculated as the difference in results between the control group and the intervention group in the pre- and post-intervention periods. The use of this method means that the two comparison groups must have been formed before the intervention started. The parameters of interest are measured simultaneously in both groups before and after the intervention.

It is quite common for interventions to have a control group formed after the activities have been completed. In this case, the evaluation often uses different statistical methods to form a control group that is similar in basic characteristics to the tested group. However, these methods are more difficult to use in areas such as education and the labour market, where the observed characteristics (personal skills, motivation and intelligence, which influence individual behaviour) cannot be expressed quantitatively.

Given that there are quite a number of methods and tools, we recommend that implementers of interventions discuss their monitoring and evaluation with evaluation experts before they start

their implementation. Based on the design of the intervention, it will be possible to assess at what stage the evaluation will be carried out and what is the most appropriate evaluation approach and methods. Where relevant, an appropriate control group can be set up.
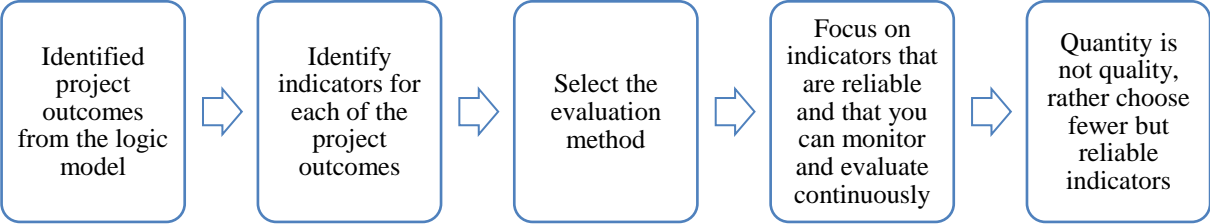

Evaluation methods

More detailed information on the evaluation methods can be found here:
https://www.partnerskadohoda.gov.sk/hodnotenie-esif/ (section Issued documents)

4.2. Process for setting the evaluation indicators

In the process of setting the evaluation indicators, it is important to take into account the identified project outcomes from the logic model of the social innovation in question. The next step is to identify the project outcomes indicators. It is necessary to define the indicators that would best demonstrate that the social innovation actually delivers value to its beneficiaries and therefore has the intended social impact. Only at the next stage is it necessary to choose one or more of the evaluation methods outlined in the previous chapter. Whether you choose qualitative or quantitative methods, it is advisable to use proven practices or, in the case of questionnaires, established and validated tools. As the results and impacts of social innovations are diverse, there is no list of available tools. Equally, because of the nature of social innovation, and therefore the fact that it is something new, it may be necessary to develop a custom tool that is capable of capturing the outcomes and impacts of a given social innovation. In that case, focus on indicators that are reliable and can be monitored and evaluated on a continuous basis.

Figure 3: Process for selecting indicators and evaluation methods

| Identified project outcomes from the logic model | | Identify indicators for each of the project outcomes | | Select the evaluation method | | Focus on indicators that are reliable and that you can monitor and evaluate continuously | | Quantity is not quality, rather choose fewer but reliable indicators |

Example 3: Defining indicators and evaluation methods
The way of defining indicators and evaluation methods

Project outcomes	Project outcomes indicator	Evaluation methods
• Improved cognitive abilities of the child	• Parents stating improved cognitive capabilities of the child	• Questionnaire – self-assessment (after the intervention)

• Improved psychomotor development of the child	• Parents stating improvement in the psychomotor development of the child	• Validated questionnaires:
		• Parental involvement scale (evaluation before and after the intervention)
• Parents are more aware of the child's developmental needs and the importance of their parental role	• Parents stating increased involvement in learning activities at home	• Family functioning scale (evaluationt before and after the intervention)
	• Parents stating that they spend more time with the child	• Parental self-confidence (evaluation before and after the intervention)
	• Parents stating that they actively use gained knowledge in the education	• Satisfaction with Life Survey (evaluation before and after the intervention)
• Parents have improved knowledge, skills and ability to provide parental care	• Parents stating that they have better competence in raising their children	
	• Parents stating better self-confidence raising the child in a correct way	
• Significant changes in family (parents' and children's) lives as a result of using acquired skills, knowledge, abilities	• Parents stating that the needs for further development of the child, it is necessary to define his or her needs according to the child's age	
	• Parents stating improved relationships with the child	
	• Parents stating that they feel more satisfied in the role of a parent	

Recommendations on evaluation
- Clearly define the evaluation targets (what do you want to achieve with the evaluation).
- Review available data sources (review the existing data sources, e.g. public data, research studies and other relevant sources).
- Consider the need for collecting new data and different methods of data collection (advantages as well as disadvantages).
- Consider the context and evaluation boundaries (limitations, time framework, available sources).
- Think of the evaluation of social, economic and environmental impacts.
- Take into consideration specific characteristics of social innovation and its social impact.
- Set methods and tools for data collection from different sources.
- Make sure that the necessary data do exist and are accessible.
- Ensure data reliability and validity (compliance with methodology, selection of respondent sample, use verified tools and methods).
- Include relevant interested parties in the evaluation (their point of view may contribute to evaluation objectivity and complexity).
- Collect all the available information (verify their validity and reliability).
- Select methods that are suitable for the analysis of the collected data.
- Process data (text, graphs, figures, infographics).
- Elaborate conclusions and recommendations from the findings.

- Use the results of the evaluation for communication, improvement and scaling of the social innovation.

The evaluation should be:
- cost effective and its price should correspond to the extent of the evaluated intervention and the range of the evaluation
- participatory – should be agreed by all stakeholders
- clear and concise – should be as simple as possible, with accurate documentation of the framework and standardised outputs
- relevant – it meets the needs of both external and internal users, while being evidence-based
- comparable – capable of allowing comparisons between similar initiatives and time periods
- easily implementable – includes time spent on training, data collection infrastructure and required information systems.

Conclusion

The Guide to social impact monitoring and evaluation of social innovations is a tool for initiatives that aim to create positive societal changes. This guide provides valuable guidelines and procedures for systematic monitoring and evaluation of data related to the social impact of social innovations.

Monitoring of social impact is key to tracking progress and identifying areas of need for initiative improvements. The guide provides practical guidance on how to establish a systematic data collection process that will help initiatives gain a comprehensive picture of how their activities and actions generate social impact.

Social impact evaluation is the process of measuring the achievement and effectiveness of social innovations. The guide offers evaluation frameworks and approaches to enable initiatives to assess the extent to which they have achieved their societal objectives and the overall impact of their activities on society.

At the end of this guide it is obvious that monitoring and evaluation of social impact are an integral part of the social innovation process. Their systematic implementation can help initiatives to improve and optimise their social impact, thereby helping to maximise positive change in society.

Annexes

Annex 1: Logic model

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impact
⇨	⇨	⇨	⇨	
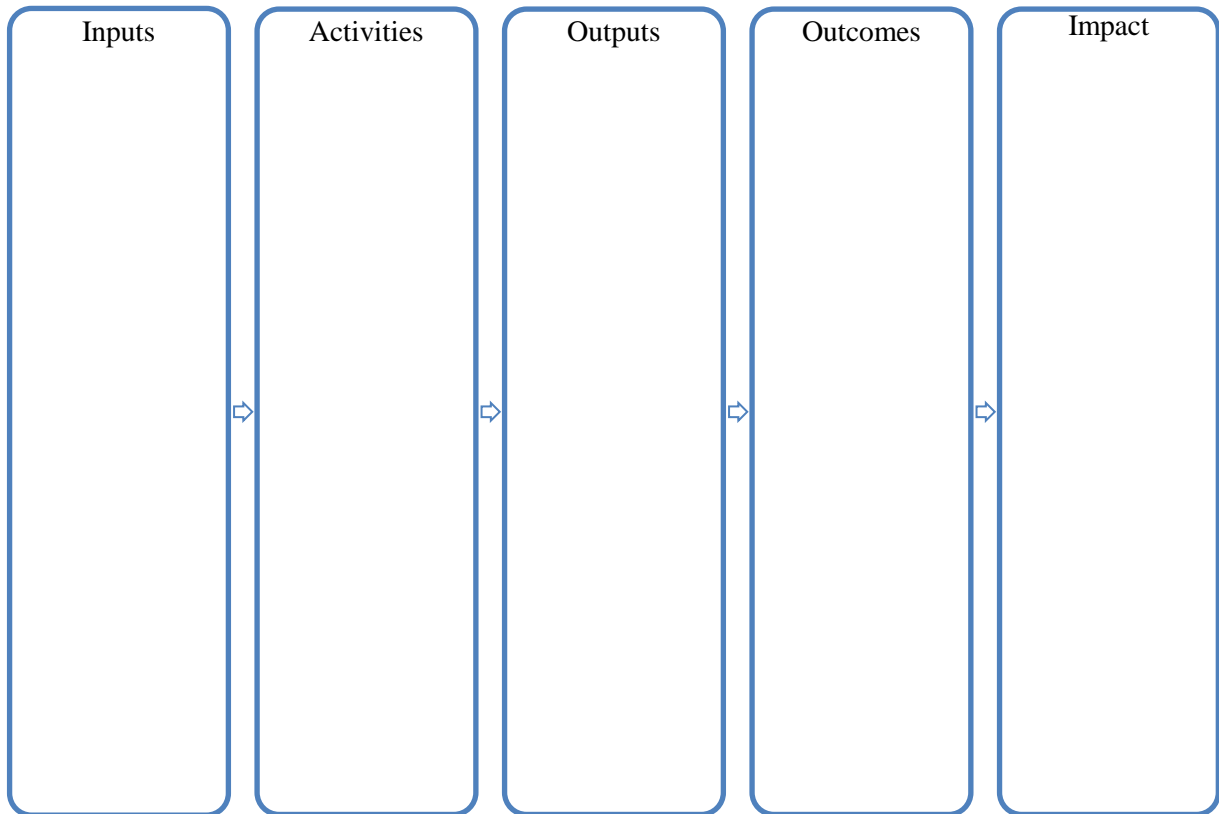
Annex 2: Defining indicators and evaluation methods

Project outcomes	Project outcomes indicators	Evaluation methods
⇨	⇨	