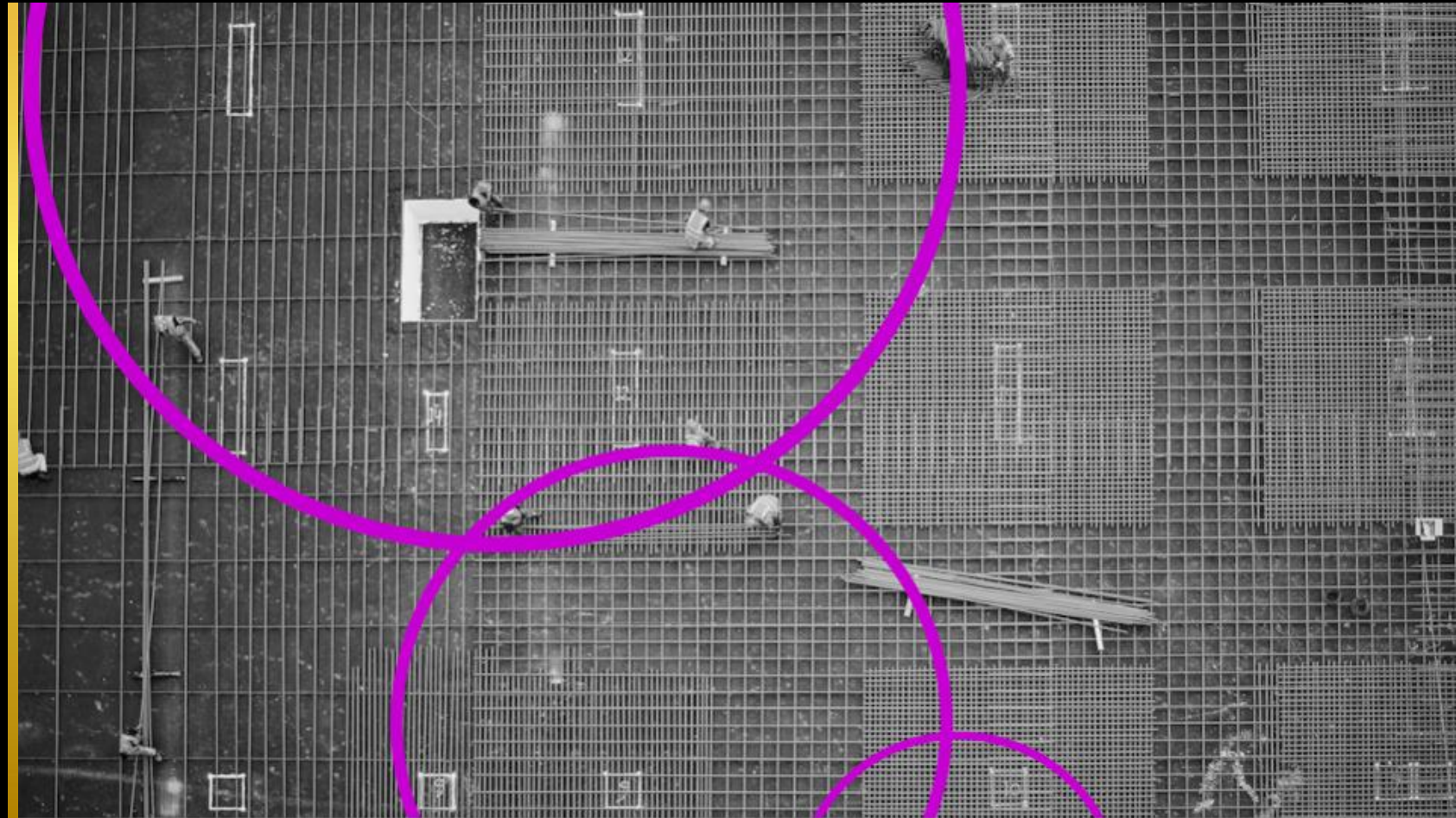


# KANTAR PUBLIC

## Evaluation of development aid in the Nordic countries: What can we learn from each other?

Evalueringskonferansen 2023:  
Hva kan Norge lære av evaluering i EU?

Johanna Lindström, Kantar Public Sweden  
Head of Policy Evaluation  
22 September 2023



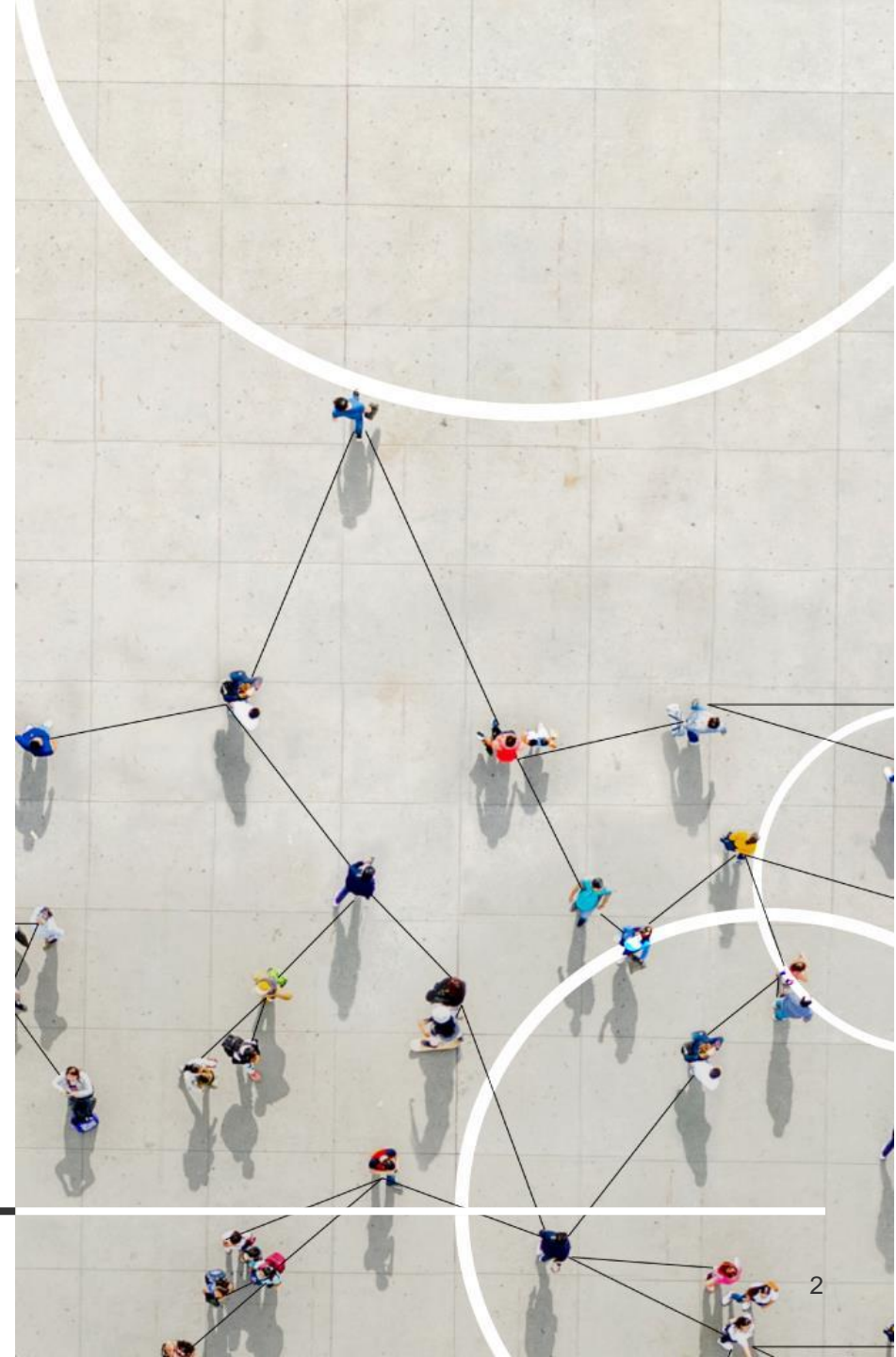
# Aim and background

Examines similarities and differences between the systems for evaluating development cooperation in Nordic countries

An exploratory presentation from the perspective of evaluators in the system.

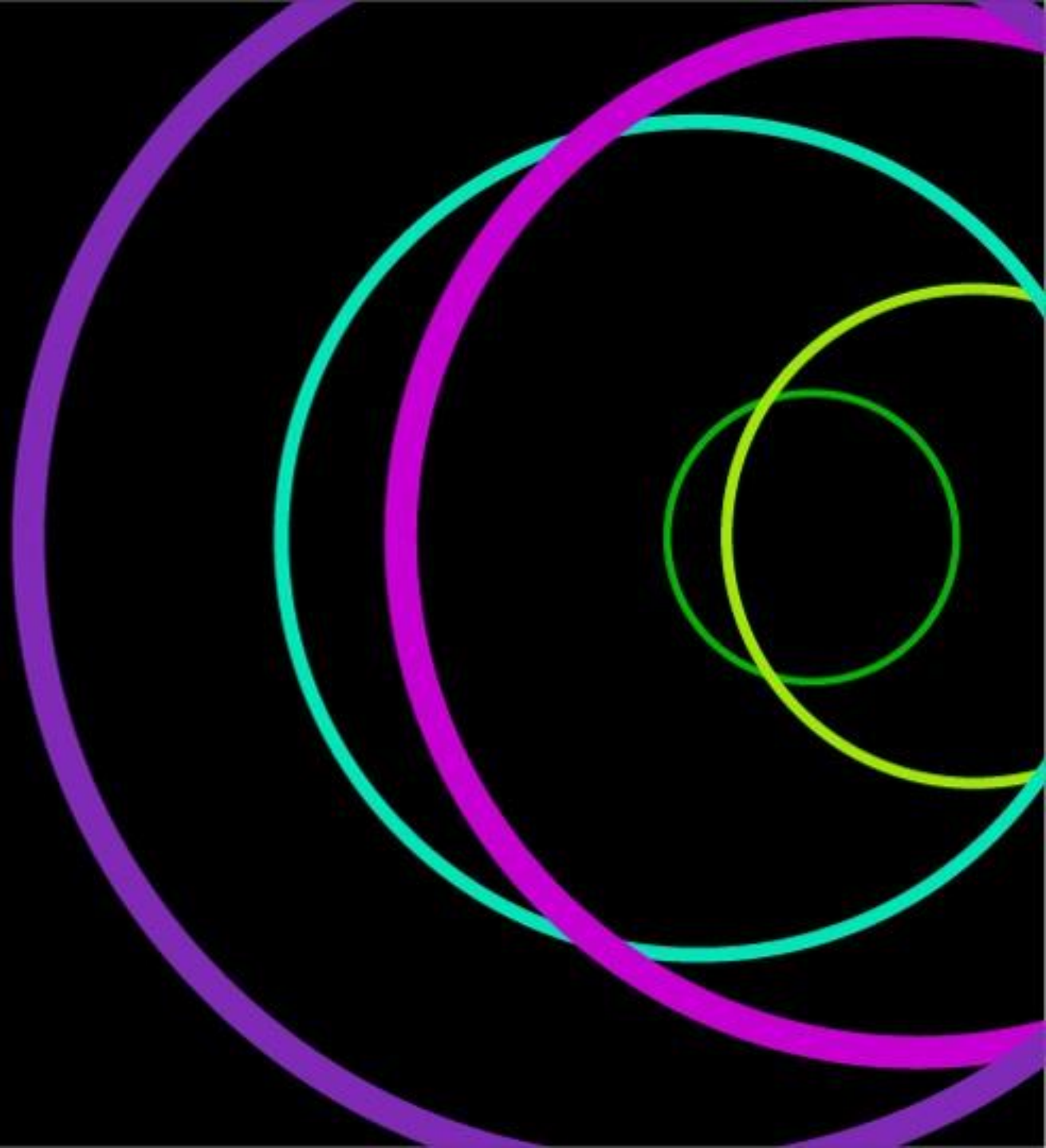
Based on personal experience, consultation with a small number of interviews with evaluators that have worked in more than one Nordic country, and review of literature.

*What can we learn from each other?*



# Guiding questions

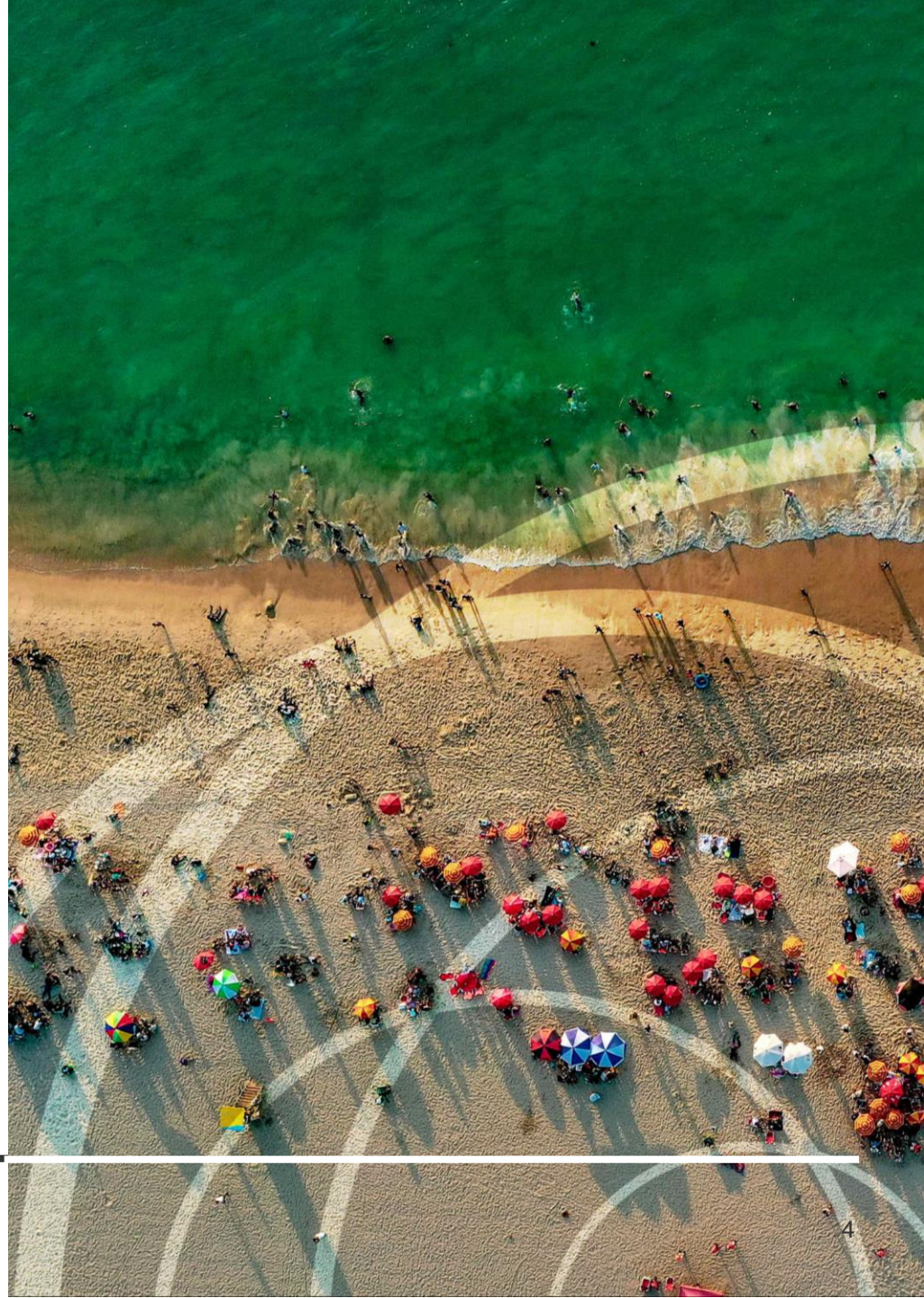
1. What in these systems encourages/discourages high quality in evaluation?
2. What in these systems encourages/discourages useful evaluations?
3. Are these systems fit for purpose?



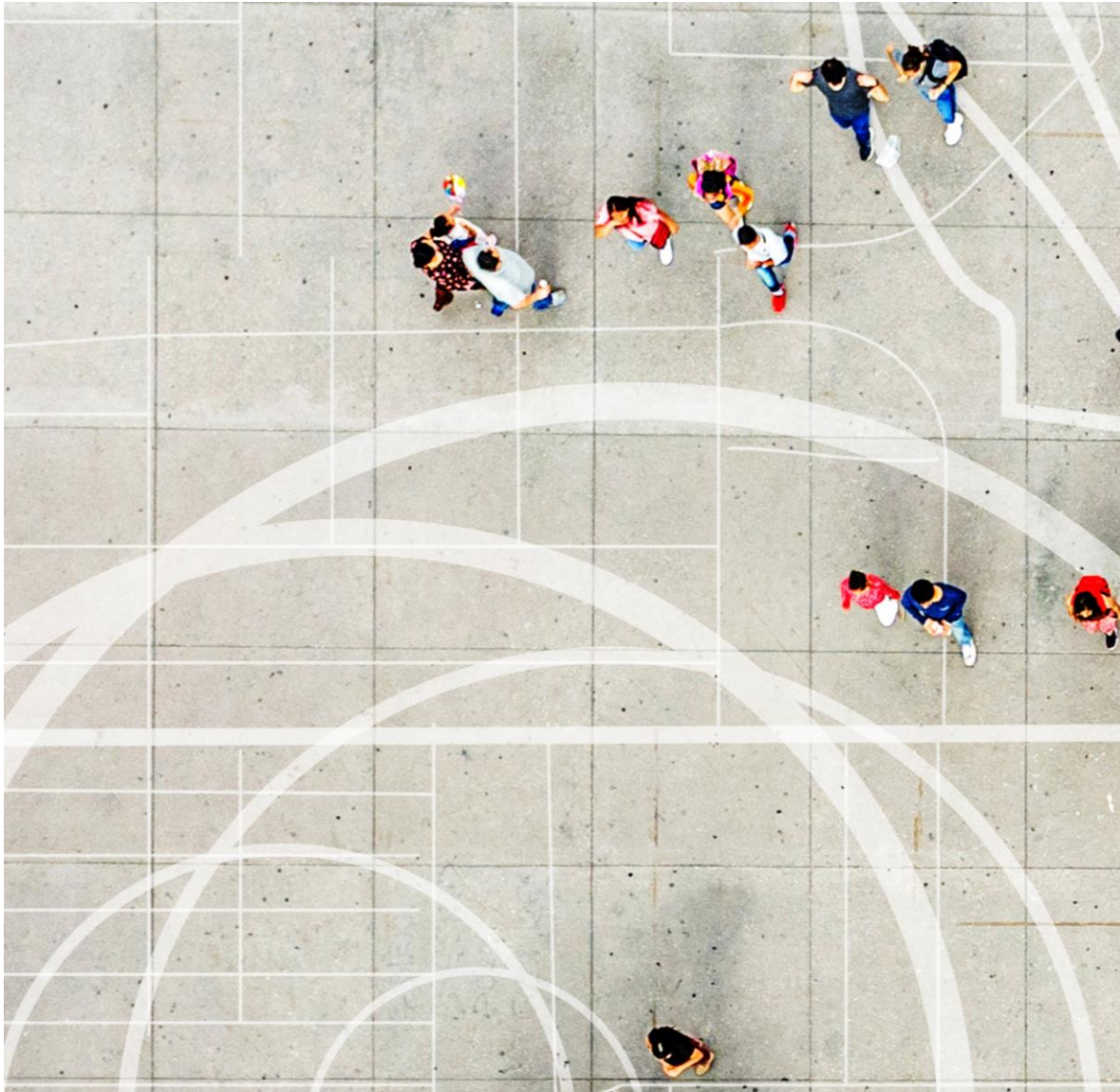


# Outline

- Evaluation systems: what are they?
- Evaluation systems in development cooperation: what is unique?
- International norms standards: what is their role?
- Overview of similarities and differences in the evaluation systems across the Nordics
- Concluding thoughts
- Questions and discussion







## What do we mean by evaluation systems?

The gradual institutionalisation of evaluation activities within governments and public sectors.

Move from one-off studies to larger streams of systematic knowledge production within specific organisations or organisational fields

Four criteria according to Leeuw and Furubo:

- The existence of a distinctive epistemological perspective
- Evaluation activities are carried out by evaluators within organizational structures and institutions
- Permanence
- A focus on the intended use of results of evaluations.

# Evaluation systems in international development cooperation

Subject to relatively high levels of evaluation, reflecting unique accountability dynamics, and high level of domestic scrutiny

Evaluation systems are mature:

- Guided by international norms and standards
- Established institutional structures
- Permanence, but evolving over time
- Ever increasing focus on use. Dual focus on accountability and learning





# Evaluation of international development cooperation is guided by international norms and standards developed by OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Network on Development Evaluation (EvalNet)



## DAC Guidelines and Reference Series Quality Standards for Development Evaluation



Three book covers are displayed, each featuring a hexagonal graphic with a different color and a central dot:

- Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management for Sustainable Development**  
Second edition
- Glossaire des principaux termes relatifs à l'évaluation et la gestion axée sur les résultats pour le développement durable**  
Deuxième édition
- Glosario de términos clave en evaluación y gestión basada en resultados para el desarrollo sostenible**  
Segunda edición

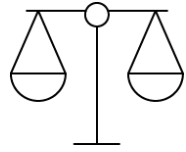
The OECD logo is visible in the bottom right corner of the book covers.





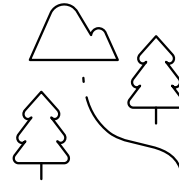
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**Independence**



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**Accountability and Learning**



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**Transparency**



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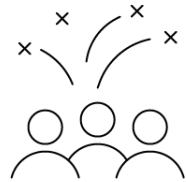
**Quality**

**All Nordic countries work hard to align to international norms and standards**



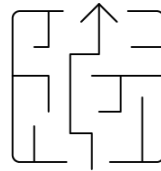
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**Participation and stakeholder engagement**



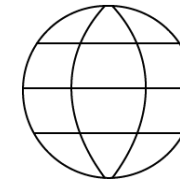
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**Use and utilisation focused evaluation**



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**Ethical principles**



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**Capacity development**



**But what are the  
specific differences?**

# Institutional structures: are they governed independently?

All are independent but the level of independence varies



MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
OF DENMARK

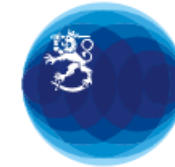
- Danida's Department for Evaluation, Learning and Quality (ELK)
- Reports to Minister through the State Secretary of State for Development Policy



- The Department for Evaluation
- Reports to Secretary Generals of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Climate and Environment.



- Sida's Evaluation Unit, reports to Sida Director General.
- The Expert Group for Aid Studies. The committee reports to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



Ministry for Foreign  
Affairs of Finland

- The Development Evaluation Unit
- Reports to the Under-Secretary of State of development policy and co-operation



# Number and type of evaluations: How does this connect to their mandate?

Only Sida takes some kind of responsibility for decentralised evaluations



2017-2021: ~30 evaluations

Strict delineation between evaluation and review



2017-2021: ~45 **centralised** evaluations.

Number of decentralised evaluations unknown.



Sida: 2017-21: 166 **centralised** and **decentralised** evaluations

EBA: 2017-21: 46 **centralised** evaluations



2017-21: ~150 **centralised** and **decentralised** evaluations

# Human resources: Is there sufficient competence and capacity?

Depends on the mandate, external support and recruitment policies



4 FTE (2021)



7.5 FTE (2021)



Sida: 6 FTE (2021)  
EBA: 8.5 FTE (2021)



5 FTE (2021)



## Procurement: Do they get the best evaluators?

Denmark and Norway have consistent procedures for open tenders. Finland and Sweden create consistency through framework contracts but this mean less competition over time



- No framework contract
- Consistent procurement procedures, using a 2-step process
- Threshold high for larger evaluations.



- No framework contract
- Consistent procurement procedures, using a one step process
- Low barrier to entry for smaller tenderers
- Relative scoring is not completely transparent.



- **Sida:** One step, open procedure for centralised evaluations. Requirements change. Framework contract for decentralised evaluations. Good for consistency, but has reduced competition.
- **EBA:** Two step, open procedure. Academic merit is highly valued. Low barrier to entry for smaller organisations.



- Framework contract for centralised and decentralised evaluations.
- For centralised evaluations there is only one provider, which has been detrimental for competition.

# Quality assurance: Are quality assurance systems fit for purpose?

Level of ambition varies, with Finland having the most advanced system and process



- QA: Consultants through designated QA experts.
- QC: ELK and reference group
- May use external peer reviewers



- QA: Consultants, through designated QA expert.
- QC: Evaluation department and large internal stakeholder group.
- May use external peer reviewers
- Reviews the quality of decentralised evaluations but does not manage this process.



- Sida:**
- QA: Consultants through designated QA experts.
  - QC: Evaluation Unit and Reference Group for centralised evaluations. Manages overall quality of decentralised evaluations.
- EBA:**
- 2-step process with reference group and Expert Group.



- QA: Consultants through designated QA expert.
- QC: Evaluation Unit and external evaluation service provider, external critical friend, and internal reference group.
- Reviews the quality of decentralised evaluations but does not manage this process.



# Dissemination and use: Do the systems enable use of evaluations?

There is a strong focus on use in all countries, using different strategies. Only Finland has studied use.



- Operational staff engaged through reference groups.
- Dissemination: Evaluation reports and summary reports.
- Internal learning from reviews, but this can sometimes be a box-ticking exercise.



- Stakeholders engaged through the evaluation process.
- Dissemination: Evaluation reports, summary reports, infographics, videos, open seminars, learning events, and social media.
- Panorama is an important publication that lifts evaluation findings



- **Sida:** Strong focus on utilisation focused evaluation. The Evaluation Unit works closely with technical staff through a reference group. Recent focus on Evaluation Briefs and internal dissemination seminars
- **EBA:** Independence sometimes works against EBA, but have become better at using reference groups to enable use. Dissemination through public seminars and podcast.



- Technical staff involved through reference groups.
- Dissemination: evaluation reports, summary reports, one-pagers, social media, and learning events. Larger evaluations through public seminars
- Recent study on use: Centralised evaluations are large and take a long time – they are sometimes not seen as timely for decision-making.

# Other bodies: What is the role of other national evaluation institutions?

Performance audits play a role across the Nordics, but to varying degrees.



- The Danish Rigsrevisionen regularly conducts performance audits
- Not well-known by evaluators.



- The Norwegian National Audit Office (Riksrevisjonen) 11 performance audits since 2006
- The MFA and the Ministry of Finance recently conducted a study of foreign policy, and development



- The Swedish National Audit Office (Riksrevisionen) 17 performance audits since 2004
- The Swedish Agency for Public Management regularly conducts evaluation like studies



- National Audit Office of Finland (NAOF): 6 performance audits since 2012
- Focus on aid administration and on multilateral development cooperation
- Not well-known by evaluators.



## The systems at a general level: are they fit for purpose?

There is a missing middle between larger strategic evaluations and smaller intervention level evaluations. Danida has a potential system to deal with this



- Central evaluations broad, but also some country strategy and portfolio evaluations.
- Large monitoring assignments at country level.



- Central evaluations broad, but also some country strategy and portfolio evaluations.
- Decentralised evaluations very specific, of varying quality and use beyond operational level.

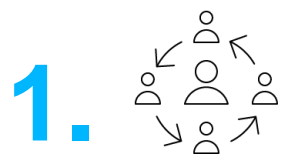


- Sida and EBA centralised evaluations often broad and very seldom well-enough resourced for purpose.
- EBA: some evaluations of Sweden's contribution to long term results at country level, but small in relation to evaluation object.
- Decentralised are often very specific, and do not allow for aggregation of development results.



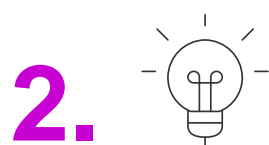
- Central evaluations tend to be broad, and are not timely
- Decentralised evaluations very specific, of varying quality and use beyond operational level

# What can we learn from each other?



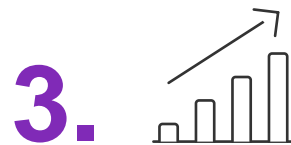
**A focus on stakeholder participation and engagement to support use (Sweden)**

But ensure that there are sufficient resources to work collaboratively



**Consistency in procurement to encourage competition (Denmark & Norway)**

But framework contracts for decentralised evaluations ensures consistency in quality (Sweden)



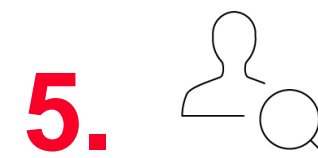
**A concerted effort to look at all levels of development cooperation through connected monitoring and evaluation (Denmark)**

Lack of data is nearly always what makes evaluation difficult



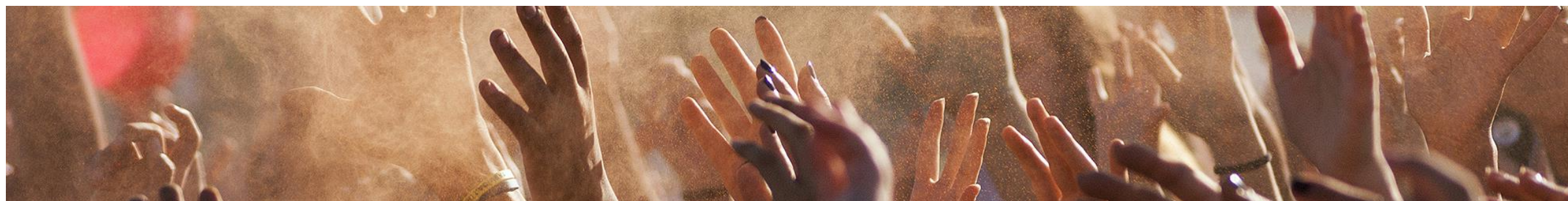
**Ensure the right balance between evaluation and policy expertise in evaluation units (Denmark and Norway)**

But ensure that there is also experience of actual evaluation.



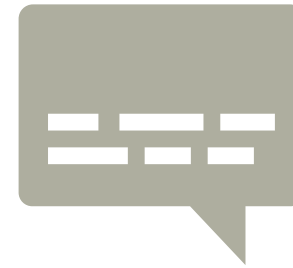
**The use of critical friends in quality assurance (Finland)**

But do not allow quality assurance to be so elaborate that it delays timely evaluations.





Questions?



Comments?



An aerial photograph of a sidewalk with several people walking. Overlaid on the image are several white circles of varying sizes and three grey speech bubbles. The scene is captured from a high angle, showing the shadows of the pedestrians.

# Thanks

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