



IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM DEval EVALUATIONS

*Second Synthesis of the Implementation Monitoring
of DEval Evaluation Recommendations (2019 – 2022)*

2025

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The German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval) is mandated by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) to independently analyse and assess German development interventions.

The Institute's evaluation reports contribute to the transparency of development results and provide policymakers with evidence and lessons learned, based on which they can shape and improve their development policies.

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FOREWORD BY UWE GEHLEN

**Head of Division G 34 (Evaluation and development research, DEval, IDOS)
at the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)**



Dear Readers,

Ever since the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) was first founded, evaluation – and with it the critical review of development activities – has been a recognised and effective means of learning from experience and credibly ensuring accountability for the results of the ministry's work.

The aim in this context is to make development measures more effective and efficient, and to make knowledge-based progress in German development cooperation to ensure that Germany is contributing as effectively as possible to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to the implementation of the Paris Agreement – even in times of increasingly scarce resources.

This second synthesis report on the implementation of recommendations from evaluations by the German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval) systematically analyses the challenges and success factors involved in translating recommendations into specific decision-making processes. The results of this synthesis are promising: The proportion of fully implemented recommendations has increased significantly compared to the first synthesis report compiled in 2023. This shows that the continuous efforts to ensure quality, standardisation and a focus on areas where change is needed are having an effect. It is therefore a good demonstration of the fact that the BMZ and its partner organisations are able to learn.

At the same time, the report identifies areas where the parties involved – the BMZ and DEval – have room to develop: Evaluation findings and the recommendations derived from them should be integrated even more closely into decision-making processes, and responsibilities should be more clearly defined. The BMZ's focus on learning enables it to continuously review and optimise its processes and procedures. At the same time, DEval is continuously working to further improve the quality of the recommendations it makes to ensure that they are appropriate and useful.

If you're not learning, you're not growing. With this in mind, we would like to thank all those who have contributed to this successful report with their commitment and expertise. This synthesis is not only a documentation of progress but also an incentive to continue resolutely on this path.

Uwe Gehlen

FOREWORD BY PROF DR JÖRG FAUST

Director of the German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval)



Dear Readers,

DEval's evaluations serve to enhance practice-oriented knowledge, accountability and learning. This triad enables them to optimise their usefulness for the demanding tasks of German development cooperation, and to improve its effectiveness, cost-efficiency and sustainability. Furthermore, we consider it our mission to help objectify what are often polarised debates by offering thorough and scientifically sound analyses – especially in turbulent times in which the field of politics is subject to critical public debate.

The recommendations of our evaluations form the most important bridge between the results of the scientific analysis and their use in practice. Recommendations formulate targeted suggestions for improvement; they are concrete learning stimuli and improvement-orientated tasks, tailored as precisely as possible to our addressees: policy-makers and implementers.

In order to reinforce the implementation of recommendations and thus the impact of evaluations, the institutionalisation of monitoring procedures has proved its worth in international evaluation practice. This synthesis report on the implementation of our recommendations shows that, in cooperation with the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), we are deploying sophisticated procedures that match this good evaluation practice. This has also been recognised outside our policy field as an achievement for evidence-based policy-making in the meantime.

In this report, we document the extent to which recommendations from DEval's evaluations are shared and then implemented by the organisations addressed. We also analyse factors that can influence the implementation of recommendations. In this respect, this analysis is also of great value to us at DEval. We provide information on the impact of our own work and the endeavours of policy-makers and implementers to improve development-cooperation measures. Furthermore, we receive important suggestions on how we can further improve the quality of our own work.

I would be delighted if this report could also serve as proof that independent and scientifically sound evaluation is an essential component of modern statehood in order to improve the effectiveness of public policies.

Jörg Faust

Box 1 Summary

Analysing and evaluating to which extend and why German development cooperation has been effective, is the focus of Deval's work. It compiles independent analyses and assessments of German development-cooperation measures in the form of evaluations or evaluative studies.

In its evaluations, DEval makes recommendations to the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and organisations involved in German development cooperation on how they can improve their measures. The addressees can either completely share, partially share or reject these recommendations in the context of their implementation planning (IP). One and a half to two years afterwards, as part of implementation monitoring (IM), DEval conducts an assessment on the extent to which the shared recommendations have actually been implemented in practice.

Implementation planning and implementation monitoring promote learning and accountability. Without them, evaluations and the recommendations derived therein might remain non-binding, and the findings, conclusions and recommendations generated would not be realised. Precisely in the light of the ongoing discussions about the need for reform in German development cooperation (Faust et al., 2025; Mair and Trebeljahr, 2025), it is however important to address identified potential for improvement.

This synthesis analyses experience gained in the implementation of recommendations from ten DEval evaluations that were completed between 2019 and 2022 and were the subject of implementation monitoring between 2022 and early 2025. The results are combined with the findings of an initial synthesis of implementation monitoring, which was published in 2023 and also analyses ten evaluations (DEval, 2023). The most important findings are as follows:

The DEval-synthesis shows that evaluations lead to changes. The implementation of the evaluation recommendations is a positive contribution to evidence-based policy-making by the organisations addressed in DEval recommendations.

DEval's evaluation recommendations have become more targeted. The number of recommendations has decreased over time. Moreover, they now concentrate primarily on the essential changes needed, in order to promote the usefulness of evaluations.

DEval recommendations are increasingly being shared by the addressees. In the implementation planning following DEval evaluations, the addressees shared the vast majority of the recommendations or aspects thereof. Overall, 90% of the recommendations of the evaluations examined here were at least partially shared. This is an increase compared to the evaluations analysed in the first synthesis of implementation monitoring, in which this applied for only 70%. The proportion of completely shared recommendations also rose, albeit more moderately from 46 to 53%.

More recommendations are being implemented. In the monitoring of the implementation of recommendations, which takes place about 18 to 24 months after implementation planning, around 80% of the shared recommendations or shared aspects of recommendations were assessed as completely or for the most part implemented. This is an increase compared to the first synthesis (approx. 75% of recommendations completely or for the most part implemented; DEval, 2023). Recommendations of evaluations from the recent past were implemented more readily than those of older ones.

Recommendations from evaluations with fewer recommendations were more likely to be implemented.

Here positive effects of a focus on a maximum of ten recommendations per DEval evaluation (or five in the case of short evaluations) become apparent, as it stands to reason that focusing on the important needs for change is conducive to their implementation.

The qualitative analysis of implementation monitoring suggests that **recommendations are more likely to be implemented** if they are **derived in a comprehensible manner** and **responsibility for implementation is clearly defined**. Furthermore, positive effects are evident from the **consideration or the provision of resources for implementation** as well as from a connection of **recommendations to ongoing reform processes**.

The above-mentioned factors influencing the implementation of evaluation recommendations apply to different actors in different process steps. They are to be found at the level of implementation planning and implementation itself, and in a positive learning culture. In addition, the quality of the evaluations and their recommendations also has a favourable effect on implementation.

Learning opportunities and potential for improving DEval evaluation recommendations and their implementation – both by evaluators and by recipients of the recommendations – can be extrapolated from the findings: for DEval, the synthesis confirms how important it is to formulate comprehensible and targeted recommendations and to participate in implementation planning in an advisory capacity. The addressees of the recommendations should translate these into ambitious implementation steps with clear responsibilities that correspond to the intended changes.

CONTENTS

Imprint.....	ii
Foreword by Uwe Gehlen.....	iii
Foreword by Prof Dr Jörg Faust.....	iv
1. Background and objectives.....	3
2. What characterises DEval’s recommendations?	6
2.1 How many recommendations does DEval make?.....	6
2.2 Who is the addressee of DEval’s recommendations?	6
2.3 What sort of changes does DEval recommend?.....	7
3. How do the addressees deal with DEval’s recommendations?.....	11
3.1 Do the addressees share DEval’s recommendations?	11
3.2 Are the addressees implementing DEval’s recommendations?.....	13
3.3 Factors influencing how addressees deal with the recommendations.....	15
4. Conclusions	16
4.1 Conclusions on the implementation of recommendations.....	16
4.2 Learning potential for those involved in implementation planning and implementation monitoring	17
4.3 Outlook.....	18
5. Literature	19
6. Appendix	21

Figures

Figure 1	DEval evaluation process.....	3
Figure 2	Recommendations per evaluation	6
Figure 3	Recommendations per addressee.....	7
Figure 4	Fields of action addressed by recommendations.....	10
Figure 5	Fields of action of recommendations by addressee.....	11
Figure 6	Number of shared and rejected recommendations in evaluations	11
Figure 7	Shared or rejected recommendations by addressee	12
Figure 8	Assessment of the implementation of recommendations that are at least partially shared.....	14
Figure 9	Fields of action of recommendations by evaluation	21
Figure 10	Proportion of shared and rejected recommendations by evaluation.....	22
Figure 11	Assessment of implementation for each evaluation on the basis of the recommendation	23
Figure 12	Assessment of implementation for each evaluation on the basis of the implementation steps.....	24
Figure 13	Assessment of implementation in fields of action measured against the recommendations.....	25
Figure 14	Assessment of implementation in fields of action measured against the implementation steps.....	26

Tables

Table 1	Evaluations with completed implementation monitoring up to the beginning of 2025....	5
Table 2	Implementation of recommendations by addressee group.....	15

Boxes

Box 1	Summary.....	v
Box 2	DEval	3
Box 3	Implementation-planning and implementation-monitoring processes.....	4
Box 4	Fields of action addressed in DEval evaluation recommendations.....	8
Box 5	Bases of assessment for the implementation of recommendations.....	13

1. BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Evidence-based policy-making, oriented towards practical and, at the same time, scientifically based findings, is more important than ever in times of declining budgets and increasing debates about the effectiveness of development cooperation. Evaluations, which always operate in the area between learning and accountability, are therefore essential in order to know which measures work and how.

Box 2 DEval

The German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval) gGmbH was established in November 2012 and is based in Bonn. The sole shareholder is the Federal Republic of Germany, represented by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

DEval aims to independently assess the success of development cooperation measures as part of the German development cooperation evaluation system, which works according to the principle of the division of labour. Its activity is based on three pillars: 1) strategic evaluations (sectors, country programmes, instruments, etc.), 2) evaluation research and 3) promotion of evaluation capacity in partner countries (Evaluation Capacity Development, ECD).

In DEval, German development cooperation has an institute that conducts scientifically independent and practice-orientated evaluations on strategically relevant topics. It thus provides the German government (usually represented by the BMZ), state implementing organisations (IO) and civil society with information for evidence-based management that is geared towards effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability.

The prerequisite for management based on evaluations is that decision-makers in politics and practice use the results to implement recommendations. To make this process transparent and to support it, major international organisations have established the good practice of not shelving evaluations when a report is submitted, but following up the evaluations' findings and recommendations. Based on this experience, DEval and the BMZ have developed a structured system which tracks the way in which evaluations and their recommendations are implemented in policy and practice. These processes of implementation planning (IP) and the implementation monitoring (IM) of evaluation recommendations follow on from the evaluation process (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 DEval evaluation process



Source: DEval, own visualisation

Implementation planning and implementation monitoring are an integral part of the BMZ guidelines on *Evaluating German Development Cooperation* (BMZ, 2023). These guidelines provide for a three-stage process with responsibilities shared between the Federal Ministry and DEval (see Box 2):

- parallel publication of the evaluation report by DEval and the BMZ 's response;
- formalised implementation planning in which the addressees of the evaluation recommendations define concrete, deadline-bound and verifiable sub-steps for their implementation;
- monitoring the implementation of recommendations and/or the implementation steps defined for this purpose by the addressees.

Box 3 Implementation-planning and implementation-monitoring processes

Implementation planning: Publication of the evaluation report by DEval and the BMZ's corresponding response launches a formalised implementation-planning process in which the Federal Ministry and other organisations addressed by the recommendations decide to what extent they share them and in which steps the (partially) shared recommendations are to be implemented. Recommendations can either be shared, or only aspects of a recommendation are shared (partially shared), or they can be rejected.

DEval plays an advisory role in implementation planning, which is the responsibility of the BMZ. Where necessary, the Institute explains in more detail how a recommendation has been extrapolated from the results of the evaluation and what changes are intended. It also supports the BMZ in quality assurance. In this way, DEval assesses whether it believes that the agreed steps can plausibly lead to the changes envisaged by the recommendation. Final quality assurance is carried out by the BMZ Evaluation Division, and the lead division is responsible for implementing the programme.

Implementation monitoring: The systematic tracking of the implementation of recommendations has been part of DEval's evaluation work since 2020. One and a half to two years after implementation planning, DEval examines the extent to which the recommendations – or the steps set out for these in the implementation planning – have actually been implemented. In a tabular query, interviews and an online survey, the addressees of the recommendations provide information on the prerequisites, success factors and obstacles to dealing with recommendations, as well as insights into the actual status of implementation. The implementation of recommendations that are not shared is not assessed. However, findings on these recommendations can be used as stimuli for learning, i.a. for the future formulation of recommendations.

This second synthesis report analyses not only the extent to which recommendations from DEval evaluations have been shared and implemented by the organisations addressed, but also the factors that have influenced implementation. An initial synthesis of implementation monitoring was published in spring 2023 (DEval, 2023). This second synthesis report summarises the results of implementation monitoring for ten DEval evaluations published between 2019 and 2022 for which the implementation monitoring was completed the beginning of 2025. The results of these ten evaluations are combined with those of the ten analysed in the first synthesis. Experience is thus available from a total of 20 DEval evaluations (see Table 1).¹ Information on the respective evaluations and the reports can be found on the [DEval homepage](#), the corresponding statements of the Federal Ministry on a [BMZ website](#).

Implementation planning and implementation monitoring are becoming increasingly standardised. The first synthesis report analyses ten DEval evaluations, some of which were conducted during the Institute's start-up phase and in which the processes of implementation planning and implementation monitoring were still being developed. By contrast, the ten evaluations included in this second report have undergone continuous quality-assurance development.² The database has thus not only been expanded to 20 evaluations, it is also more reliable than that of the first synthesis, even if there are still challenges with some implementation plans. These arise in particular when implementation steps do not (completely) reflect the change intended by the recommendation, or when responsibilities and timelines are not precisely defined.

¹ No implementation monitoring was carried out for evaluations whose implementation planning took place in the initial phase of DEval. These evaluations are: "A Review of Evaluative Work of German Development Cooperation in Afghanistan" (Kirsch, 2014), "Aid for Trade: Policies and Strategies in German Development Cooperation" (Kröger & Voionmaa, 2015), and "30 Years of Rwandan-German Development Cooperation in the Health Sector" (Schwedersky, Noltze & Gaisbauer, 2014).

² In the meantime, DEval has developed quality criteria for evaluation recommendations, which were applied to most of the evaluations included here. These criteria were developed in parallel with the development of a joint BMZ/DEval handbook entitled "Planning and Monitoring the Implementation of Recommendations from DEval Evaluations", which came into force in 2022. It sets out processes and responsibilities and defines quality criteria for implementation planning (see also Box 4).

Table 1 Evaluations with completed implementation monitoring up to the beginning of 2025

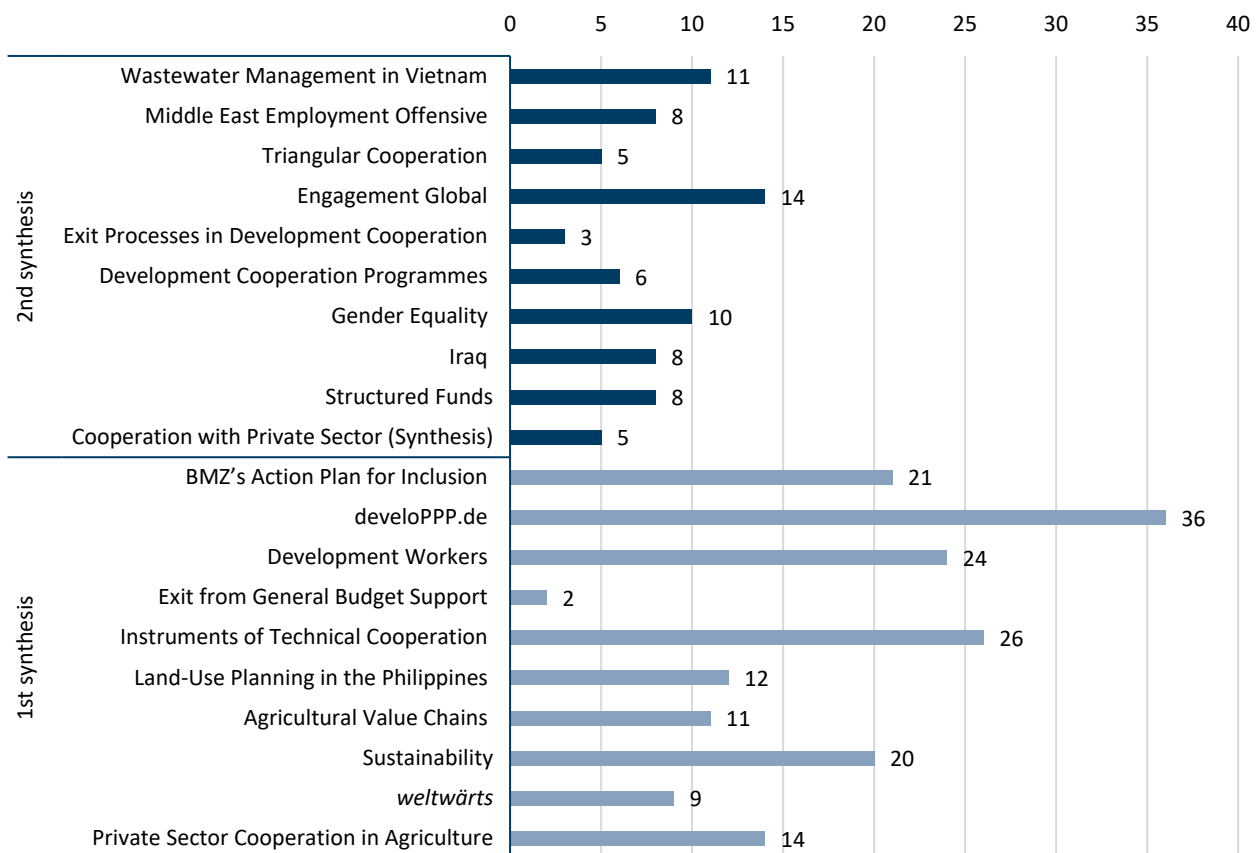
IM synthesis	Evaluation	Conclusion	IM
2nd synthesis	Joint Strategic Ministerial Evaluation of the Engagement of the Federal Foreign Office (AA) and BMZ in Iraq	2022	2024
	Results Orientation and Evaluability of Development Cooperation Programmes	2021	2024
	Evaluation Synthesis: Cooperation with the Private Sector	2021	2024
	Exit Processes in Development Cooperation	2021	2024
	Supporting Gender Equality in Post-conflict Contexts	2021	2023/24
	Effectiveness of German Development Cooperation in Dealing with Conflict Driven Migration Crises. The Middle East Employment Offensive	2021	2024/25
	Institutional Evaluation of Engagement Global	2020	2022/23
	Structured Funds	2021	2022/23
	Trilateral Cooperation in German Development Cooperation	2020	2023
	Wastewater Management in Provincial Towns in Vietnam	2019	2022/23
1st synthesis	Cooperation with the Private Sector in Agriculture in German Technical Cooperation	2018	2021
	The Future of Integrated Policy-based Development Cooperation. Lessons from the Exit from General Budget Support in Malawi, Rwanda, Uganda and Zambia	2018	2021/22
	Impact, Diffusion and Scaling-Up of a Comprehensive Land-Use Planning Approach in the Philippines	2018	2022
	Meta-evaluation and Evaluation Synthesis of Sustainability in German Development Cooperation	2018	2021
	<i>Weltwärts</i> Volunteers and Their Civic Engagement in Germany	2017	2022
	Evaluation of the BMZ's Action Plan for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities	2017	2021
	Integration of the Instruments of Technical Cooperation	2016	2021
	Evaluation of the develoPPP.de Programme	2016	2021
	Agricultural Value Chains	2016	2021
	Secondment of Development Workers	2015	2020

2. WHAT CHARACTERISES DEval'S RECOMMENDATIONS?

2.1 How many recommendations does DEval make?

A total of 78 recommendations are made in the ten evaluations included in this synthesis. The number of recommendations varies between three and 14 per evaluation (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 Recommendations per evaluation



Source: DEval, own visualisation

Note: In order to ensure implementability, since 2021 DEval has formulated no more than ten recommendations per evaluation, and a maximum of five for short evaluations.³ For this reason, the average number of recommendations has fallen significantly, from an average of 18 in the evaluations of the first synthesis report on implementation monitoring to eight in those of the second synthesis.

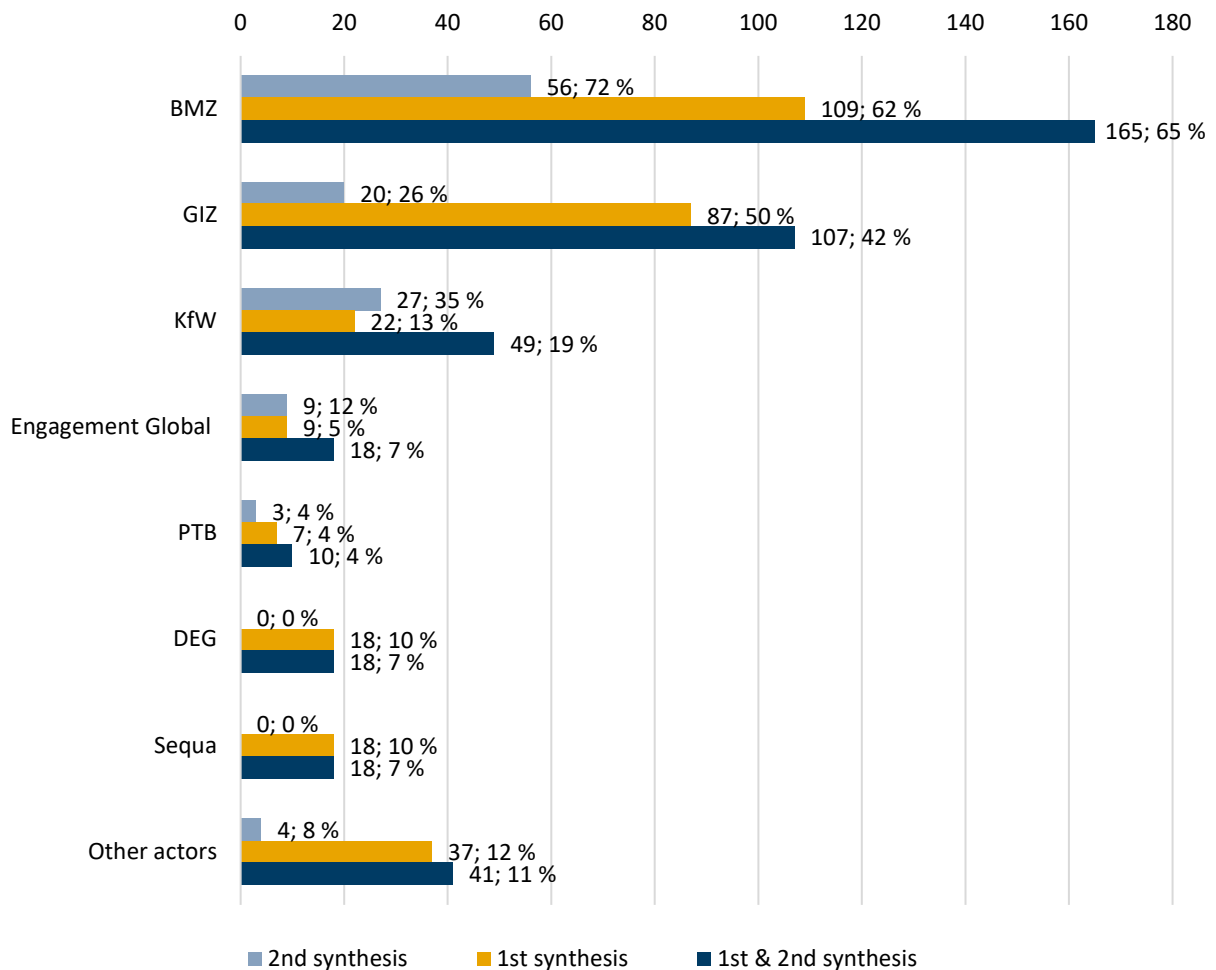
2.2 Who is the addressee of DEval's recommendations?

In the ten evaluations used for this synthesis, the recommendations are most frequently directed at the **BMZ, the KfW Development Bank and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)**: 56 of the 78 recommendations are directed at the BMZ (72%), 27 at the KfW (35%) and 20 at the GIZ (26%);

³ Short evaluations are shorter evaluations with a more narrowly-defined evaluation subject, epistemic interest and evaluation design; they are completed in 15 months (standard DEval evaluations take 24 months). In consultation with the management of DEval, the Institutional Evaluation of Engagement Global deviated from the guidelines for evaluation recommendations, which were still under development at the time, and the maximum number of recommendations contained therein.

see Figure 3).⁴ (It should be noted that a recommendation can also be directed at more than one recipient.) A joint examination of the 20 evaluations of the first and second syntheses together also reveals that DEval evaluation recommendations are most frequently addressed to the BMZ (165 of 253 recommendations; 65%), followed, however, in the synopsis by the GIZ (107; 42%) in second place and the KfW third (49; 19%).

Figure 3 Recommendations per addressee



* Multiple categorization possible

Source: DEval, own visualisation

2.3 What sort of changes does DEval recommend?

DEval's recommendations relate to various fields of action (see Box 4). These differ in terms of content, but overlap to some extent. Recommendations of a field of action can be directed at different addressees or groups of addressees, for example at the BMZ and implementing organisations at the same time. Furthermore, the need for action identified in a recommendation can be assigned to several categories, although this does not mean that several needs for action are expressed in this way. For example, a recommendation for more investment in knowledge management in a certain area or sector of development cooperation would be allocated both to the “expertise and knowledge management” category and to the “resources and allocation of funds” category.

⁴ Of the 27 recommendations addressed to the KfW, seven alone apply to the evaluation of Structured Funds. The recommendations addressed to Engagement Global all stem from the institutional evaluation of the organisation. This explains the high proportion of recommendations to these organisations in the second synthesis. Other actors – for example National Metrology Institute (PTB), Deutsche Investitions- und Entwicklungsgesellschaft (DEG), sequa, partner countries (not specified in more detail) or German DC donors (again not specified in more detail) – are only addressed by the evaluation recommendations analysed in the first synthesis.

Box 4 Fields of action addressed in DEval evaluation recommendations

Strategy and conception: Recommendations that encourage the (further) development of political, sectoral, country-specific or organisational strategies and concepts. These can involve both the definition of objectives and how to achieve them. The recommendations relating to this field of action call on the addressees to further develop strategies and concepts that lie within their area of responsibility, to design lacking strategic documents, or to make content-related proposals for the design or modification of strategies or concepts.

Planning and implementation: Recommendations aimed at improving the technical and operational planning and implementation of development-policy measures (projects and programmes). These recommendations address the operational level – planning and implementation – and can be directed at both implementing organisations and the BMZ.

Analysis, monitoring and evaluation: Recommendations that address the implementation, (further) development or use of analyses, (baseline) studies, monitoring activities, reporting and evaluations. Development-policy and organisational-development measures can be the subject of the investigation here. The overarching goal of the recommendations is to generate knowledge and incorporate it into political and operational management.

Expertise and knowledge management: Recommendations on how to reinforce or leverage specialist knowledge within one or more development organisations, for example by means of training, hiring staff or improving knowledge management. This aims at enabling the addressees to adequately fulfil their tasks.

Communication and information exchange: Recommendations related to improving the exchange of information between actors within an organisation as well as between actors from different organisations. This also includes dialogue with government representatives from partner countries, as well as general public relations work. Different communication channels and information carriers can be used.

Coordination and division of labour: Recommendations on improving coordination and the division of labour within an organisation and between different organisations and actors. This also covers role clarification and the networking of actors to improve performance. The implementation of recommendations in this category aims, for example, at improving work efficiency.

Standard and process definition: Recommendations that suggest improving specifications or processes, for example by (further) developing manuals, guidelines, definitions or other directives, such as funding directives. The overall objective is to standardise recurring processes to improve political and operational management by the addressees.

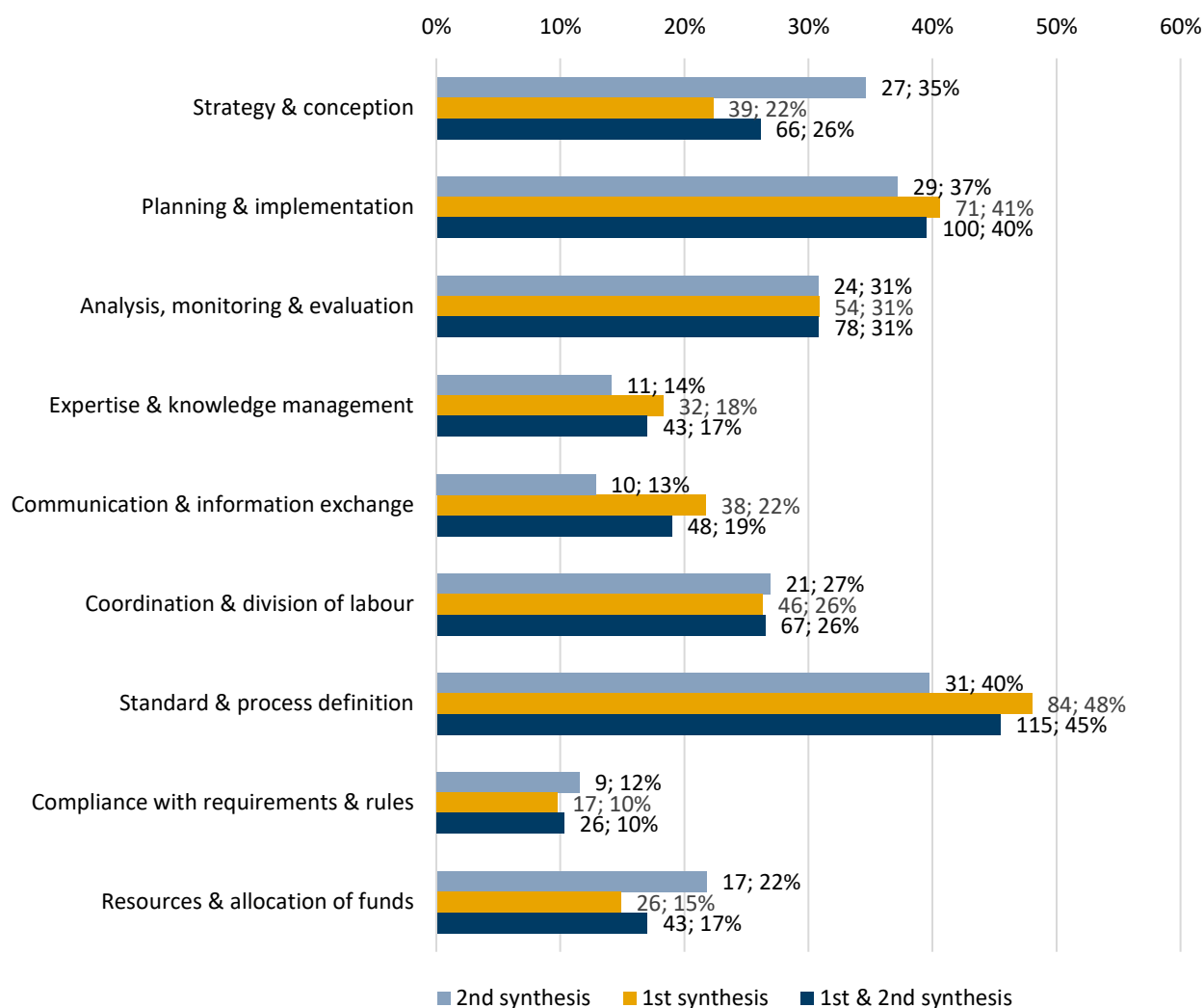
Compliance with requirements and rules: Recommendations that refer to existing requirements and rules. The aim of these recommendations is to ensure that existing rules and requirements are taken into account (more fully) by the addressees or third parties, and that they become more binding. Rules and requirements include manuals, strategic objectives, guidelines and directives, standards and definitions, but also general principles (for example Agenda 2030) and existing recommendations (for example from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development).

Resources and allocation of funds: Recommendations relating to the distribution of financial resources. This includes both continued financing and the redistribution of funds within organisations and the development portfolio. Among other things, the recommendations aim to improve allocation efficiency.

The DEval recommendations examined here most frequently suggest changes to technical and operational planning, but also to the implementation of development-policy measures (projects and programmes) and the definition of standards and processes. A total of 29 recommendations (37% of all recommendations; see Figure 4) are made in the ten evaluations that relate to the planning and implementation of projects and 31 (40%) to the definition of standards and processes. Although DEval's evaluations are strategically orientated and do not generally look at isolated individual projects, they can relate to the operational level. Changes at this decision-making level have an impact on higher levels. For example, recommendations can be made in favour of interlinking different measures more closely, making their implementation more targeted or more flexible, adapting criteria for selecting implementation partners or involving beneficiaries in planning and implementation. Recommendations on standard and process definition relate to (re)defining procedures or requirements in order to standardise recurring processes and thus improve management at the political and operational level. In these cases, a recommendation might be made, for example, to work on regulations or selection criteria, define decision-making powers or implement standardised exchange formats.

Very few recommendations are made on conformity with requirements and rules (9; 12%), for example on aligning measures (more closely) to existing strategic goals, standards and principles. Similarly, comparatively few changes are recommended in the areas of "communication and information exchange" between different actors and "expertise and knowledge management", for example on further training or the systematic use of learning experience. If we look at the recommendations of all 20 evaluations that have hitherto undergone implementation monitoring, we can see that they have a similar focus in terms of content.

In many evaluations, recommendations are made focusing largely on one or two of the fields of action, depending on the subject matter and the findings of the study. In the evaluation "Effectiveness of German Development Cooperation in Dealing with Conflict Driven Migration Crises", for example, six out of eight recommendations (75%) relate to the planning and implementation of projects; in the evaluation of development cooperation programmes, 83% (five out of six) relate to the definition of standards and processes (see Figure 9 in the Appendix).

Figure 4 Fields of action addressed by recommendations⁵

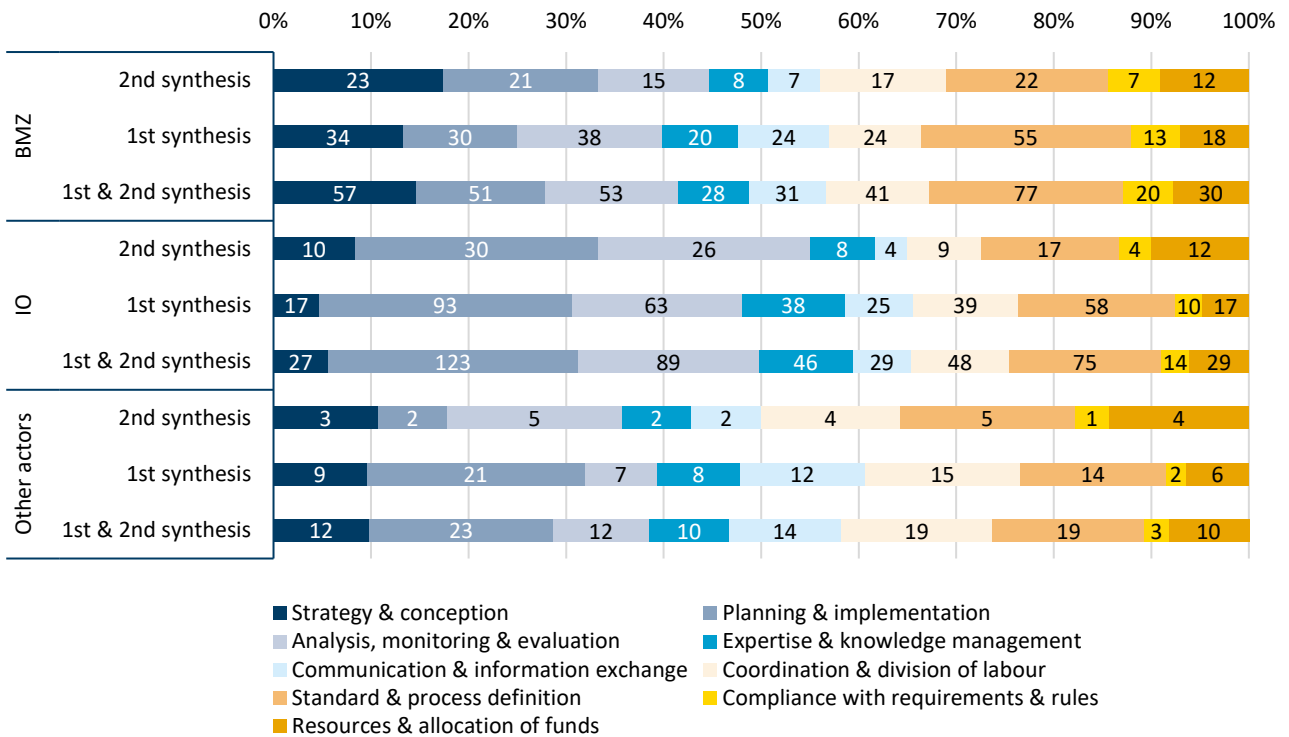
* Multiple categorization possible

Source: DEval, own visualisation

The content of the recommendations for different target groups also varies and reflects the division of labour in German development cooperation (see Figure 5). The BMZ is most frequently advised to make adjustments in the fields of action falling within its remit, namely “standard and process definition” and “strategy and conception”. The recommendations made to the implementing organisations most frequently relate to the area of “planning and implementation”, followed by “analysis, monitoring and evaluation” and “definition of standards and processes”. These differences can be found in the evaluations of both the first and second syntheses of the implementation monitoring. The fact that the BMZ is also the addressee of recommendations on planning and implementation, and the implementing organisations are the addressees of recommendations on strategy and conception is because recommendations are often addressed the Federal Ministry and the implementing organisations jointly.

⁵ The percentages represent the proportion of recommendations in relation to the total number of recommendations for a particular field of action. Since the need for action addressed in one recommendation can be allocated to several categories, the percentages add up to more than 100%.

Figure 5 Fields of action of recommendations by addressee



* Multiple categorization possible

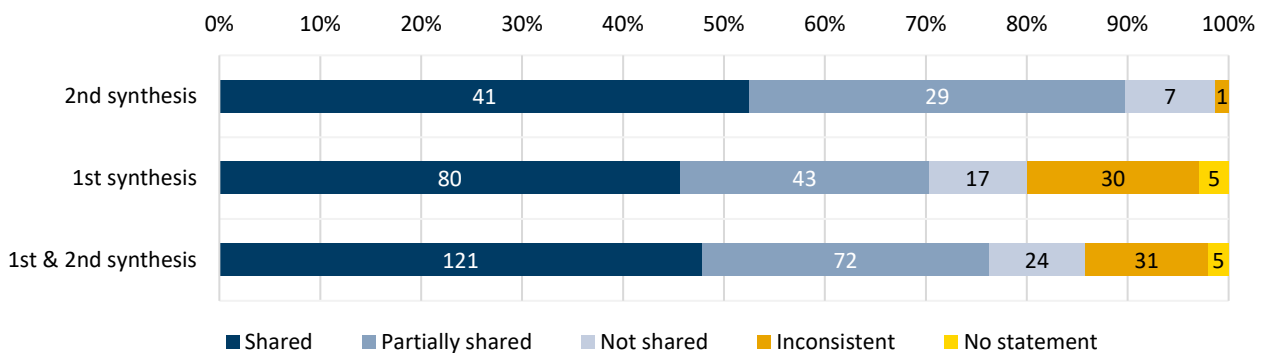
Source: DEval, own visualisation

3. HOW DO THE ADDRESSEES DEAL WITH DEVAL'S RECOMMENDATIONS?

3.1 Do the addressees share DEval's recommendations?

In the ten additional evaluations, a total of 90% of the recommendations were completely or partially shared. In all, 41 recommendations (53%) were completely shared, 29 (37%) were partially shared, seven (9%) were not shared, and one was shared to varying degrees by different addressees ("inconsistent" category; see Figure 6).

Figure 6 Number of shared and rejected recommendations in evaluations



Source: DEval, own visualisation

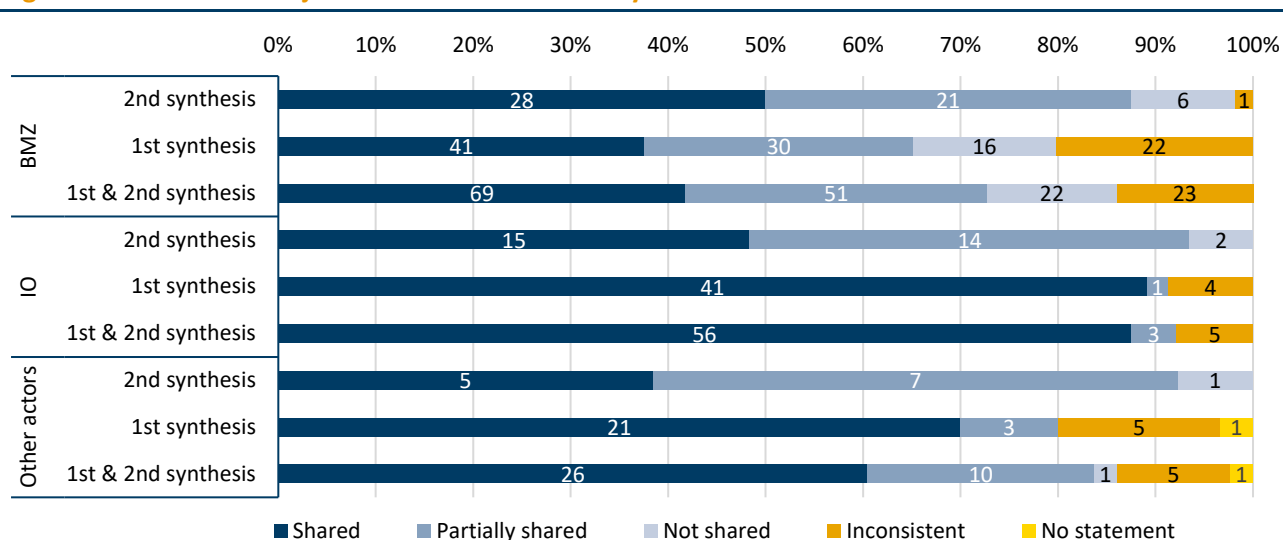
The proportion of recommendations that are at least partially shared has increased significantly compared to the evaluations included in the first synthesis of implementation monitoring (first synthesis: 70% at least partially shared). This increase is primarily due to the fact that more recommendations were shared partially. However, this increase does not come at the expense of the completely shared recommendations: their proportion is also increasing but only slightly, from 46 to 53%.

In the majority of evaluations, therefore, all or most recommendations were shared at least partially, and only individual recommendations were rejected. In a total of six evaluations, all recommendations were completely or partially shared.⁶

If we only consider completely shared recommendations and exclude partially shared recommendations, we see several evaluations with particularly high proportions of completely shared recommendations and others where only a few were shared.⁷ All recommendations were shared in the evaluation of development cooperation programmes; however, in the evaluation of wastewater management in Vietnam, around a third were not shared.

There are only minor differences between the addressees with regard to the sharing of recommendations. Figure 7 shows hardly any differences, particularly between the BMZ and implementing organisations. The differences to other actors are difficult to interpret due to the diverse composition of this category.

Figure 7 Shared or rejected recommendations by addressee⁸



* Multiple categorization possible

Source: DEval, own visualisation

The reasons for not sharing a recommendation or a sub-aspect of a recommendation should be explained as part of implementation planning. However, especially in the case of partially shared recommendations, this is not always clear from the implementation-planning documentation. In the future, BMZ and DEval should therefore pay greater attention in their quality assurance of implementation planning, to ensure that convincing explanations are also provided for rejected aspects of recommendations. This will allow an analysis of the reasons for rejection in the medium term. The findings from this analysis can in turn provide impulses for DEval's evaluations and recommendations, but equally for the learning processes in the BMZ and other addressee organisations.

⁶ The Effectiveness of German Development Cooperation in Conflict-Related Refugee Crises - the Middle-East Employment Offensive, Trilateral Cooperation in German Development Cooperation, Impact Orientation and Evaluability of Development Cooperation Programmes, Supporting Gender Equality in Post-conflict Contexts, Joint Strategic Ministerial Evaluation of the Engagement of the AA and BMZ in Iraq and Structured Funds.

⁷ However, neither the sharing nor the rejection of recommendations says anything about their quality.

⁸ In older (i.e. pre-2019) evaluations with large and diverse target groups, a large proportion of recommendations are shared inconsistently (Evaluation of the BMZ Action Plan for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities; Impact, Diffusion and Scaling-Up of a Comprehensive Land-Use Planning Approach in the Philippines; Development Workers). Different addressees have shared the recommendations to varying degrees. In the ten most recently included evaluations, this only applies to one recommendation (see Figure 12 in the Appendix).

3.2 Are the addressees implementing DEval's recommendations?

The extent to which the shared or partially shared recommendations have been implemented is analysed 18 to 24 months after the implementation planning comes into operation (see Box 5 for the two bases of assessment used). Recommendations or aspects of recommendations that are not shared are not followed up.

Box 5 Bases of assessment for the implementation of recommendations

The BMZ/DEval joint manual 'Planning and monitoring the implementation of recommendations from DEval evaluations' specifies the relevant processes and responsibilities. Quality criteria for implementation planning are specified in the manual: the implementation steps must fulfil formal requirements such as completeness, comprehensibility and consistency with the BMZ statement on the evaluation report. Requirements on content are also formulated: for example, the implementation steps should be geared towards the intended change that can be derived from the recommendation; it should have an appropriate level of ambition and be suitable for monitoring the implementation of the recommendation. The BMZ is responsible for the quality assurance of implementation planning. The Federal Ministry involves DEval in an advisory capacity, for example by providing advice on whether the implementation steps are in line with the report's recommendations.

Despite the definition of the requirements described, the planned implementation steps have so far not always corresponded to the changes intended by a recommendation, or have only reflected parts of it. In such a case, this recommendation cannot be assessed in implementation monitoring in a comparison with the implementation steps. Then, the assessment is made based on the recommendation set out in the report rather than the implementation steps. As a result, there may be discrepancies between the two assessments – based on the implementation steps or the recommendation formulated in the report. As quality assurance improves, this should only occur in exceptional cases in future.

DEval's recommendations deliberately leave a certain amount of room for interpretation. The ultimate character of the path to the intended change is not precisely described but defined by the addressees themselves. As part of the quality assurance of the planned implementation steps, different assessments can be made as to whether the path chosen is suitable for achieving the change, or whether the implementation steps fulfil the quality criteria. If these differences cannot be resolved, DEval uses the recommendation as the starting point for its implementation assessment in its implementation monitoring, or it rates the recommendation as not implemented. Alternatively, the recommendation can be recorded as not shared.

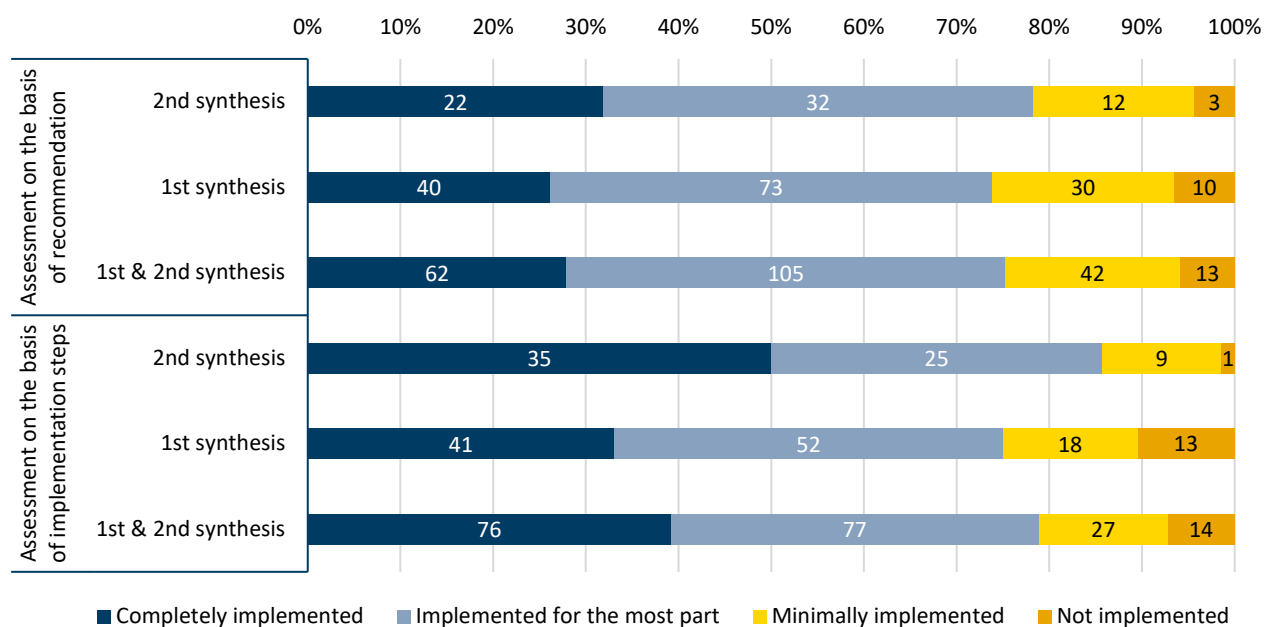
In the ten most recent evaluations analysed in implementation monitoring, more than three quarters of the recommendations were completely or implemented for the most part. Where the recommendations are used as the basis for assessment and only assessable recommendations are considered, 78% of the recommendations were completely or implemented for the most part (see Figure 8). This represents a slight increase on the implementation rate of the ten evaluations analysed in the first implementation-monitoring synthesis (74%). When the steps defined in the implementation plan are used as the basis for assessment, 86% of the recommendations were either completely implemented or to the most part. **This is a considerable increase compared to the first synthesis (75%).**

The proportion of completely implemented recommendations is increasing over time. When the implementation steps were used as the basis for assessment, 50% of the recommendations included in the second synthesis were completely implemented. This is significantly higher than the 33% of recommendations implemented in the ten evaluations of the first synthesis. However, even if the recommendations are used as the basis for assessment, the proportion of completely implemented recommendations has at least risen slightly to 32% (first synthesis: 26%).

Various factors may have led to this development, although it is not possible to conclusively identify a decisive factor. For example, the increasing standardisation of processes, especially implementation planning and the introduction of quality criteria for implementation steps (see Chapter 1), may have facilitated the implementation of the recommendations and also the monitoring of implementation.

Similarly, the decreased number of recommendations may itself have played a role, as this meant that more capacity was available for the tailored development of individual recommendations, which in turn facilitated implementation.

Figure 8 Assessment of the implementation of recommendations that are at least partially shared



Source: DEval, own visualisation

The proportion of non-assessable recommendations has fallen. Depending on the assessment basis, there were only one or two recommendations in the ten evaluations analysed here that could not be assessed. This means that the proportion has fallen (significantly) compared to the first synthesis, where six recommendations (compared with the original recommendations) respectively 35 recommendations (compared with the implementation steps) were not assessable. This may be because the steps did not meet the quality criteria, for example because their degree of fulfilment could not be determined due to the wording, or because the content of the implementation steps had no real connection with the change intended by the recommendation.

A particularly large number of recommendations were implemented in some evaluations. For example, a large proportion of the recommendations were implemented in the synthesis on cooperation with the private sector and the evaluation of structured funds. The evaluations of development cooperation programmes and exit processes in development cooperation also showed high implementation rates (see Figure 11 and Figure 12 in the Appendix).

Looking at the fields of action in which the recommendations initiate change, there is no clear picture of the fields in which a particularly large or small number of recommendations were implemented (see Figure 13 and Figure 14 in the Appendix). Both in the synopsis of the first and second syntheses and in the comparison of the two bases of assessment (recommendation versus planned implementation steps), there are different fields of action with particularly many or few implemented recommendations. In addition, there may be different explanations for the differences described. A definitive statement on the areas in which particularly large or small numbers of recommendations were implemented and which factors were decisive cannot be made because the database is still limited.

There are only minor differences in the implementation by different groups of addressees (see Table 2). Similarly, there may be different explanations for these differences between the actor groups. A definitive statement on the decisive factors is again not (yet) possible.

Future syntheses with a broader database can use detailed analyses to shed light on the reasons for the differences in implementation rates between the fields of action of certain recommendations or between groups of actors.

Table 2 Implementation of recommendations by addressee group

	implemented completely/ for the most part		minimally/ not implemented		not assessable	
	according to DEval's recommendation	according to implementation steps	according to DEval's recommendation	according to implementation steps	according to DEval's recommendation	according to implementation steps
BMZ	74,0%	86,0%	22,0%	12,0%	4,0%	2,0%
IO	82,8%	86,2%	17,2%	13,8%	0,0%	0,0%
Other actors	83,3%	91,7%	16,7%	8,3%	0,0%	0,0%

3.3 Factors influencing how addressees deal with the recommendations

Statistical analysis of influencing factors

Recommendations from recent evaluations are more likely to be implemented than those from older ones.

The timing of an evaluation therefore has an influence on the extent to which recommendations are implemented. This applies to both bases for assessment. It can be assumed that the increasing standardisation and quality assurance of processes, and – likewise – the reduced number of recommendations (see below), have a positive effect.

The fewer recommendations are made in an evaluation, the more likely they are to be implemented.

This influence is evident in the analysis both of the ten new evaluations and of all 20 evaluations considered in the implementation monitoring. Here, too, further influencing factors could be increasing standardisation of processes or improved quality assurance

It is unclear whether there are significant differences in implementation between different groups of addressees or fields of action. Both aspects need to be further examined in future syntheses. A broader database will enable more detailed analyses.

Qualitative analysis of influencing factors

The purely quantitative evaluation of the implementation of the individual recommendations presented here was supplemented by a qualitative analysis of the statements made by the persons responsible for implementing the recommendations from specific evaluations. Information from all 20 evaluations was incorporated into this analysis. The positive as well as negative factors influencing the implementation of recommendations derived from this analysis are found at different levels: at the level of the recommendations and the responsibilities for implementation, as well as in the characteristics of the evaluation subjects or in developments in their environment.

When addressees perceive recommendations as relevant and can clearly understand how they are derived from the results, this promotes implementation. It is also beneficial to formulate recommendations neither too abstractly nor too specifically.

Clear responsibilities are helpful for implementation. In addition to the quality of recommendations, it has a positive effect when responsible individuals or defined working groups take responsibility for implementing the recommendations. This begins with the evaluators addressing the recommendations to the responsible organisations. Within the organisation, the units in whose area of work the implementation lies are then identified as part of implementation planning. However, particularly in the case of recommendations to

large and diversely composed actor groups, a “diffusion of responsibility” can arise. This should be avoided by clearly mandating those responsible as part of implementation planning.

When recommendations encounter parallel change processes and are incorporated into them, or address current political priorities, this positively influences their implementation. This was the case, for example, in the evaluation of development cooperation programmes which was able to build on the existing efforts of working groups (e.g. the “Boosting Development Cooperation Programmes” working group) and thus strengthen these processes, as well as in the evaluation of the Middle East employment offensive or the synthesis on cooperation with the private sector. In both cases, the recommendations came at a favourable moment according to those implementing them. In many of the more recent evaluations, the topics analysed were a political priority at the time of the evaluation – for example structured funds, triangular cooperation or gender equality in post-conflict contexts – and this also had a positive impact.

A lack of resources, on the other hand, can hinder implementation. Addressees most frequently identify insufficient resources as an obstacle. In addition, inadequate consideration of the resources necessary for implementation when formulating recommendations is also mentioned. This applies to both older and more recent evaluations. Similarly, **personnel changes or vacancies** in the organisations impair the implementation of recommendations.

Furthermore, **a lack of quality of recommendations also** has a negative impact, for example if they are formulated too vaguely, or, in the addressees' opinion, do not represent any new insights, or if the framework conditions are not sufficiently taken into account. The same applies to **weaknesses in implementation planning**. These can be, for example, inadequate implementation steps that only relate to parts of the recommendations. These weaknesses also occur in more recent evaluations where the processes have been standardised.

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Conclusions on the implementation of recommendations

The synopsis of statistical analyses of correlations and qualitative assessments of the statements made by the implementers provides some indication of factors that influence the implementation of recommendations.

Compared to our first synthesis report, the implementation of recommendations has improved. More recommendations are being implemented from more recent evaluations than from older ones. The reasons for this may be that recommendations are more precisely formulated, particularly due to the introduction of quality criteria for recommendations. A further influencing factor could have been the fact that DEval has further consolidated its position in the evaluation system of German development cooperation, and that its role and position vis-à-vis the BMZ and the implementing organisations is increasingly clarified. Finally, the standardisation and increasing quality of implementation planning during the period of investigation has led to an increase in the implementation of recommendations.

Fewer recommendations mean more implementation. In 2021 DEval introduced internal quality criteria for recommendations. These laid down a maximum of ten recommendations per evaluation (or five for shorter evaluations). This upper bound is intended to ensure that the recommendations are focused on the essential changes required. The present synthesis shows that the fewer recommendations are made in an evaluation, the more likely they are implemented. However, other factors can also have a positive effect here, such as stronger quality assurance of recommendations and increasing standardisation of processes.

Evaluators, addressees and decision-makers should continue to work towards ensuring that results and recommendations from evaluations are considered in relevant decision-making processes. The first synthesis of the implementation monitoring of DEval evaluation recommendations already shows that recommendations are highly useful if they can be successfully linked to ongoing reform and change processes. To achieve this, they must be compatible with the current framework conditions.

The new evaluations added in the present synthesis also make it clear that if a topic has political priority, this also promotes the implementation of recommendations. It may be worthwhile to engage early and intensively with the (potential) users of the evaluation, regarding the evaluation questions but also the point in time at which results are expected, as well as later regarding the results themselves. As regards the timing, it should be borne in mind that context factors and plans can change in the course of the evaluation. Moreover, there may be delays on the part of the evaluation process or those implementing potential recommendations. The effects of such delays can be countered, if learning from evaluation insights already begins during the evaluation process.

Clear responsibilities for implementing recommendations have a positive effect. If the responsibility for implementation is clearly defined, even for large and diverse target groups, the implementation of recommendations is strengthened. As already shown in the first synthesis, working groups can be helpful in individual cases. This was the case, for example, in the evaluation of development cooperation programmes. The already existing working group 'Boosting development cooperation programmes' assumed responsibility for the implementation of the recommendations. However, the establishment of new working groups should always be in line with the aim of streamlining and increasing the efficiency of procedures.

Whether recommendations are to be implemented also depends on the resources of those responsible for implementation. In times of declining funds for development cooperation, there are starting points for improvements on the part of both the evaluators and the addressees of recommendations. Evaluators should consider the amount of resources needed to implement a certain recommendation and what sources are available (e.g. potential savings elsewhere). They should equally consider the responsibilities for the funds. In the implementation planning, the addressees, for their part, should explore options for how the identified opportunities for improvement can be implemented with the available resources.

In addition, further challenges are grounded in the framework conditions of implementation planning and implementation monitoring. The time lag between the evaluation or implementation planning and the implementation monitoring of evaluation recommendations can make it difficult to keep track of the implementation process, especially when there are personnel changes among those responsible for the implementation and those who monitor it.

4.2 Learning potential for those involved in implementation planning and implementation monitoring

The results of the synthesis of the implementation monitoring of DEval evaluation recommendations offer starting points at various levels for further improving the implementation and thus the influence of DEval evaluations. These lie with those responsible for implementation planning and implementation itself, as well as within the framework conditions surrounding them, but also with the continuous quality assurance of evaluations and their recommendations.

Maintaining the focus on targeted, evidence-based recommendations: The focus of DEval's evaluation recommendations should continue to be on essential needs for change. In the future, greater consideration should be given to the circumstances of implementation: the defined responsibility of organisations and institutions, the available resources, the decision-making needs, and the time horizons of decision-makers.

Clear definition of responsibilities for the implementation of recommendations: If the addressees of the recommendations succeed in clearly mandating those responsible in the implementation planning, this has a positive influence on the realisation of the recommendations or the agreed implementation steps.

Examination of the resource implications of recommendations: On the one hand, when formulating recommendations, it is important to consider their implications for resources and distribution, especially in times of tight budgets. On the other hand, recommendations need to remain ambitious and the addressees are responsible for ensuring that the objectives of the evaluated subject can be prioritised based on coherent and comprehensible indicators.

Promoting the inclusion of findings from evaluations in decision-making and ongoing change processes: Where possible, it can already be anticipated in the course of crafting DEval's Multi-Annual Evaluation Programme (MEP) on which topics strategic information needs exist that can be answered by evaluations. This increases the chance that their findings and recommendations will be incorporated into decision-making processes. At the same time, the usefulness of recommendations requires decision-makers who are open to evaluations and value evidence-based policy-making.

4.3 Outlook

Overall, the present analysis shows that the implementation of evaluation recommendations is a positive contribution by the addressed organisations to evidence-based policy-making. However, monitoring the implementation of evaluation recommendations also identifies existing challenges for learning and accountability from evaluations. DEval evaluations and their recommendations should therefore be made even more useful. In the same way, the organisations addressed by recommendations should invest more than hitherto in engaging with evaluation evidence and in the implementation of recommendations.

Particularly in light of the legitimacy crisis of development cooperation decision-makers should engage more intensively with evidence on existing strengths as well as on necessary potential for improvement. Evidence-based policymaking has great potential to improve the legitimacy and acceptance of development cooperation in the medium and long term. Future analyses of the implementation of recommendations from DEval evaluations can continue to serve as learning and incentive tools for this purpose.

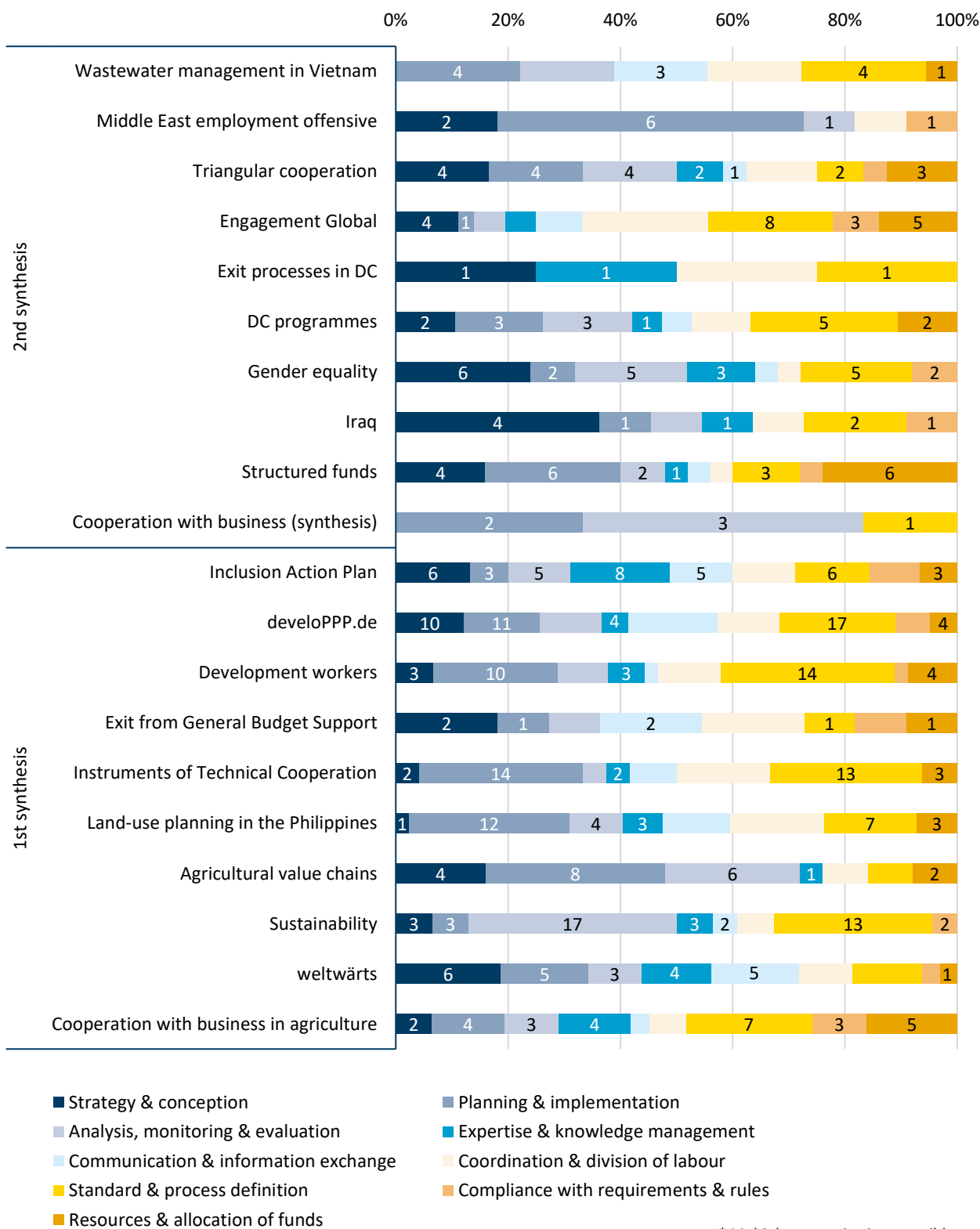
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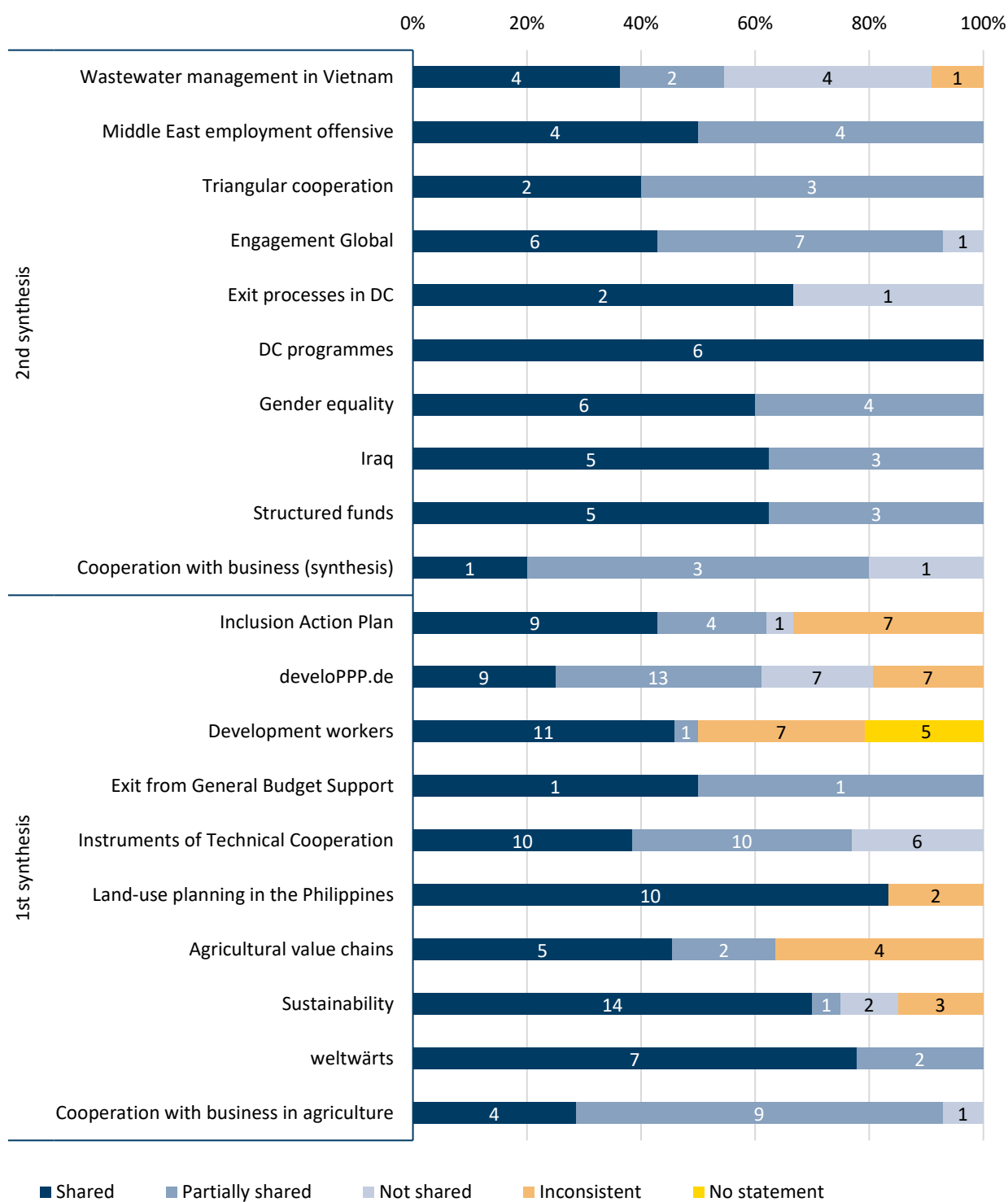
6. APPENDIX

Figure 9 Fields of action of recommendations by evaluation

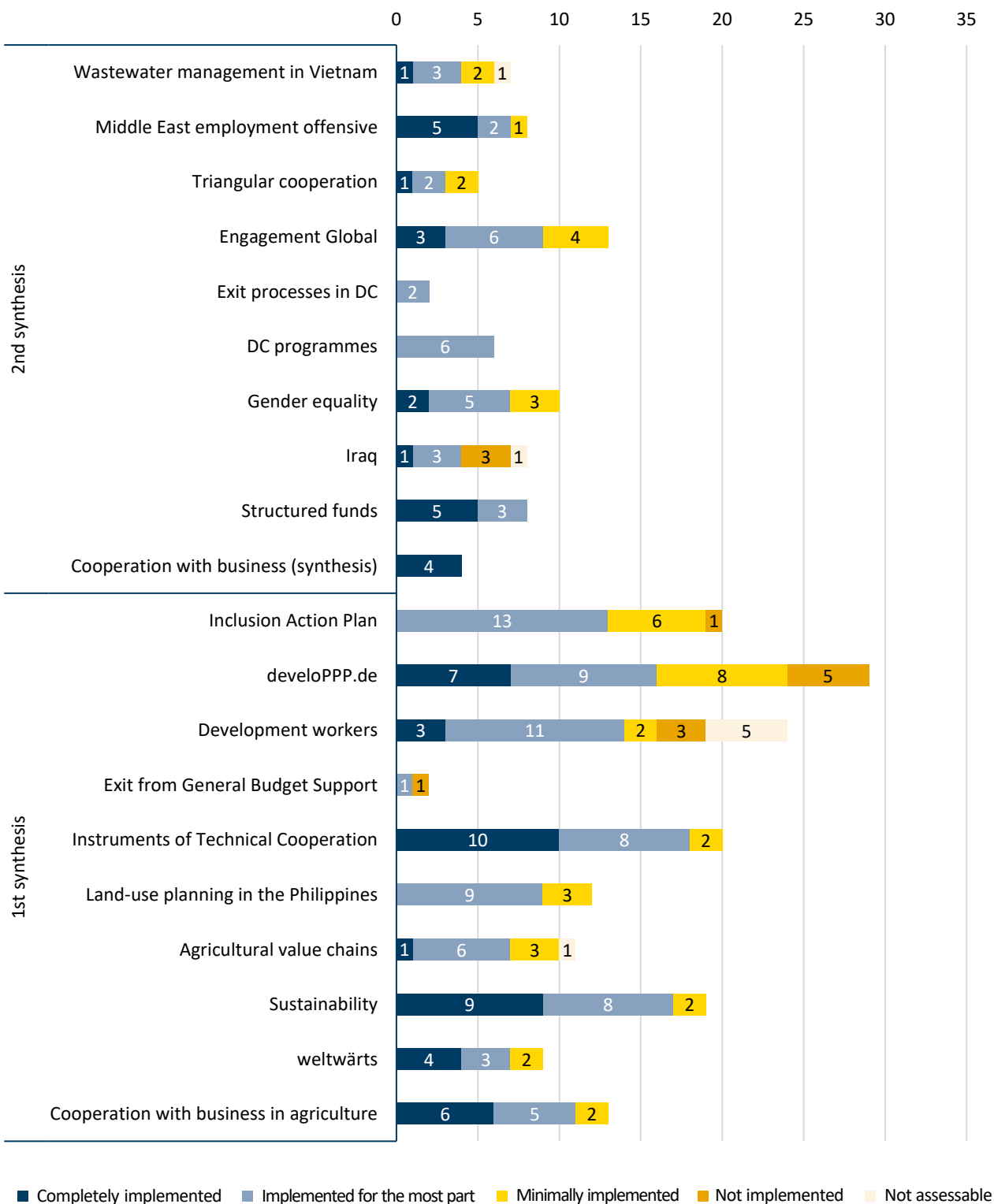


* Multiple categorizations possible

Source: DEval, own visualisation

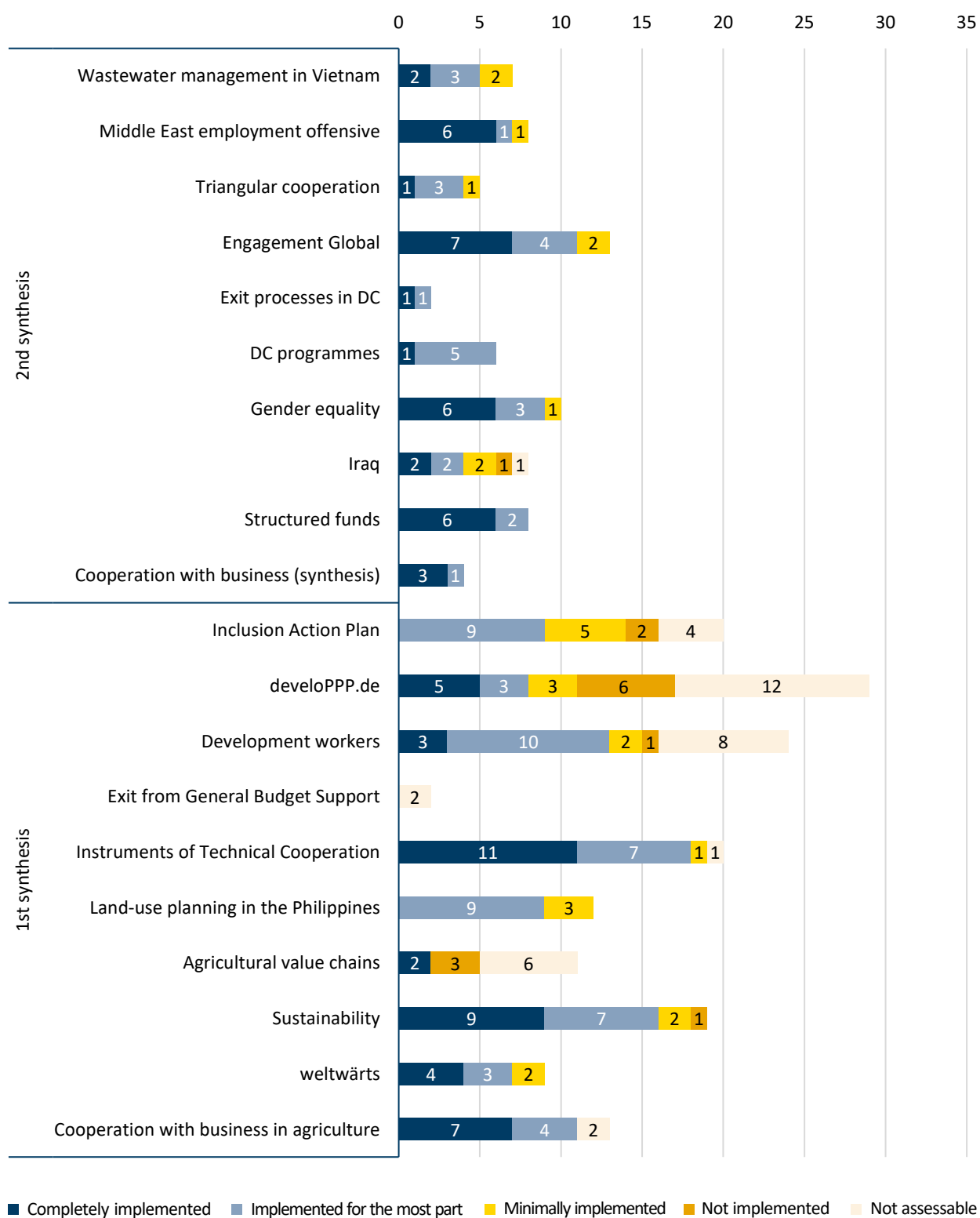
Figure 10 Proportion of shared and rejected recommendations by evaluation


Source: DEval, own visualisation

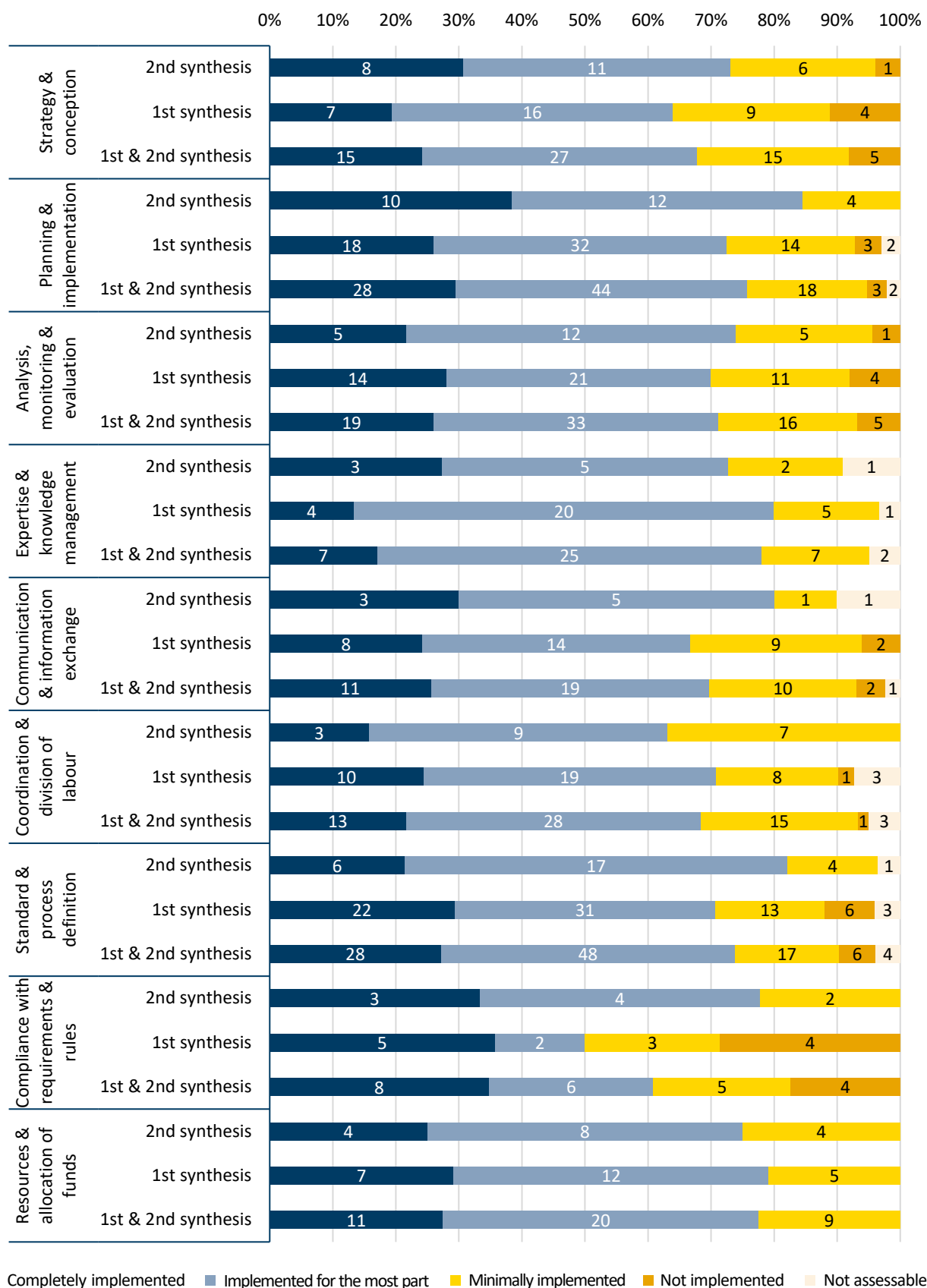
Figure 11 Assessment of implementation for each evaluation on the basis of the recommendation


Source: DEval, own visualisation

Figure 12 Assessment of implementation for each evaluation on the basis of the implementation steps

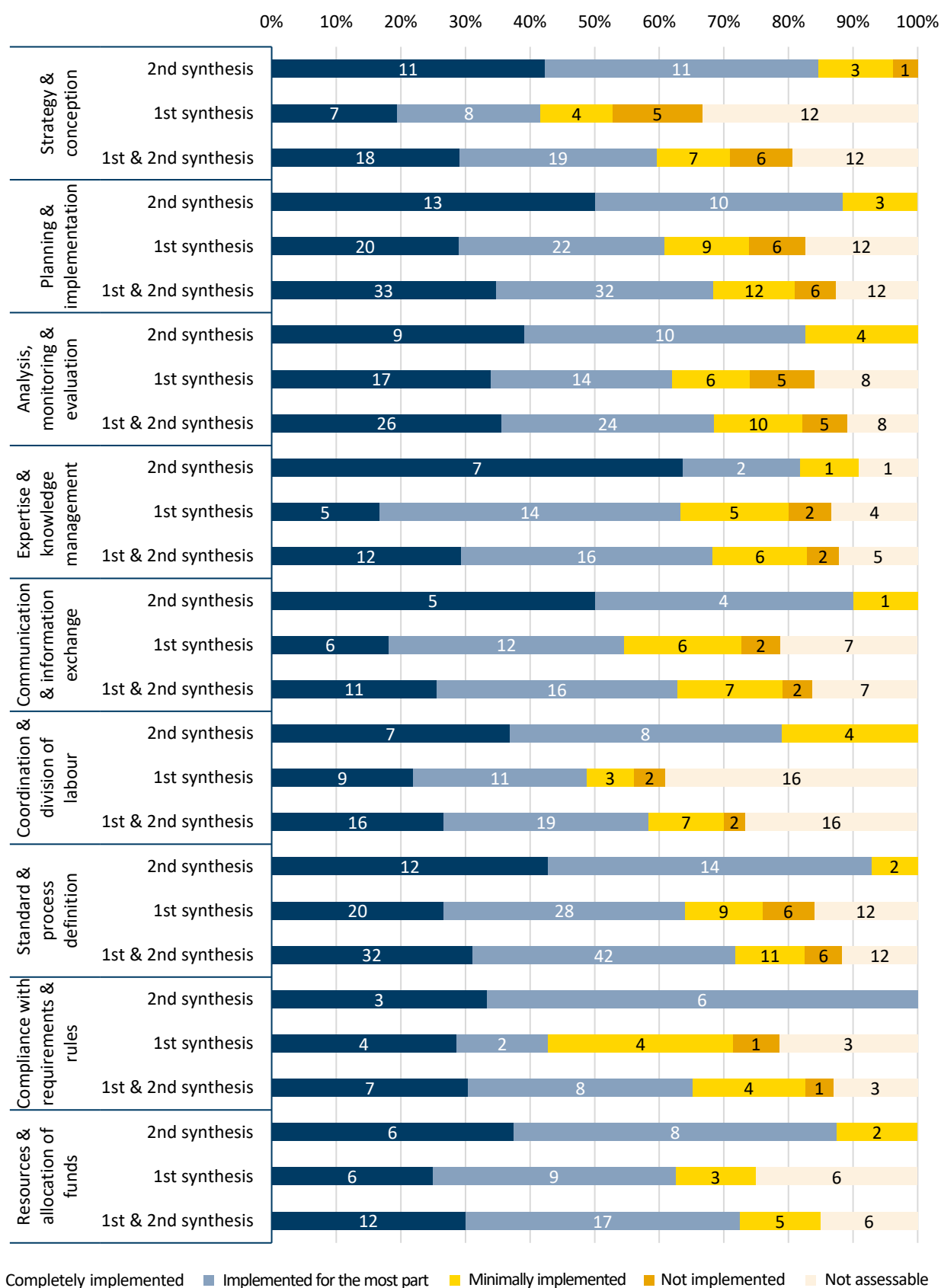


Source: DEval, own visualisation

Figure 13 Assessment of implementation in fields of action measured against the recommendations


* Multiple categorizations possible

Figure 14 Assessment of implementation in fields of action measured against the implementation steps



* Multiple categorizations possible

Source: DEval, own visualisation

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