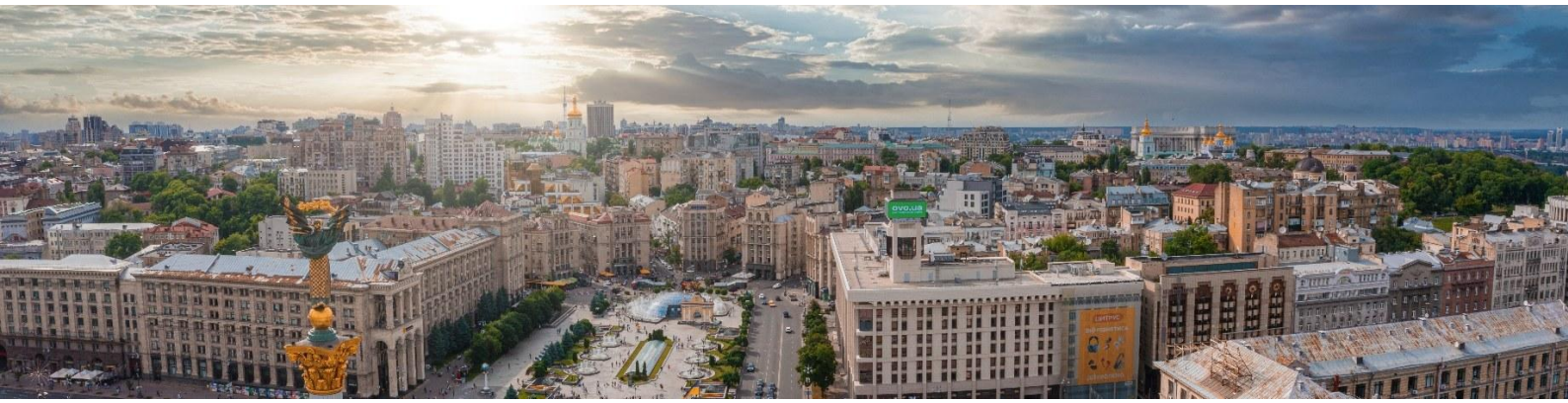


Photo by: Aerial Film Studio, Adobe Stock

Learning for Recovery: Applying new approaches to monitoring, evaluation and learning in Ukraine

Insight in Brief

- Ukraine's recovery brings together a complex network of stakeholders all looking to understand if, and how, their resources are effecting change. Conventional, compliance-focused M&E is not enough for this task.
- Ukraine's national evaluation system is still at an early stage, with M&E focused mainly on reporting and spending control (DEval, 2025).
- Ukraine's recovery calls for MEL that is decision-focused, adaptive, proportionate and owned by Ukrainian institutions, built into recovery from the outset and coordinated with national systems.
- Lasting capacity depends on embedding MEL in institutions and learning processes that survive staff turnover, working alongside ministries, regions, municipalities, civil society and Ukrainian evaluators.

MEL that is decision-focused, adaptive, proportionate and owned by Ukrainian institutions.

Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction is one of the largest and most complex efforts of its kind in recent decades. It brings together national and local government, bilateral and multilateral donors, international financial institutions (IFIs), private investors and civil society. This complex network of stakeholders is looking to understand if, and how, their resources are effecting change.

Conventional, compliance-focused monitoring and evaluation is not enough for this task. Recent research shows that Ukraine's own evaluation system is still at an early stage, even as recovery and EU accession place growing demands on it. Ukraine's recovery calls for monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) that is decision-focused, adaptive, proportionate and owned by Ukrainian institutions. We first outline the current situation in Ukraine and the demands it places on MEL. We then set out the key shifts emerging in how donors approach MEL, and close with the implications for Ukraine's recovery, drawing on Triple Line's experience over more than two decades.

01

Current situation in Ukraine

Several features of Ukraine's current situation shape what effective MEL needs to look like. A recent study by the German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval)[1], produced jointly with Ukrainian evaluators, provides the most detailed picture to date of the country's national evaluation system (DEval, 2025).

Ukraine's national evaluation practice remains at an early stage.

- **A gap between demand and capacity.** The DEval study identifies a central tension. Recovery, reconstruction and EU accession all depend on robust M&E and evidence-based decision making, yet Ukraine's national evaluation practice remains at an early stage. There is no unified legal framework or national evaluation policy, and M&E provisions vary widely between sectors. Where M&E exists, it is mainly quantitative and focused on reporting, compliance and control of spending, rather than integrated into governmental structures and processes, for understanding whether policies work, and learning from the answer. Existing systems largely track whether projects are completed, with few metrics for assessing the wider impact of recovery efforts. Government bodies rarely commission independent evaluations and evidence-based decision making is not integrated into policy making. Importantly, the study finds that though these weaknesses largely pre-date the full-scale invasion the war has constrained progress in these areas.
- **Insecurity, access and data.** Ongoing conflict limits access to some areas and creates risks for data collectors and respondents. MEL needs to combine remote and digital monitoring, third-party monitoring and careful, conflict-sensitive data practices that protect the people involved. Ukraine had relatively well-developed data systems before the invasion, but the war has reduced the availability of public information and made data on its effects harder or impossible to collect.
- **A fast-changing environment.** Needs, priorities and operating conditions can shift quickly. MEL systems therefore need to support adaptation in real time, with rapid learning products linked to key decision points rather than only end-of-programme evaluations, which is currently the main focus.
- **Many actors, many frameworks.** Recovery involves a wide range of donors, lenders and investors working alongside government, and new coordination structures have multiplied. Ukraine's Reforms Matrix brings together more than 200 reforms agreed with international partners and tracks them through over 500 indicators. The Ukraine Facility has introduced a results-based management procedure for monitoring its funds, and joint Rapid Damage and Needs Assessments provide a shared picture of needs. These are valuable foundations. But the DEval study warns that the large number of structures and actors creates real complexity and risks parallel or duplicated processes that stretch national capacity rather than strengthen it.
- **Strong digital transparency infrastructure.** Ukraine has developed notable public systems for transparency and accountability, including the Prozorro e-procurement system and the Digital Restoration Ecosystem for Accountable Management (DREAM) platform for reconstruction projects. These offer real opportunities to link monitoring data with public accountability. However, they mainly capture technical information, such as damaged assets, restoration costs and compensation paid, and registries still cover only part of the

[1]German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval). 2025. *Strengthening Evidence-Based Decision Making in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States: Insights from Ukraine's National Evaluation System*. DEval Discussion Paper 3/2025. https://www.deval.org/fileadmin/Redaktion/PDF/05-Publikationen/Discussion_Paper/2025_03_Ukraine/DEval_Discussion_Paper_3_2025_Evaluation_System_Ukraine_final_barrierefrei.pdf

recorded damage. More detailed, reliable and disaggregated data is needed to prioritise recovery fairly and to understand its results.

- **Local ownership and a growing evaluation community.** Municipalities and local communities play a central role in recovery, and regional policy is among the sectors where M&E is most developed. Civil society organisations have built emerging M&E skills, and Ukraine has a national professional evaluation association (Ukraine Evaluator's Association) that could play a larger role in setting standards and supporting government. At the same time, high staff turnover in the civil service, worsened by the war, makes it hard for learning to become institutionally embedded.
- **EU accession.** Ukraine's path towards EU membership creates growing demand for results frameworks and reporting that align with EU standards. EU annual progress reports have assessed Ukraine's capacity for evidence-based policy making as insufficient, which gives accession a strong role as a driver of change in M&E practice.

02 Policy insight: a changing landscape for MEL

How donors think about MEL has changed significantly.

Underlying this is a change in how donors expect to achieve results. Aid budgets have tightened, and development actors increasingly look to influence wider systemic change, rather than deliver change by funding individual programmes. That means combining programming with diplomacy, security cooperation, technical assistance, partnerships and convening. MEL is changing with it.

Several connected shifts stand out.

Figure 1. Six connected shifts in MEL



- **From stand-alone evaluations to portfolio MEL services.** The UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's (FCDO) Evaluation Strategy 2026–2030[2] is a significant marker of this change. It recognises that sustainable outcomes are rarely delivered by a single programme. Instead, they come from programmes, diplomacy, security and technical support working together over time. The strategy complements, rather than replaces, programme evaluations with portfolio-level MEL. Portfolio-level MEL, including Portfolio MEL (PMEL) arrangements already in place in other war-affected countries looks at how these levers combine, in what order, and with what effect. Because change involves many actors

[2]UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. 2026. *FCDO Evaluation Strategy 2026 to 2030*. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fcdo-evaluation-strategy-2026-to-2030

and long timeframes, the focus moves from attribution to contribution. Rigour still matters, through theory-based methods, triangulation and transparent assessment of the strength of evidence.

Evaluators act as learning partners offering strategic insights, not just independent assessors.

- **From delivering results to understanding systems change.** Perhaps the most fundamental shift concerns the purpose of MEL itself. Donors and major philanthropic foundations increasingly aim to change the systems that hold problems in place: the policies, institutions, resource flows, relationships, power dynamics and norms that shape outcomes over time. Reduced aid budgets reinforce this, as limited funds must lever wider and more lasting change rather than pay for it directly. This changes what MEL is for. The central question is no longer only whether a programme delivered its planned outputs and outcomes, but how the wider system is changing, what contribution an intervention is making, and where to act next. MEL becomes a tool for navigating complexity. It tracks early signals of change, such as new relationships, shifts in practice or changes in who holds influence, alongside conventional indicators. It works with feedback loops, time lags and unintended effects, and helps identify leverage points and decide when to adapt, scale or exit. It also asks whether change will last once external funding ends. This requires methods suited to emergence, such as outcome harvesting, progress markers, contribution analysis and regular sense-making with partners, as well as Triple Line's innovative approach to measuring system change using pivot metrics. The change in MEL's purpose means that evaluators act as learning partners offering strategic insights, not just independent assessors.
- **From retrospective judgement to strategy and foresight.** Evaluation is increasingly expected to inform decision-making. Donors stress starting with scoping the decision and working backwards to the evidence needed to inform it and building evaluative thinking in from the design stage. The FCDO is also moving from a purely programme-by-programme model to one with more central direction, so that evaluation targets strategic priorities and evidence gaps. Some European agencies are going further, framing evaluation services as strategic consultancy and foresight.
- **Proportionate, flexible evidence.** Smaller MEL budgets do not reduce the need to know what is being achieved. Indeed, the FCDO strategy acknowledges that aid cuts often led to MEL being removed from programme budgets and that this reduced oversight. To use available budgets effectively, donors are turning to a wider range of approaches, such as rapid learning reviews, after-action reviews and change stories (what the FCDO calls "small e" evaluation), alongside full evaluations. They increasingly expect evaluators to give clear judgements and recommendations while being open about uncertainty and limitations.
- **From producing evidence to using it.** Most organisations already hold more evidence than they use. Some donors are responding with AI-enabled tools that make large bodies of evaluation evidence searchable. The emphasis is on AI supporting human judgement rather than replacing it, with findings that can be traced back to their sources. Even so, getting evidence into use still depends on making sense of it together and facilitating discussion around real decisions.
- **Whose perspectives count?** There is also more attention to power and participation in MEL: who sets the questions, who interprets the evidence, and whose definition of success is used. This connects closely to the localisation agenda and to working alongside national partners.

Each of these shifts speaks directly to the Ukrainian context described above: a multi-actor, fast-changing recovery in which programming, diplomacy and investment are tightly connected.

03

Implications

A systems lens is particularly important.

Recovery is not only about rebuilding physical assets.

Recovery is not only about rebuilding physical assets. It is about whether the systems that people depend on, such as energy, housing, health, local governance and public procurement, emerge more resilient, inclusive and accountable than before. MEL can help track these deeper changes: for example, whether municipal planning and procurement practices are improving, whether citizens have more voice in recovery decisions, and whether reforms are taking root and building resilience, not just how many buildings have been restored.

Taken together, these shifts and our experience point to a practical agenda for MEL in Ukraine's recovery. This includes portfolio-level MEL for recovery programmes and multi-donor initiatives, showing how investments, technical assistance and policy dialogue combine to produce results. It includes building evaluative thinking into programme and investment design, so that the evidence needed for key decisions is planned from the start. It includes rapid, proportionate learning products, such as learning reviews and change stories, timed to strategic moments. And it includes conflict-sensitive remote and third-party monitoring where access is limited.

These approaches also match what Ukraine itself needs. The DEval study concludes that national M&E structures should be built into recovery from the outset, under national ownership, so that external support is driven by data, continuous learning and adaptive management. That means moving from compliance-focused monitoring towards learning-oriented evaluation within government and coordinating donor M&E with national systems rather than creating parallel ones. It also suggests that evaluation can be presented as a way to build public trust in state institutions and the legitimacy of recovery, not only as a donor requirement. Recent donor commitments, such as the FCDO's pledges to co-create evaluation questions, join multi-donor learning partnerships and pursue analytical collaboration with partner governments, create a clear opening to do this.

Just as important is strengthening Ukrainian capacity in ways that last. Short training courses alone are unlikely to change practice unless they are embedded in institutional frameworks and learning processes that survive staff turnover. Working alongside ministries, regions, municipalities, civil society and Ukrainian evaluators, including the national evaluation association, helps to ensure that MEL systems are locally owned and will outlast external support. Facilitated sense-making, supported where appropriate by responsible use of AI for evidence synthesis, can help decisionmakers draw on the large body of evidence that recovery is already generating.

Ukraine's recovery will be judged not only by what is rebuilt but by how well resources are used. MEL that is decision-focused, adaptive and locally owned can help to ensure that reconstruction builds back better and strengthens Ukrainian institutions rather than bypassing them. Triple Line brings the experience and the approaches to support this, and we welcome the opportunity to work with Ukrainian and international partners on this shared agenda.

Triple Line's Proposition

For more than two decades, Triple Line has designed and delivered learning-focused monitoring, evaluation and learning services that hold accountability and learning together.

Our work has covered evaluations of 60 funds and complex multi-partner programmes with a combined value of over EUR 1 billion, spanning challenge funds, programme portfolios and large collaborative initiatives across many sectors, geographies and delivery models. Across this work, we ask not only whether results were achieved but what works, for whom and why. We produce evidence that arrives in time to shape strategic and programmatic decisions, rather than lessons that come too late to use. This combination of portfolio-level evaluation and strategic advisory experience reflects where the sector is now heading: towards understanding how different investments and actors together contribute to change.

In practice, our approach rests on a few principles. We start with the decisions that evidence needs to inform. We design MEL in proportion to the budget and the need. Where attribution is not possible, we use theory-based and contribution-focused methods, with transparent assessment of the strength of evidence. We use participatory methods to ensure that diverse voices are heard. We combine full evaluations with lighter-touch learning reviews and change stories. We support evidence use through facilitated sense-making with the people making decisions. We involve partners in shaping the questions and interpreting the findings.

To deliver our work in Europe we are pleased to have developed a strategic partnership with the team at UA Direct (Home page - ua-direct). Together we combine sectoral expertise with deep local knowledge of Ukraine. As part of the partnership, UA Direct Managing Partner Oleksiy Starodubov has joined Triple Line as Principal Advisor. Together, we look forward to developing practical programmes, partnerships and investment opportunities that contribute to Ukraine's recovery and long-term economic development.

For further analysis of the needs and challenges of Ukraine's recovery journey please see here.

TRIPLELINE