

Expert Group for Aid Studies

EBA working methods

This document addresses *how* the Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA) works. It describes how studies are initiated, how priorities between different studies are set, the parameters for how work on studies should be carried out and quality-assured, and how follow-up of activities should be conducted. EBA has also adopted an operational strategy that describes the EBA's remit and the issues with which it works. EBA uses 'studies' as an umbrella term for projects that are to result in a report of some kind to EBA.

Initiation of studies

Suggestions for studies can come from many different sources. Proposals may naturally come from EBA members or secretariat staff, but EBA encourages proposals from other sources, including everyone from potential authors and independent experts to the Government Offices or other actors in the area of aid.

Setting priorities

Proposed issues to be addressed by studies are placed on a list that is regularly discussed at meetings of the expert group. The expert group determines which issues the secretariat should focus on and also provides suggestions for specific studies that could help illuminate the issue. The list of proposals forms the basis of the ongoing work between meetings of the expert group. However, the order in which studies are carried out, and whether they are actually carried out, will in practice not only be guided by the order of priority and resources available, but will also depend on the availability of researchers/experts to carry out studies. Experience from similar working groups indicates that the availability of well-informed authors is often the determining factor when it comes to which studies can actually be carried out. Public advertisements are one way to try to find suitable authors for specific studies.

Project proposals

In order for the expert group to decide whether a particular study should be carried out, a project proposal is prepared. Ideally this will be done by a potential author, but it may also initially be done by the secretariat, possibly in cooperation with a member of the expert group. The project proposal should include information concerning which issues the study is intended to address and its relevance to EBA's overall remit. It should also contain information about the current state of knowledge, the method that will be used and the type of conclusions the study may lead to. It should also be stated who will carry out the study and whether it should be advertised. The expert group has produced the document 'Guidelines for project proposals', which is intended for external authors and which describes what a project proposal should contain.

Decisions on studies

Ahead of a decision on a project proposal, the secretariat prepares background material in which the study is classified according to criteria provided in EBA's operational strategy. Other information provided includes the reason for the study, the type of study, the target group, the background of the authors, and a timetable and cost for the study. If the project proposal comes from an author or a group of authors, the expert group decides whether the author/authors should be commissioned to carry out the study on the basis of this background material and the actual project proposal. The expert group may request revisions of the project proposal or its costs as a condition for a decision in favour of carrying out the study. If the project proposal comes from the secretariat or a member of the group, the expert group will determine whether the secretariat should try to find one or more authors who can carry out the study, whether it should be advertised or whether the project should be revised or discontinued. In the next stage, the selected author(s) draft a project proposal that will be submitted to the expert group for a decision.

Implementation of studies

EBA will mainly engage external authors who have researched or otherwise acquired knowledge on a specific issue. As far as possible, the reports produced are expected to include policy recommendations. Normally, the expert group does not take a position on these. The expert group determines the subject of the report, subjects it to quality control and decides whether it will be published in the EBA report series, but does not take a position on the content or recommendations. This arrangement means that published reports are normally characterised by the same *dual independence* that has long applied for the Expert Group on Public Economics; the expert group selects which studies will be published and the authors themselves then determine the content of the reports. However, exceptions to this general rule may occur. If the expert group considers that it may be useful to make a statement, it can assess and take a position on the material in order to make recommendations. In addition, the EBA secretariat itself may, to a lesser extent, carry out studies. In such cases, EBA is solely responsible for the analysis and conclusions. A member of the expert group may also write a report, but is then solely responsible for the report in the same way as external authors.

For each study, a reference group will be set up consisting of people with the relevant expertise for the study that is to be carried out. The aim of the reference group is to provide support to the authors and so increase the quality of the reports. The reference group is chaired by a member of the expert group. This member is responsible for monitoring the work on the report and should give recommendations as to whether the report should be published. The expert group decides on the chair of the reference group. The chair of the reference group appoints the reference group following consultation with the author.

Communications

The expert group is to be as transparent as possible. For this reason, minutes are to be kept of the expert group's meetings and are to be published on the EBA website. EBA is also to submit an annual report to the Government summarising the content and conclusions of the studies published the previous year. This report is to be published.

It is important that the expert group's work has an impact on policy and debate. Experiences from similar expert groups show that the effect on policy often occurs via public debate and not infrequently after quite some time. EBA should therefore actively work to disseminate the results of the studies carried out and otherwise contribute to the debate on aid issues.

Members of the expert group and the secretariat also make targeted presentations to relevant decision-makers.

Follow-up of projects

Following a completed, published and communicated study, the secretariat follows up the results of the activity in light of the criteria that served as the basis for carrying out the study and the impact the study has had in the media and on policy. The follow-up is presented to the expert group and constitutes important data for EBA's activities.