

1 Executive Summary

The Board of the European Centre for Development Policy Management, ECDPM, contracted Scanteam to undertake a final evaluation of the five-year programme 2022-2026. Below are the key findings.

Introduction and Methodology

The ECDPM, a “think and do tank”, developed its strategy 2022-2026 in light of the rapid changes taking place in the world, noted as *Challenges* and *Opportunities*. The Strategy is based on ECDPM’s history working with and on the EU system and its relations with Africa, but in light of the changes in the world, it opens up and restructures its focus. It retains its focus on and relations with its institutional partners, where the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs plays a particular role.

The Centre simplified its cluster and workstream structure, reducing staff *size* due to budget constraints while changing staff *composition*, improving gender balance, recruiting more African researchers, and accessing more skills in growing workstream areas with Associates and Fellows.

The evaluation applied a mixed methods approach of document review; interviews with key actors; workshops with ECDPM staff; and participation at ECDPM hosted events. Documenting ECDPM results at Outcome level is challenging since much advisory/brokerage work is not public so the team relied on responses from interviews, group discussions, direct reporting, case examples to gauge satisfaction levels by relevant stakeholder groups to ECDPM work (see Annex B, *Methodology*).

Bottom line: Triangulating the different information sources and using different tools provided very similar answers to performance questions, reassuring the team that findings appear robust.

Relevance

ECDPM has developed further its core competency on the EU, EU policy priorities and the instruments it developed in pursuit of its geostrategic agenda: Neighbourhood, Development, International Cooperation Instrument, NDICI/Global Europe; the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus, EFSD+; Global Gateway. As the EU prepared its 2028-2034 Multiannual Financial Framework, MFF, ECDPM presented early analyses of likely operational consequences.

It was among the first to assess consequences of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and later the US’ decision to disband USAID. As donor commitments to the SDGs and international cooperation development weaken as political priorities change, workstreams adjusted their workplans while working to ensure actors realise the importance of values-based priorities for longer-term partnerships and development.

Bottom line: ECDPM *Relevance* is *High to Very High* as workstreams quickly adapted to changes to their environment yet worked to maintain a focus on long-term values-based relations and objectives.

Added Value

ECDPM is widely recognised as an expert milieu on EU development and partnership policies, providing analyses for decisionmakers and advice on how actors, in particular in Africa, can access EU instruments. Workstreams provided value-added on issues that matter to clients/partners while ensuring coherence with ECDPM’s strategy. ECDPM has also expanded its work beyond Europe-Africa relations on issues like climate change and digital, building relations in Asia and Latin America on issues where it can provide value-added on understanding of issues and policy options.

Bottom line: As a mid-size think tank, ECDPM’s added-value is *Very High* as its focus on identifying solutions in an increasingly contested and unpredictable world is of growing importance.

Effectiveness and Coherence

ECDPM produced its *Strategy 2022-2026* based on a careful analysis of the changing global environment. Annual workplans were linked to the Strategy with workstreams identifying annual “Key activities”

where cross-workstream, cross-thematic work was encouraged, where a 2023 staff survey showed 60% believed such collaboration was well coordinated. *Coherence* is *improving* due to strong commitment by staff to ECDPM's objectives and ethos, with a corporate culture that encourages staff to work together. The annual workplan exercise is also to filter out what the workstream should *not* take on, such as projects that are not aligned with the strategy – important for ensuring overall coherence.

ECDPM developed a performance monitoring system with annual Balanced Scorecard reports on ten key indicators, where the gender dimension is the most elaborate. Own assessments by all workstreams early spring 2025 provided reflections on own and Centre performance and dynamics, with an overall positive view confirmed in interviews with staff and management. The Centre can also document positive feedback on its deliverables with ECDPM continuously invited to high-level policy briefings, confidential/closed door hearings and dialogue meetings with EU, Member States and to regional bodies in both Europe and Africa, receiving positive feedback on such events.

Looking ahead, ECDPM will be facing an EU that has to manoeuvre in an increasingly complex world and where the Centre will as a result also have to make difficult choices that may pose dilemmas for its own effectiveness and coherence,

Bottom line: *Coherence* around the 2022-2026 strategy is *Good and Improving* while *Effectiveness* is considered *Good to Very Good* by key users such as institutional partners and events participants but may be challenged as ECDPM has to negotiate an increasingly complex and competitive world.

Outcomes and Impact

The ToR asks the team to look at five aspects of the Outcomes and Impact dimension:

Coherence and Purposefulness versus Outcomes and Impact: Good, but challenging to document

As noted above, coherence and effectiveness are seen as good and improving. Yet methodologically it is not possible to assess *the extent* to which an increase in purposefulness and coherence due to the Strategy has led to better Outcome and Impact.

Knowledge Co-Production: Very Good

ECDPM has continued to develop its relations with African partners, African voices becoming more prominent as reflected in an increasing number of co-produced studies, co-hosted events and more co-created projects. While funding asymmetry still exists, more African think-tanks are mobilising own funding, establishing own networks and thus enter partnerships with ECDPM on a more equal footing.

Prospects for ECDPM's Future Work at EU Level: Excellent

ECDPM is a trusted partner across the EU system: Whether an ECDPM study is critical or supportive of what the EU does or intends to do, the EU recognizes that it will represent an independent view, evidence-based, constructive and basically non-partisan. An interesting aspect is that ECDPM provides an institutional memory that many EU and MS units do not have, providing training and awareness raising on EU policies, instruments and history to a wide range of EU system stakeholders.

Sustainability of Results: Good

ECDPM's publicly available reports are *sustainable* since they are published on the website but fade as policy relevance declines where ECDPM advice is topical. But ECDPM's capacity to produce good deliverables – methodological knowledge, networks, trust, corporate culture – is sustainable as it is encouraged, managed and developed internally, contingent on sufficient funding going forward.

Contributions to the Five Impact Areas: Very Good

ECDPM has overall been highly successful in its role as an influential think tank and broker of knowledge and dialogue across all five impact areas, but in particular when it comes to the area of *EU and Africa in the World* and *Prosperous, Inclusive, Resilient and Sustainable African Economies*. In the emergent field of *Green Transition and Effective Climate Action* it is beginning to set its mark, and in

the last two areas, where current politics are creating headwinds, ECDPM still succeeds to contribute constructive proposals that are being listened to and seen as pointing towards future solutions.

Results – Bottom Line

ECDPM, especially considering its limited staff and funding, has been a highly influential and successful centre that provides implementable proposals in line with its own *Strategy 2022-2026*. This is happening at a time when Europe’s voice on the global stage is weakening, yet ECDPM provides a model for making a values-based EU approach to international relations practical, implementable and appreciated across regions and classes of actors – it acts as a *soft power* multiplier.

Overall Assessment: While facing important challenges for fully implementing its Vision and Mission, it is the team’s opinion that ECDPM focuses on core challenges that not only are of relevance to the EU and ECDPM’s other partners, but provides important analytical, bridge-building, consensus-shaping and forward-looking insights, and hence delivers *excellent value for money*.

Looking Ahead

Lessons Learned and Challenges

Lessons include the centrality of context and politics, the importance of "how" to implement, and that brokering consensus is a unique value-added. ECDPM’s political economy approach and its partnerships are core strengths while visibility is increasingly important.

Challenges include an unpredictable world, human skills and funding limits, need for better results reporting, with the key challenge being managing trade-offs between ambitions and available resources.

Future Possibilities

New Strategy: Based on lessons from the current strategy, present the increasingly complex challenges and options, introduce a client feedback system for real-time monitoring of performance, satisfaction.

Integrated Workplans: Have annual workstream reviews lead to workplans based on assessments of previous year’s achievements, identify key interventions to be pursued, and use these as inputs to Centre workplans and annual reports, streamlining planning and results tracking exercises.

ECDPM in a Changing World: The EU will face greater internal and external challenges meaning less focus on ECDPM’s traditional areas of concern and more on EU’s Neighbourhood. How ECDPM adapts to this will influence its future relevance but can in part be handled through becoming a “centre of Neighbourhood centres” with continued expansion of its Associates and Fellows approach.

Institutional Partnerships: These remain critical, and ECDPM’s focus on ensuring that these continue, preferably with at least the same level of support, will remain a priority for management going forward.

Research Partnerships: Building on the ETTC and African partnership experiences, develop further its network of researchers, audiences and funding partners where “flagship events” for more visibility and higher-level attention may be worth exploring, and where a Neighbourhood focus could be useful.

Research and Consultancy Financing: ECDPM’s experience with research consortia and partnering on evaluations is a mixed bag, but in particular EU strategic evaluations may be interesting avenues for relevant skills development (evaluation methodologies) and revenue generating workstreams.

Bottom line: *Financing* will be the ultimate binding constraint for ECDPM. With increased and more predictable funding, some of the painful trade-offs that the organisation must make today may become less critical. While it is recognised that marketing specific ECDPM capacities and services are best done by those who will be responsible for delivering them, a well-planned but comprehensive review of the opportunities space for future funding may turn out to be a worthwhile investment.