

METHODOLOGY

The following are some of the main highlights of and rationale for the approach used, the main sources of data, and the strategies for analyzing the evidence and reaching evaluative conclusions. Further details about important aspects of the methodology are included in several of the Appendices of this report.

WHAT IS A RETROSPECTIVE IMPACT EVALUATION?

The term “impact evaluation” is used across different sectors and organizations with slightly different definitions (see Rogers and Peersman quote¹), so it is important to clarify how we are using the term here.

First, we take the broadest definition of impact evaluation as *an evaluation that evaluates impact*. We do not narrowly limit this to any specific methodology (such as RCTs). However, good impact evaluation must include causal inference.

What are “impacts”? Essentially, they are synonymous with “outcomes,” which are changes that happen to (or are prevented from happening to) people, communities, organizations, and the environment and that are caused, influenced, or catalyzed by whatever is being evaluated.

In the international development sector, “outcomes” typically refer to short- to medium-term effects, while “impacts” refer to longer-term effects. In Save the Children, “outcomes” refer to the effects that occur within the timeframe of the program, while “impacts” refer to changes that are evident after Save the Children has transitioned out of the area.

A “retrospective” impact evaluation, also known as an “ex post” impact evaluation, is one that is conducted entirely *after* the program or intervention is completed.

Save the Children’s definition is as follows: “A retrospective impact evaluation (RIE) is an ex post evaluation of an evaluand to assess its value, worth, and merit, with a special focus on examining the sustainability of intended results as well as unintended impacts.”²

“The broadest view of impact evaluation is any evaluation which evaluates impact – even if it is not labelled as an impact evaluation, and has elements of other types of evaluation as well, such as needs assessment, and process evaluation. ... A slightly narrower definition is anything which is primarily focused on evaluating impact and which is labelled as an impact evaluation. Even narrower is to only include evaluations which have used counterfactual approaches to causal attribution, or only randomised controlled trials (RCTs).”

– [Rogers & Peersman \(2015\), BetterEvaluation.org](https://www.betterevaluation.org)

¹ Rogers, P. J., & Peersman, G. (2015). Impact evaluation: Challenges to address. BetterEvaluation. https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/blog/impact_evaluation_1

² Source: <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/retrospective-impact-evaluation-scoping-guide>