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# Evidence-informed policymaking: A pathway to increasing trust in democratic institutions and boosting competitiveness

JRC Reflection paper

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# Evidence-informed Policymaking: A pathway to increasing trust in democratic institutions and boosting competitiveness

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## **Project description**

### **'Building capacity for evidence-informed policymaking in governance and public administration in a post-pandemic Europe'**

This multi-country project was funded by the European Commission's Technical Support Instrument (TSI) from the Reform and Investment Task Force (SG REFORM). The project was jointly implemented by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

The general objective of this project was to support Greece, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and the Netherlands in their ongoing reforms towards a) improved capacity for evidence-informed policymaking in governance and public administration; b) increased awareness, recognition and understanding at the political level, and in the scientific communities, of the actions and investments that are required for science and evidence to be able to fully contribute to well-informed policymaking.

To support the countries, JRC and OECD organised and produced national kick-off meetings, an inception report, national diagnostic reports, national needs and gaps assessment reports, and finally, country roadmap reports with recommendations for strengthening of evidence-informed policymaking in governance and public administration. The country specific recommendations in the roadmaps are the result of extensive analysis and a series of interviews with key individuals within the national EIPM ecosystems. The recommendations were subsequently tested in reflective workshops with a select and diverse group of individuals working across the ecosystem.

In addition, JRC and OECD organised international Capacity-building Workshops for scientists, policymakers and knowledge brokers, and Mutual Learning Exercises on Foresight, Policy Evaluation and Artificial Intelligence.

All country roadmaps were presented during national closing events. It is expected that the countries, having been closely involved in the implementation of the project and consulted at all major stages, take the necessary follow-up actions on final outputs through their internal mechanisms.

## **Abstract**

The project 'Building capacity for evidence-informed policymaking in governance and public administration in a post-pandemic Europe' was inspired by the need of Member States to respond to complex policy issues requiring specialised knowledge, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic led to a widespread recognition in governments that the use of evidence in advising policy is vital but has not been as effective as necessary. Meanwhile political agendas have shifted in the past two years towards geopolitical threats, competitiveness, misinformation and democratic upheaval. Societal challenges are huge, while trust in national governments has declined in many countries over recent years. This erosion of trust leads to a decreased ability to deal with these problems in a publicly supported way. Evidence Informed Policymaking (EIPM) is not a silver bullet, but it appears to have significant potential as a key driver. It improves the ability of governments to solve problems directly, by supporting better design and implementation of policies. EIPM also can increase trust more indirectly, as citizens strongly support the use of science in policymaking, and that translates into increased trust in institutions that use evidence.

Ensuring effective uptake of evidence in the policy process can only be achieved if two conditions are met. A technical one: the ability to provide the best available relevant evidence to the decision-maker at the right time in the right format; and a political one: willingness to seriously consider, ask for and use evidence in policymaking and public communication. The EIPM project has delivered seven national roadmaps with a range of recommendations to strengthen both conditions, by focusing on technical aspects such as the need to strengthen EIPM skills of individual scientists, policymakers and knowledge brokers, as well as on the need for a supportive 'tone at the top', to create a culture in which evidence is actively requested and used, even if it challenges prevailing assumptions. This project provides lessons that are helpful for the continuation of this mission. These are presented in this publication, followed by a future agenda for evidence-informed policymaking.

## 1. Evidence-informed policymaking is needed more than ever<sup>1</sup>

The project 'Building capacity for evidence-informed policymaking in governance and public administration in a post-pandemic Europe' was inspired by the need of Member States to respond to complex policy issues requiring specialised knowledge.<sup>2</sup> Concretely, the project was triggered by a global pandemic during which science played a central role. The pandemic led to a widespread recognition in governments that the use of evidence in advising policy is vital but has not been as effective as necessary. Moreover, it led to the recognition that the system was incapable to self-organise to meet this goal, due to a lack of the required skills and institutional support.

At the European level, the need for evidence-informed policymaking (EIPM) was underlined by the Commission Staff Working Document 'Supporting and connecting policymaking in the Member States with scientific research'<sup>3</sup> published in October 2022 and a series of political declarations. These declarations include the COMPET Council Conclusion in December 2023, that asked for a strengthening of the role and impact of research and innovation in public policymaking in the European Union.<sup>4</sup> The Ghent Declaration, signed by EU Public Administration ministers on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February 2024, explicitly acknowledges the importance of using evidence in making and evaluating policy decisions.<sup>5</sup> The declaration calls for strengthening exchanges between policy makers, scientists and knowledge brokers, providing accessible data and analysing the possibilities of a framework that embodies policy preparation and evaluation.

Meanwhile political agendas have shifted in the past two years towards geopolitical threats, competitiveness, misinformation and democratic upheaval, issues for which the contribution of science may appear less evident. However, equally for these issues, science is essential to separate fact from fiction in accurately describing the problem, assessing the impact of potential solutions and evaluating the outcomes. This common ground is the unappreciated bedrock of democracy that has been exposed by the epistemic crisis and attacks on science of recent years.

The new political guidelines of the European Commission, the Draghi and Letta reports also demonstrate the need for a shift towards increasing Europe's competitiveness. Countries are facing significant fiscal challenges, as public finances were stretched during the pandemic and there is a need to address new priorities, for example in defence and the green transition. To that end, simplification of licencing procedures, reduction of administrative burdens for enterprises and investors and well-planned incentives attracting foreign direct investment can be supported through evidence-informed policy. Concretely, scientific evidence and proper analysis of data can contribute to better regulation. Impact assessments help to foresee and avoid administrative burdens, enhance

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<sup>1</sup> The JRC would like to thank Athina Manta (SG REFORM) for her comments on an earlier version of this text. The responsibility for opinions expressed in the paper rests solely with the JRC.

<sup>2</sup> This is a JRC Reflection paper prepared for the final event of the EU TSI project 'Building capacity for evidence-informed policymaking in governance and public administration in a post-pandemic Europe'. All publications of this project can be found here: [https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/news/tsi-capacity-building-eipm-read-project-reports\\_en](https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/news/tsi-capacity-building-eipm-read-project-reports_en)

<sup>3</sup> [Staff Working Document - Supporting and connecting policymaking in the Member States with scientific research | Knowledge for policy.](#)

<sup>4</sup> The full text of the COMPET Council Conclusions of 8 December 2023 can be found at this link: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-16450-2023-INIT/en/pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Ghent Declaration [SKM\\_C250i24022717100](#).

policy implementation, and compliance by citizens and companies. Quality evidence and evaluation is needed for effective spending and to preserve the long-term competitiveness of economies.

Reliable data provide a basis for sound public policies by national administration. They are also critical for input from the Member States for the Economic Governance Framework<sup>6</sup>, in particular for the sound design and implementation of the Medium-Term Fiscal Plans of the Member States, the European Semester<sup>7</sup>, and the Rule of Law exercise<sup>8</sup> assessing the efficiency of the national judicial systems. Finally, evidence-informed economic analysis will better equip the Member States for the negotiations in the new Multi-annual Financial Framework.<sup>9</sup>

Societal challenges are huge, while trust in national governments has declined in many countries over recent years.<sup>10</sup> This erosion of trust leads to a decreased ability to deal with these problems in a publicly supported way, often resulting in new governments reversing policies of their predecessors, with a risk of stagnation and inaction on the most pressing challenges. There is also a linked crisis of trust in information and belief in a shared reality.<sup>11</sup> Citizens' access to reliable information is being jeopardised by the spread of misinformation and disinformation, designed deliberately to erode trust in the informational environment and democratic institutions. This can lead to further erosion of trust in institutions, governments, and the media, and have negative consequences for society, including increased radicalism and polarisation.

The signals of declining trust and growing dissatisfaction with national governments provide reason for great concern. Lack of trust in government has real impact on the economy and society. Trust enables governments to get things done by reducing transaction costs, nurturing political participation and easing compliance with policies once implemented. Furthermore, trust in democratic institutions helps protect citizens against dis- and misinformation as it decreases the belief in negative narratives about them and increases the receptiveness for messages by democratic institutions themselves.

The root causes of low-level trust in democratic institutions are complex. EIPM is not a silver bullet, but it appears to have significant potential as a key driver. It improves the ability of governments to solve problems directly, by supporting better design and implementation of policies. EIPM also can increase trust more indirectly, as citizens strongly support the use of science in policymaking<sup>12</sup>, and that translates into increased trust in institutions that use evidence. The perceived capacity of governments to take decisions based on evidence appears as the second most powerful driver of trust in national governments.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> [New economic governance framework - European Commission.](#)

<sup>7</sup> [The European Semester.](#)

<sup>8</sup> [2024 Rule of law report - Communication and country chapters - European Commission.](#)

<sup>9</sup> [NEW EUROPEAN BAUHAUS - The road to the next multiannual financial framework.](#)

<sup>10</sup> OECD 2024 OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions. 44 percent of citizens have low or no trust in the national government, compared with 39 percent with high or moderate trust. The 2024 results mark a general erosion compared to the 2021 results.

<sup>11</sup> OECD 2024 Facts not Fakes; Lewandowsky et al. 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Relevant findings from the Eurobarometer survey <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2237>, p.9

<sup>13</sup> OECD 2024 OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions, p. 36.

Strong science-for-policy ecosystems are not a goal in themselves, and science is just one input for policymaking and by definition has a degree of uncertainty. However, science-for-policy ecosystems are part of the checks and balances that safeguard the functioning of our democratic societies. Hence, in the context of eroding trust, investing in the capacity and resilience of science-for-policy ecosystems is essential to guarantee that they continue to operate even when faced with challenging political conditions.

Decreasing trust in societies commonly leads to people becoming more entrenched, with a risk of greater focus on extreme views and identity politics. This, in turn, usually decreases the demand for evidence and reduces the willingness of everyone, including politicians and citizens, to engaging and listening to information that contradicts their views. Investments into the science-for-policy ecosystem should therefore not be limited to classic goals such as ensuring mobilisation of evidence when needed. They should also focus on new objectives, such as fostering and understanding citizen engagement by listening to citizens and acquiring knowledge of their perspectives and values as part of the evidence gathering work package.

Ensuring effective uptake of evidence in the policy process can only be achieved if two conditions are met. A technical one: the ability to provide the best available relevant evidence to the decision-maker at the right time in the right format; and a political one: willingness to seriously consider, ask for and use evidence in policymaking and public communication. The EIPM project has delivered seven national roadmaps with a range of recommendations to strengthen both conditions, by focusing on technical aspects such as the need to strengthen EIPM skills of individual scientists, policymakers and knowledge brokers, as well as on the need for a supportive 'tone at the top', to create a culture in which evidence is actively requested and used, even if it challenges prevailing assumptions. This project provides lessons that are helpful for the continuation of this mission. These are presented in the next section, followed by a future agenda for evidence-informed policymaking.

## 2. Key lessons of the project

A key feature of this EIPM project was the combination of extensive analysis at the national level, with a multi-country set-up. This provided the opportunity to design recommendations in such a way that they can be successfully adopted by the individual Member States, as well as to draw more general lessons that are helpful for all countries that share the goal of improving their science-for-policy ecosystem. From the start, the significant diversity among participating Member States was noticeable. There is no singular, standardised model for EIPM. What works depends on the fit with the national culture and governmental system. Nevertheless, the project did provide key lessons that are presented in this section.

### *Providing a shared language*

Language and terminology matter, especially if you want to join forces to reach a shared goal: improving the national EIPM capacity in public administration in European Member States. This EIPM project has not only brought together a large number of actors, such as ministries, agencies, advisory councils and research organisations, but provided them with common terminology and an analytical framework. That was instrumental to come to a shared analysis of the main needs and gaps and will facilitate a joint effort for the implementation of the roadmaps. Using a common vocabulary enhances the potential for mutual learning and impact.

### *The ecosystem approach widens and connects*

This EIPM project used an ecosystem approach to analyse the science-for-policy practices in the seven participating Member States. EIPM cannot be secured only through individual skill or function, it requires a whole ecosystem to function properly, bringing together both supply and demand for evidence through processes and institutions. It also requires promoting a culture facilitating openness and curiosity with the capacity to ask the right questions.

The science-for-policy ecosystem is defined as ‘a complex of organisational structures and entities, processes, and networks that interact to support the mobilisation, acquisition, synthesis, translation, presentation for use, and application of scientific knowledge in policymaking processes.’<sup>14</sup> The approach is systemic, in the sense that it involves all relevant actors and their functions, a thorough study of the different layers and interactions among different parts of the system, and a process that specifies the rules or ‘paths’ in these linkages. The ecosystem approach acknowledges the diversity among countries, and does not imply that there is, or should be, a singular, standardised solution. While formal mechanisms should be in place to ensure reliable and transparent processes, they can be supplemented by informal mechanisms, which may be particularly useful in smaller countries where individual networks may facilitate interaction. An ecosystem approach helps to understand how formal and informal channels can be mutually reinforcing.

The ecosystem approach also helps to widen the view on EIPM practices. It not only includes what is usually referred to as the demand side (government, public administration, parliament) and the supply side (scientific institutions, other expert organisations). It also includes what is referred to as knowledge brokerage: everything happening in between these two functions. For some, knowledge

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<sup>14</sup> Krieger et al. forthcoming.

brokers form a more elusive category, because not all countries have people and/or organisations that identify as such. This term is used to refer to people or organisations that see themselves primarily as boundary workers and organisations, who bring the worlds of science and policy together. Knowledge brokers can perform different functions, such as disseminating, translating, synthesising and communicating research for policy, articulating and managing requests for evidence and facilitating access to research.

The primary focus of knowledge brokering is connecting knowledge with policy. That does not mean that the role of knowledge broker cannot be combined with the role of knowledge producer or knowledge user. The function of knowledge broker corresponds either to the role of a specific individual working at the evidence-to-policy interface, or to institutions as a whole. People that perform this role can work in dedicated knowledge broker organisations, but also within government, for example as science adviser, within a governmental analytical unit or within academia or scientific research institutes. The EIPM project underlines the vital role these people and organisations play to connect all parts of the ecosystem. Several roadmaps contain recommendations to expand knowledge brokering activities. Greece, for example, is recommended to establish additional analytical units inside government and Lithuania to explore synergies between different potential knowledge brokers organisations.<sup>15</sup>

A second way the approach brings a new perspective is that it views science for policy not as a simple linear process, that happens at a fixed moment in the policy cycle and where policy asks and science answers. EIPM requires more than demand-driven knowledge input. Evidence can also be an inspiration for new policies and have an agenda-setting function<sup>16</sup> or be brought into an ongoing policy discussion that has become static and needs new conceptual perspectives. Ideally, evidence is available or can be produced in the early stage of policy design, so it can serve as a basis for a problem definition that incorporates both a range of evidence and of values, and can be used for ex ante impact assessment. Therefore, it is important that the ecosystem can produce and uses different types of evidence, including for example foresight, policy evaluations, data and statistics and practitioners' knowledge.

The EIPM project analysed the countries' science-for-policy ecosystems using a four-layered approach: the individual level, the organisational level, the inter-organisational and the systems level. A healthy EIPM ecosystem requires individuals that advocate for, are motivated to, knowledgeable about and skilled for generating mobilising, requesting, synthesising, translating, presenting, absorbing, and using such expertise and knowledge for policy. A healthy ecosystem also requires that these individuals are supported through structures, processes, norms, networks and policies at the organisational, inter-organisational and systems level.<sup>17</sup> The project was able to show how many challenges appearing at one level are often intertwined with challenges at another level. Therefore, the roadmaps have identified the need for a strategic approach that addresses the ecosystem as a whole, when looking for ways to improve it. Quick fixes that focus on just one level can be a waste of investment, if no incentives are created on other levels. For example, strengthening the government's

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<sup>15</sup> The Greek country report: <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC141465> ; the Lithuanian country report: <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC141125>

<sup>16</sup> Given that science and technology are the source of new policy problems and solutions and therefore scientists are usually the first to hear of them.

<sup>17</sup> Krieger et al. forthcoming: 7.

capacity to formulate cross-ministerial knowledge needs, should go hand in hand with ensuring capacity for producing multidisciplinary evidence.

The ecosystem approach also provided legitimacy for a broad range of stakeholders to join the discussion on the current state and the future of their national science-for-policy practice. This allowed the national stakeholders to come to a shared analysis and understanding of the main challenges and to identify the actions that the government needs to adopt to strengthen evidence informed policy making. The convening power of the project was one of its most important outcomes. As such, it was an investment in the future development of these ecosystems. Trusted relationships are a fertile addition to the availability of good evidence.

#### *An evidence-informed policymaking ecosystem needs coordination*

The project has underlined that evidence informed policy making does not happen in a vacuum as science-for-policy ecosystems do not self-organise, even in countries with advanced systems of governance. They require a minimum level of capacity, infrastructure and individual skills. However, in addition they need coordination to make sure the different elements of the ecosystem talk to each other. This does not need to involve great costs. A lot can be realised within existing resources. Coordination is in part about creating the right incentives. For example: scientists, knowledge brokers and policy makers will be motivated to participate in individual trainings, if they know their investment will be rewarded in terms of recognition and career opportunities.

Coordination does not necessarily have to be top-down. It can also be a shared responsibility of different stakeholders, for example, to jointly formulate a knowledge agenda that reaches beyond single domains, single disciplines, and the issues of today. What works in a country depends on its culture and governmental system. In countries with a strong 'centre of government' it makes sense to work with a central analytical unit<sup>18</sup> or a Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA). In countries with a more decentralised structure, it makes more sense to invest in peer-to-peer coordination, for example by creating networks, such as a network of science advisors or policy evaluators, to bridge departmental silos that hamper the sharing of knowledge and the formulation of joint knowledge needs.

#### *The importance of the policymaker perspective: obstacles in the use of evidence*

Often science-for-policy discussions focus on the ability of scientists to deliver the best available knowledge to the right decision-maker at the right time. There is however the other side to this issue which this project helped to unravel: the actual use of evidence by policymakers. While the majority of countries participating in the project have a decent supply of evidence, there is often not enough capacity or interest inside government to consume and utilise the evidence or to engage in proper problem formulation.

Obstacles preventing optimal uptake of evidence in policymaking processes include a culture that is influenced by short-termism and political pressures, and lack of resources. These factors create a shortage of time and capacity to absorb the evidence. Evidence becomes something nice to have, instead of an essential part of the policy process. The national roadmaps identify a need for senior civil servants and administrators to visibly and tangibly support use of evidence in policymaking, and acknowledge the capacity that a healthy EIPM ecosystem requires. Several roadmaps provide

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<sup>18</sup> For example, a unit with a lead function for policy and impact assessment supporting policy development.

recommendations to strengthen such support. For example, the Estonian roadmap suggests producing a bi-annual report on 'The State of EIPM', to be discussed in the Cabinet meeting of the Government, and Lithuania has established a 'Public Policy Decisions and Data Analysis Group', which formalises the integration of evidence into decision-making and ensures a direct link between administrative evidence providers and political leaders.<sup>19</sup>

#### *An inter-departmental and interdisciplinary way of working*

Most national ecosystems face similar challenges to bring together interdisciplinary evidence and formulate cross-sectoral knowledge needs. In many countries some of the public sector institutions that in effect are supposed to provide a knowledge brokerage function, work as sectoral research institutes serving the needs of specific ministries, without the understanding and capacity to engage in more innovative communication approaches, to prepare evidence gaps maps and conduct systematic reviews. Countries such as Latvia and Belgium have a significant number of advisory bodies, but most cover only a specific policy domain. This makes less sense as policy issues become more inter-dependent.

However, challenges remain even when countries have dedicated interdisciplinary advisory bodies, such as the Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR). Policymakers should aim to formulate cross-sectoral knowledge demands and, while working in a siloed public administration, use the evidence provided to solve the wicked problems that do not fall into single departmental focus, but need to be addressed jointly by several departments. Traditional methods of producing knowledge and making decisions within government silos, following a single department line or minister's portfolio, or academic disciplines, function poorly in a world of many interdependencies. The fragmented nature of knowledge and the quick pace of decision-making do not easily allow for EIPM processes. In addition to improving the synthesis and integration of various knowledge sources for policymaking, successfully addressing this challenge also requires aligning and integrating knowledge needs across government.

Several countries are trying to stimulate an inter-departmental way of working. In Latvia some ministries have started to prepare a joint evidence-needs-agenda, that aims at coordinating evidence needs across institutions to avoid duplication of research, and to increase the visibility of findings. Member States roadmaps contain recommendations to strengthen inter-departmental and interdisciplinary approaches. Most countries are advised to introduce or prioritise cross-sectoral knowledge agendas, as well as to introduce funding initiatives that support interdisciplinarity, such as the programme recently launched by the Belgian Science Policy Office (BELSPO).<sup>20</sup>

#### *Skills and competences*

All countries acknowledge the importance of individual skills and competences and recognise that it is not only about skills of scientists, but also those of policymakers. Too often the assumption is that the problem lies with the other side: policymakers don't understand the science, and scientists cannot deliver the evidence on time. That is problematic because some of the countries have good supply of

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<sup>19</sup> The Estonian country report: <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC139946>; the Lithuanian country report: <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC141125>

<sup>20</sup> The Belgian country report: <https://doi.org/10.1787/223b01a8-en>

high-quality research, with the potential to inform and support policymaking, which is often not fully used due to communication issues as well as a lack of incentives.

To strengthen individual capacities, the project delivered ‘Capacity Building workshops’ for scientists, policymakers and knowledge brokers, which were based on the competence frameworks of the JRC on Science for Policy (for scientists) and Innovative Policymaking (for policymakers), as well as the OECD work on Building Capacity for Evidence Informed Policy Making.<sup>21</sup> These frameworks helped to identify the competences, attitudes and skills that are needed in a science-for-policy ecosystem. For countries that do not yet have fully developed educational programmes, such as Estonia, Czechia and Belgium, these frameworks were an important source of inspiration. Other countries, such as Latvia, Lithuania, Greece and the Netherlands, are advised to incorporate elements of the frameworks into existing programmes and trainings.

Focus on specific skills differs depending on country needs. In Czechia, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania analytical capacities in the public administration, particularly in line ministries, are often insufficient to address increasingly complex policy challenges. This includes both the capacity to supply policy relevant analysis to ministers and senior policy makers, as well as the capacity to understand evidence and science and to ask the right questions. Czechia is currently developing a competence model for public servants which includes points on analytical skills.<sup>22</sup> The competence model is intended to be used during recruitment and to guide the setting of learning and development goals for civil servants. In Estonia, the roadmap points towards strengthening foresight skills, because the practical use of foresight activities is underdeveloped.<sup>23</sup> Latvia and Lithuania are also making efforts to build and strengthen analytical capacities within government.<sup>24</sup>

The project also identified pairing schemes and fellowships as a way to supplement skills and knowledge acquired in trainings. Some countries, such as the Netherlands, are already working with this type of instruments and are advised to expand existing programmes. While countries like Czechia, Estonia and Greece are advised to set up new possibilities, drawing on some best practice examples identified through the project. Latvia is about to upgrade and modernise its current PhD-law which should facilitate pairing or fellowship possibilities in the future with government sponsored PhDs.<sup>25</sup>

Although investment in individual skills is very important, the EIPM project underlines that if organised as an isolated action the return on investment will be limited. Investments at the individual level need to be combined by a supportive culture, that contains recognition of the value of science for policy skills as well as incentives for individuals to strengthen their own capacities. The latter may include a professionalisation of knowledge brokerage function as well as promotion of dedicated career tracks.

A strong learning culture needs to be embedded in national public administration and academic structures. This learning culture is often related to the capacity to accept risk and promote public

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<sup>21</sup> [Learning & Development | Knowledge for policy](#); Schwendinger et al 2022; OECD 2020 Building capacity for evidence informed policymaking, <https://doi.org/10.1787/86331250-en>

<sup>22</sup> The Czech Republic country report <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC140040>

<sup>23</sup> The Estonian country report: <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC139946>

<sup>24</sup> The Latvian country report: <https://doi.org/10.1787/2b43bc19-en>; the Lithuanian country report: <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC141125>

<sup>25</sup> The Latvian country report: <https://doi.org/10.1787/2b43bc19-en>

sector innovation and experimentation. In the end, the driving force behind building capacity comes down to a culture of demand for evidence from top level decisionmakers, including at the political level. If these decision-makers start to regularly ask questions such as 'What is the evidence for this?' 'What evidence will we need to understand the problem and evaluate the options?' 'What are the key assumptions behind the model or study?', this will send the necessary signals to the eco-system.

### 3. Shaping a future agenda for evidence-informed policymaking

The EIPM project has identified important steps for each of the seven participating Member States. Some have already been implemented, such as the creation of an Analytical Competence Centre in the Office of the Government in Latvia, the implementation of agile funding schemes for policy-oriented research in Belgium, or the translation of the JRC competences frameworks to Greek by the National Documentation Centre.<sup>26</sup> Other recommendations from the roadmaps will take prolonged effort. What is crucial however and what this multi-country project has underlined is that science is inherently global. At the same time, there is an obvious need for local contextualisation to translate science into evidence that can improve national policies. National resources, however, are limited. Therefore, there is value in formulating a European wide agenda.

A future oriented EIPM agenda should serve several goals. First, it should help to ensure that EIPM ecosystems can function in increasingly challenging information environments and polarised contexts. Trust in science is still relatively high, compared to trust in other institutions, but the informational space, the way information is shared, seen and consumed, is radically changing.<sup>27</sup> Spotting and distinguishing credible evidence from a deluge of partially AI generated information overload will become increasingly difficult. To strengthen the use of evidence, there is a need to invest in trustworthy production processes.

Second, the agenda should help to ensure that EIPM ecosystems are fully responsive to the changing needs of governments. At a time of significant fiscal pressures, with the need to address the green and digital transition and necessary defence investments, there is a need to close evidence gaps. This includes for example sharing evidence on carbon mitigation approaches and increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of public expenditure through evidence driven spending reviews.

Third, the agenda should help to further strengthen the resilience of science-for-policy ecosystems. The ecosystem will be more resilient across changing government landscapes if it becomes indispensable to the common good and its value is recognised and protected as such. Beyond the executive, there is a need to engage with a wider set of public institutions interested in the evidence agenda, such as parliaments and other societal stakeholders and the judicial branch. Reliability of supply and demand of evidence will strengthen interactions between these organisations and thereby contribute to a resilient EIPM ecosystem, even under less favourable conditions.

The strength of EIPM ecosystems also depends on the ability to keep up to date with state-of-the art knowledge and information technology to be able to prepare and anticipate challenges in the context of the digital transition, including the role of artificial intelligence. The professionalisation and institutional support of the role of knowledge brokers in maintaining healthy relationships with scientific, technological and innovation institutions and groups will be crucial.

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<sup>26</sup> The Latvian country report: <https://doi.org/10.1787/2b43bc19-en>; the Belgian country report: <https://doi.org/10.1787/223b01a8-en>; the Greek country report: <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC141465>.

<sup>27</sup> Cologna et al. 2025.

There are some clear opportunities to be seized as part of a future oriented EIPM agenda:

i. **How should the knowledge broker role be professionalised?**

One of the key findings of the EIPM project is that the emerging field of knowledge brokerage, with individuals and organisations dedicated to fulfilling this function as their main objective, is playing an essential role in strengthening the interaction between science and policymaking. However, most knowledge brokers have developed their competences in isolation, often following a path as researchers or experts in a specific scientific or policy field, and then learning how to effectively perform knowledge brokerage through experience. While institutions may have greater opportunities for mutual learning, the project findings show that in many countries specific applied research institutes often work in silos to address the needs of specific ministries. While translating science can be learned through experience, it poses additional challenges, such as how to work with interdisciplinary evidence or addressing ethical conflicts. Hence, science-for-policy ecosystems would probably benefit from increasing the professionalisation of knowledge broker function. This includes opportunities for increased professionalisation at the individual level, with clear, upfront guidance on how to effectively conduct the role, as well as opportunities for cross-disciplinary sharing across knowledge broker institutions.

ii. **How to combine and weigh different types of evidence?**

What counts as evidence is not always straightforward. It can refer to data, information, and knowledge from multiple sources, including both quantitative (statistics, measurements) and qualitative data (opinions, stakeholder input, conclusions of evaluation, expert advice). What is needed or preferred depends on the policy phase, or whether evidence is used for agenda-setting, or for choosing the most effective policy instrument. What counts as evidence also depends on the disciplinary perspective that is needed to solve a social problem. Cross sectoral problems often need a multi- or interdisciplinary perspective. Combining disciplinary perspectives and methods is not easy, however, and most countries expressed an ambition to strengthen their capacity for this.

There was recognition across participating Member States that EIPM requires scientific evidence but also other forms of evidence. For example, when designing social or educational policies, it is often neither feasible nor ethical to test them in a controlled environment. In such cases, it is important to draw on the expertise of practitioners to ensure that policies are sound and tailored to the local context, increasing their potential for success. In other words, there is a need to also consider implementation science and to mobilise administrative data to a greater extent.

This broader perspective on what types of evidence are needed does not imply that all types of evidence should have the same value. One of the tasks of knowledge brokers is to synthesise different types of evidence, with respect to their level of (un)certainly. Knowledge brokers should promote the use of evidence that is rigorous, systematic and technically valid. However, a core of scientific evidence may be combined with expertise from practitioners and stakeholders, which includes a need to ensure feedback from implementation, as well as space for experimentation to allow for citizen centred and user driven approaches, particularly in policies aimed at designing public services. There is already substantial guidance available on how to combine and weigh

different types of scientific evidence. That should be expanded to incorporate other sources of evidence that are relevant for EIPM.<sup>28</sup>

**iii. How to maximise the potential of new technologies, such as AI, while avoiding the threats?**

Generative AI offers unprecedented opportunities to revolutionise EIPM ecosystems. It is however of paramount importance to understand the different elements (e.g., processes, actors, influences) of EIPM to identify precisely what the needs are, what AI should be used for, and how. By doing so, it is ensured that AI is applied where it really brings additional value. This means finding the most beneficial AI applications where added value is maximised, and risks minimised.

**iv. How to measure, assess and demonstrate S4P impact?**

The importance of evidence-informed public policies has been increasingly recognised in Europe in recent years. At the same time a growing need to assess and evaluate impacts of EIPM has emerged. Assessing the impact of EIPM interventions is necessary to enable Member States to evaluate their progress, compare across EIPM interventions, and provide accountability and transparency. At the European level this has been addressed by the development of strategies to evaluate science-for-policy ecosystems.<sup>29</sup> In addition, assessing the impact of science-for-policy interventions would allow Member States to assess their progress, compare across EIPM interventions, and provide accountability and transparency.

Evaluating the impact of interventions and initiatives promoting EIPM in Member States is challenging, for the same reasons that it is usually challenging to evaluate the impact of science in policy, outside exceptional events such as a pandemic where that input, or the lack of relevant input, becomes very visible. There are both technical and political factors that need to be considered. Technical factors include: the fact that evidence is only one of many factors influencing policymaking, the time lag between science-for-policy interventions and their policy impact, and the fact that assessing the use of a science-for-policy intervention will often rely on self-reporting. On the political side the power dynamic and the relationships between stakeholders, including government entities, complicate the policymaking process and make it hard to reconstruct and measure science's influence. There is a need for impact assessments that take both type of factors into account. However, measuring the actual impact of science-for-policy on the context and the intrinsic quality of policies will remain challenging at best.

**v. How can we ensure commitment to use of reliable information with integrity, to increase public trust in government?**

In the current climate of declining trust and misinformation, it is extremely important and urgent to promote and commit to integrity principles in the production and use evidence in support of policymaking. Both on the level of the EU and the Member States there is a range of instruments

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<sup>28</sup> Social multi-criteria decision analysis (SMCA) can be a source of inspiration for this. SMCA is a method to support policymakers with comparing the potential impact of policy options ex-ante. By allowing the inclusion of many different kinds of criteria, e.g., economic, social or environmental, it is well-suited to account for the many trade-offs policymakers face when deciding on a policy options in a transparent way. Its capacity to integrate many different kinds of evidence - quantitative and qualitative- makes it an important tool for EIPM. The JRC has developed an online tool, SOCRATES, that policymakers can use to perform SMCA [Social Multi-Criteria Evaluation of Policy Options | Knowledge for policy](#)

<sup>29</sup> [Developing an evaluation framework for science for policy ecosystems | Knowledge for policy](#)

that address integrity principles in the production of evidence, such as scientific integrity frameworks, regulations, legal declarations of independence, and codes of conduct<sup>30</sup>. However, the existing instruments are not enough for the current challenges. They focus on the production of scientific knowledge in general, and not on the production for and use of scientific knowledge in policymaking. Existing documents also do not necessarily apply to the work of knowledge brokers and knowledge brokerage institutions.

As this project has underlined, science for policy is not an individual skill or function, it requires a whole ecosystem to function in the right way. EIPM requires good working relationships between knowledge producers, brokers and users. That means that simply mirroring regulations that safeguard scientific research from attempts by the private sector to influence methods and outcomes will not be sufficient. EIPM requires guidelines on how to combine the task of building good working relations, while creating an environment that ensures integrity both in the production and the use of scientific evidence. Too often the default for scientists is to insist that their integrity and independence can only be guaranteed by an arm's length relationship with government and funding independent of wider societal goals. However, this may not always be sufficient, given the risk of capture of some scientist by large private interests. While there is a vital place for such formalised advice, informal advice from scientists and experts embedded inside government is essential to effective evidence informed policymaking. Of course, such proximity risks capture or undue influence. There is therefore a need to develop frameworks that enable scientists to work in close proximity and trust, while protecting the integrity and 'independence' of their advice.

### **The JRC agenda**

The JRC remains committed to contribute to this future agenda for EIPM. To this end, in the coming years, the JRC will work on several concrete outputs:

- **Knowledge Broker Manifesto**

The JRC will publish a knowledge broker manifesto aimed at establishing the profession of knowledge brokers. The manifesto will serve as a guidebook for practicing knowledge brokerage ethically and effectively, compiling use cases and best practices from practitioners and researchers across various fields of scientific advice. It will also incorporate insights from behavioural sciences on how to deliver evidence that can change minds.

- **European Framework for EIPM**

To help strengthen citizens' trust in the ability of governments to deliver effective policies based on sound evidence, the JRC will explore ways to foster commitment to integrity in both the production and use of evidence for policymaking. Existing instruments for scientific integrity, along with national legal provisions that guarantee the independence of publicly funded research organisations and advisory bodies, provide valuable inspiration. However, the goal is to design an instrument that expresses a positive commitment to EIPM integrity from

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<sup>30</sup> The EU has a framework in place to promote and ensure scientific integrity. The framework is based on several key documents, initiatives and regulations, such as the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and the EU's Open Science Policy. Member States have similar codes of conduct, as well as legal declarations that safeguard the independence of individual advisory bodies and research organisation.

scientists and from (political) policymakers as well. Such an instrument should not add to the administrative burdens on scientists and policymakers.

- **Update of the competence framework for policy makers and researchers**

The JRC competence frameworks for policymakers and researchers have served as an important tool in this project, both for the capacity building workshops and as a framework to analyse needs and gaps in existing training and educational programmes in the seven members states. In turn the project has identified important new developments, such as the use of AI for EIPM, that challenge the national science-for-policy ecosystems and the individuals that are part of it. Therefore, the JRC will work on an update of the competence framework, that will also acknowledge more explicitly the competences of knowledge brokers. The update will not only cover the framework itself, but also and related products such as the brochure '10 tips for researchers: how to achieve input on policy'.<sup>31</sup>

- **Collaborative policymaking**

The JRC will bring science advice to collaborative policymaking. Specifically, it will explore how cognitive, behavioural, and organisational sciences can help us rethink the way public administrations and governing institutions work together and inject collective intelligence in the policymaking process. It will focus on how to strengthen coordination across governmental departments and agencies to make them more efficient in mobilising their wealth of knowledge and resources. The underlying ambition is to both systematise empirical knowledge and develop evidence-informed interventions to transform and innovate the way public services work.

- **AI to support science-for-policy**

The JRC is currently exploring possibilities to bring scientific knowledge closer to policy development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation with the help of AI. The objective of this work is (1) to investigate if and how specific activities and tasks at the interface between Science and Policy could benefit from AI capabilities and Human-AI collaboration, (2) experiment with promising use cases, and (3) develop appropriate impact indicators to evaluate both benefits and costs of using AI in such Science-for-Policy activities.

- **Disinformation**

The JRC contributes to the EU's long-standing work on countering disinformation and foreign information manipulation and interference. A JRC-led study recently published in Nature confirmed that both prebunking and debunking can be effective when countering a set of fallacious statements about climate change and COVID-19 vaccines.<sup>32</sup> Both can reduce agreement with false claims, their assessment as credible, and the likelihood of sharing misinformation. JRC is soon publishing a study on disinformation trends analysing 20 million news articles covering Ukraine and Russia from 2013 until 2024. And will publish an update of its report on Technology and Democracy.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> [10 Tips for Researchers: How to achieve impact on policy | Knowledge for policy](#)

<sup>32</sup> [Investigating the role of source and source trust in prebunks and debunks of misinformation in online experiments across four EU countries | Scientific Reports](#)

<sup>33</sup> [JRC Publications Repository - Technology and Democracy: Understanding the influence of online technologies on political behaviour and decision-making](#)

- **EIPM Community of Practice**

Inspired by the connective strength of this project, the JRC will be working together with SG REFORM and DG R&I to build a European EIPM Community of Practice, that brings together individuals and organisations that share the goal of improving EIPM both on a national and a European level. The Community of Practice should serve as a platform to jointly work on the future science-for-policy agenda. Its core members are envisioned as knowledge brokers in different functions, including science advisors in ministries, research fellows and advisors working in advisory bodies in and outside of public administrations, advisors working in knowledge transfer offices in universities, etc. As part of the second edition TSI EIPM project (which has been pre-selected for funding), the JRC will support the participating Member States in setting up their own national Community of Practice.

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## List of abbreviations and definitions

<b>Abbreviations</b>	<b>Definitions</b>
BELSPO	Belgian Science Policy Office
CSA	Chief Science Adviser
EIPM	Evidence-informed Policymaking
JRC	Joint Research Centre
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
TSI	Technical Support Instrument
WRR	Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy

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