Good practices

Problem-oriented policy recommendations and policy conclusions

Contributing INNOVATE partner: ICMPD International Centre for Migration Policy Development

Objectives, basic principles & potential impact

Problem-oriented policy recommendations offer targeted options for addressing specific policy questions, linking research findings with the realities faced by decision-makers and practitioners. Unlike general briefs, these recommendations are tailored to the specific contexts, paradigms, and constraints of the policy environment they address, translating complex issues into actionable scenarios that demonstrate how proposed adaptations could improve societal outcomes.

Well-developed and communicated recommendations can enhance policy development. A solid understanding of the policy environment, combined with clear communication and constructive critique, increases the likelihood of positive impacts. However, research findings are only one element in complex decision-making processes influenced by the diverse priorities of policymakers. Still, by offering clear, relevant, and feasible recommendations, researchers can help address

complex issues based on their research findings. To ensure their voice is heard, they must, however, be prepared to navigate existing policy paradigms and interests of key actors in the given field, shifting their focus from problem analysis to solutions.

From our experience, formulating problem-oriented policy recommendations involves several key considerations:

- **Reflecting on the socio-political context**: Policy decisions are embedded in a complex environment of prevailing narratives, interpretations, institutional frameworks, and stakeholder interactions. Reflecting on this context strengthens the relevance of policy recommendations.

- **Recognising broader policy dynamics**: Situating research within the broader political landscape involves understanding political dynamics and key actors involved; their policy paradigms, priorities, and positioning. Being mindful of their leeway and limitations, recommendations can be formulated that are relevant to their realities.

- **Engaging different voices and fostering dialogue**: Engaging those who design, are concerned by, and implement policies (e.g. via workshops, discussion, or feedback sessions) helps to interpret findings, align recommendations with policy makers' needs, and gain broader acceptance.

- **Focusing on outcome-oriented and actionable recommendations**: Instead of vague and general suggestions, recommendations are more likely picked up if they are actionable and explain clearly and transparently which conclusions are drawn from which research results.

- **Communicating sensitively**: Effective communication requires balanced, clear, and accessible language. Avoiding technical jargon and complex terminology, drawing red lines wisely, using a constructive tone, and viewing recommendations as opportunities for improvement fosters a more receptive environment.

When thoughtfully prepared, problem-focused policy recommendations and policy options can enhance policy-development. Well-tailored recommendations improve feasibility, while sensitive communication fosters trust and collaboration. Understanding the policy environment, combined with clear guidance, raises the likelihood of positive outcomes.

Example

Improving participation of refugee women and young adults

The following example is based on several research studies related to the field of "integration policy", specifically targeting refugee women and youth. These studies aimed to create a solid evidence foundation for policy discussions by addressing specific challenges and enhancing the lived experiences of these groups.

The studies targeted decision-makers and practitioners at both national and local levels in Austria, using a similar approach to identify the specific needs of newly arrived refugees as well as the structural elements shaping the integration framework.

Their goal was to pinpoint areas for improvement within Austria's "integration ecosystem" by examining refugees' real-life experiences navigating these structures. Recommendations were directed at policymakers and practitioners on both the national and local levels, encompassing a range of formal actors (e.g., government bodies, educational institutions, healthcare providers, NGOs, employers) and informal actors (e.g., community organisations, volunteer groups) actively engaged in local integration efforts across key policy areas, more specifically: housing, education, and employment.

Engagement steps

The studies were designed to address policy improvements. This involved comprehensive data collection among both target groups and experts, analysis existing support systems and policies, understanding the roles of relevant actors and the broader socio-political context influencing these realities. The integration of comparative insights and transferrable promising practices from different contexts in other countries also helped shaping local recommendations.

The studies aimed to identify opportunities for policy enhancement by undertaking extensive data collection among both target groups and experts. This process is a comprehensive review of existing support structures and policies, as well as an examination of the roles of key actors and the broader socio-political context influencing related dynamics. A crucial element was integrating comparative insights and transferable best practices from other countries, which highlighted effective strategies that could be tailored for local applications. These insights helped formulating actionable recommendations to address specific local challenges.

By following the below steps, the process of formulating policy recommendations was aimed to be inclusive, practical, and well-informed, addressing the needs of both the target groups and the broader socio-political context:

1. Stakeholder identification and understanding: Early in data collection, we identified relevant stakeholders—decision-makers, key actors and organisations active in the field, target group representatives, and other experts - to understand prevailing

paradigms within the respective domain and to understand stakeholders' interests and positioning. This helped to make sure research findings can translate to recommendations that are well targeted, regardless of the potential outcomes, thereby minimising the risk of immediate refusal by considering political and organisational priorities.

2. Target group feedback and stakeholder consultation: We engaged with the target groups, gathering firsthand experiences and needs from those directly affected to root our recommendations in their lived experiences (refugee women and youth). Reflecting on these realities, we consulted the above-mentioned sector professionals to develop actionable recommendations that are responsive to both the immediate needs of target groups and the operational realities faced by practitioners in the field.

3. International comparison: We analysed successful practices from international contexts to learn from proven approaches to enrich recommendations with adaptable strategies that have been effective elsewhere.

4. Collaborative workshops: Joint workshops and discussion forums brought together target group representatives and stakeholders to review empirical findings, discuss identified effective practices. Feedback was synthesised to draft cohesive recommendations that were both practical and feasible within the socio-political context.

5. Synthesised input and draft recommendations: We developed a set of recommendation developed based on the research findings and the input gathered from the target groups and stakeholders consulted. These recommendations followed an internal logic and included:

· **Hierarchical organisation:** Recommendations were systematically presented, beginning with broad strategies and followed by specific action areas with detailed steps for each.

- **Contextualisation**: Each set of recommendations was linked to identified issues and study findings, providing a clear basis for the proposed actions.

- **Defined actors**: implementation levels were clearly specified, either directly or implicitly, designating appropriate stakeholders.

- **Action and Outcome Focus**: Recommendations linked targeted areas, expected benefits, and necessary policy adjustments, prioritising sustainable impact over quick fixes.

- **Contextual adaptiveness and policy constraints**: recommendations were tailored to fit within the context, ensuring they resonate with both persons concerned, policymakers and practitioners. Potential constraints faced by policymakers were considered to maximise practical feasibility and acceptance.

- **Constructive approach**: Recommendations were phrased to encourage positive change, pointing out areas for improvement rather than pointing out failures.

6. Communication: The final recommendations were communicated to decision-makers and the public in accessible formats, such as reports, presentations, and policy briefs. Presentations at stakeholder events provided additional platforms for sharing findings and engaging with policymakers and potential allies.

Success factors

- **Stakeholder Engagement**: Actively involving stakeholders—such as officials, practitioners, and representatives from the target groups —ensures that their insights and concerns are considered. Engagement, transparent communication, and acknowledgment are crucial for gaining mutual trust and for collaboratively developing effective strategies for improvement.

- **Flexibility and Adaptability**: The development of recommendations requires an openness to adapt in response to new information, feedback, or changing circumstances to ensure they remain relevant and actionable.

- **Sensitivity and Inclusivity**: Recommendations that respect and address the needs of the diverse stakeholders are more likely to be accepted. Sensitivity to contextual factors enhances reception and cooperation, fostering an environment where all parties are valued and understood.

- **Clear and Effective Communication**: Clearly articulating the purpose, expected outcomes, and benefits of the recommendations can reduce resistance and defensiveness. This clarity helps to build consensus among policymakers and other stakeholders.

- **Empirical Support for Recommendations**: Using empirical findings to back recommendations enhances their clarity and demonstrates their necessity, ultimately building credibility and encouraging stakeholder buy-in.

Impact and lessons learned

Decision-makers and stakeholders reacted positively to the recommendations, particularly valuing their inclusive approach. By integrating a variety of perspectives and recognising ongoing efforts and initiatives, the formulation of recommendations created a collaborative atmosphere and mutual respect among all parties involved. Actively engaging local actors and those concerned and incorporating their insights ensured that the proposed solutions were grounded in the realities of those most affected, making the recommendations more relevant and practical.

Additionally, the research projects encouraged a wide range of stakeholders to draw on the empirical findings from the studies. While the development of the recommendations promoted increased interaction among stakeholders the specific impact remains uncertain. It would certainly be overly simplistic to attribute any resulting policy changes solely to these studies, given the diverse range of actors and interests involved in the formulation process. Any resulting changes should be understood as a collective effort.

Useful recommendations for policymakers

Contributing INNOVATE partner: CMR UW Centre of Migration Research, University of Warsaw

Objectives, basic principles & potential impact

A policy recommendation is written policy advice prepared for institutions, social groups or individual persons that have the authority to make or to influence policy decisions. Providing policy recommendations often seems like the most challenging part of each research-to-policy endeavour, even if both parties remain in long-term dialogue and researchers have conducted detailed study prior to issuing the recommendations.

Researchers should remember that the provision of recommendations is not a must; sometimes it is better to offer the policymakers solid research to consider and avenues for further research to explore. Nevertheless, if a researcher wants to influence a particular policy and maximise the impact of his/her research, it is better that he/she prepares policy recommendations that are based on solid evidence, are actionable and constructed on prior detailed analysis of the target audience.

First, recommendations should derive from the best knowledge of the researchers and be a natural continuation of the study they follow. It is good to provide solid evidence that indicate a need to introduce a certain policy solution, accompanied with statistics, causal links analysis and operational examples. The matter on which a policy decision is required should be defined in as much detail as possible. When possible, researchers could offer policy makers different policy options and analysis of the relevant pros and cons.

Second, the actionability of policy recommendations means that they should be embedded in the existing legal framework and current economic environment; they should fit with exiting legislation and propose as detailed legal changes as possible. Yet, actionability may also mean putting policy recommendations in a wider context of societal needs, in this case policy recommendations need not be so detailed but rather outline general trends in policy developments. In this case, it is good to clearly state any gaps in knowledge and the existing policy context that should be addressed.

Third, researchers who prepare policy recommendations should have a deep understanding of their target audience. If some of these are state institutions, it is good practice if they are taken onboard much earlier than when subsequent recommendations are issued. It is advisable to remain in continuous dialogue in the process of preparing a report and drafting policy recommendations. If recommendations are of a more general character and directed towards the general public, it is worth considering employing deliberative methods of engaging potential users.

Fourth, researchers should be aware that there is strong evidence that individuals process information in a biased way, for example, being more responsive to information that reinforces pre-existing beliefs, or that they process data differently in cases where they have strong values. Therefore, it is important to identify how to possibly limit that bias and properly frame a given subject.

Eventually, the fact as to whether the recommendations are taken onboard depends heavily on the policy cycle and many external factors. In particular, it is more likely that they are accepted if the problem stream (a problem has been recognised as important public issue), the policy solution stream (solutions are in general accepted by policy makers) and the political stream (there is a favourable political climate in the country for new policy development) coincide.

Example

The quality assessment of public employment services in terms of the simplified employment procedure for foreigners

In 2016-2018 the Centre of Migration Research, University of Warsaw (CMR UW), together with the think-tank WiseEuropa – the Warsaw Institute of Economic and European Studies Foundation (the project's leader), was commissioned to implement a project aimed at assessing the quality of services provided by the public employment services in the context of a simplified procedure for the employment of foreigners in Poland. The results provided, together with the recommendations issued, facilitated a gradual reform of a simplified employment scheme for labour migrants.
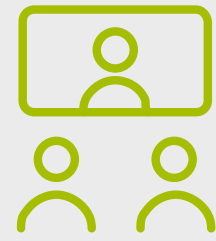
Engagement steps

The research conducted included a wide array of analyses based on both secondary data and unique newly generated data: a nationwide survey among employers, a survey of employment services, and a qualitative study. The results and draft recommendations were discussed both during working contacts with the contractor and at several seminars organised in different formats. The main recommendations included:

1. **Enhancing job stability for foreign workers**: Facilitating the extension of employment periods and simplifying work permit procedures to ensure business continuity and encourage investment in the human capital of foreign employees.

2. **Increasing occupational mobility of migrants**: Providing opportunities for more stable employment and residency statuses by recognizing qualifications, granting access to vocational training and activation programs, and making better use of their skills in the Polish labour market.

3. **Maintaining or increasing the flexibility of the procedure**: Keeping costs low and speeding up administrative decisions to preserve the procedure's attractiveness and efficiency while preventing the shift of workers into the informal economy.

4. **Expanding the list of eligible countries or modifying territorial restrictions**: Extending the simplified procedure to additional countries or lifting territorial restrictions while narrowing the list of eligible professions to better meet the growing demand for foreign workers.

5. Improving the competence and professionalism of public employment service staff: Expanding staffing levels, providing systematic training, and adapting organisational structures to new regulations to prevent the loss of experienced personnel to the private sector.

6. Enhancing the availability and clarity of information gathered by public employment services: Improving information channels about regulations and procedures, tailoring them to sector-specific needs to ensure that both employers and foreign workers can easily access accurate information.

7. Focusing on monitoring actual employment practices rather than just documentation: Strengthening oversight to detect abuses not reflected in formal documents, such as wage withholding or excessive financial penalties on workers.

8. Implementing mechanisms to discourage improper employment practices: Developing effective control mechanisms to ensure fair working conditions for foreign workers and prevent discriminatory practices, such as unfair contracts or improper wage settlements.

Success factors

Such a positive and broad social impact from our recommendations was possible due to the simultaneous appearance of three elements of the so-called multiple stream framework, namely the problem stream, the policy solution stream and the political stream that supported the research impact.

- **Problem Stream**: In this instance, the issue had been recognised and repeatedly highlighted by both practitioners and experts over several years. Their extensive, long-term collaboration prior to the project's launch enabled the design of comprehensive recommendations that examined the problem from multiple angles. Particularly persuasive to the various stakeholders were the quantitative findings, which clearly exposed the main deficiencies in the current solution.

- **Policy Solution Stream**: While policymakers ultimately determined the final form of the policy changes, our research supplied them with credible, evidence-based proposals. These were presented as multiple-choice recommendations that policymakers could later refine based on practical considerations.

- **Political Stream**: The policy change took much longer than is typically observed in multi-stream analyses, arising not from top-level agenda setting but from a series of incremental steps taken by administrators. As a result, this change was not accompanied by a significant shift in the highest-level discourse on migration.

Impact and lessons learned

In 2018, after the publication of the project recommendations and intensive dissemination activities, the Polish government amended several regulations pertaining to the employment of labour migrants. Among other things, it was decided that the newly established seasonal work permits would be issued for a longer period to better address the seasonal character of migration. Employers were also obliged to sign a written contract with the employee and to inform the public employment office about the fact of the employment.

In later stages, gradual changes were introduced to the business processes of local employment services. Finally, in 2021, several amendments to the law on foreigners took place, including the obligation that the minimum salary obtained by a foreign worker may not be smaller than the national minimum wage, notwithstanding the form of employment and working time specified in the contract.

Learn more

The quality assessment of public employment services in terms of the simplified employment procedure for foreigners (PO WER)" project final report: <u>Quality assesment of public employment services in terms of the simplified employment procedure for foreigners (PO WER)</u>

How to draft accessible, relevant, and actionable recommendations

Contributing INNOVATE partner: IRC International Rescue Committee

Objectives, basic principles & potential impact

In this good practice, we share how to draft accessible, relevant, and actionable recommendations that enhance the likelihood that they are taken seriously and acted upon by policymakers, ultimately leading to more effective policy outcomes.

The primary purpose of academic research is to contribute to the body of knowledge in a specific field. It focuses on in-depth analysis and comprehensive exploration of a topic, which is key for policymaking, but may not always be directly applicable to immediate policy decisions.

In order to inform and influence decision-makers, the knowledge acquired through research must be translated into practical guidance, with recommendations focused on relevance and applicability to current policy issues.

Here are ten tips to consider when drafting your recommendations:

1. **Be Specific:** Clearly outline what actions should be taken. Instead of vague suggestions, provide detailed steps that policymakers can follow.

2. **Provide Context**: Explain the rationale behind each recommendation. Include data or evidence that supports the proposed action, demonstrating its potential impact and feasibility. This helps policymakers understand the importance and urgency of the recommendation.

3. **Consider Feasibility**: Assess the practicality of your recommendations. Consider the political, economic, and social contexts in which they will be implemented. Recommendations should be realistic and achievable within existing constraints.

4. **Identify Stakeholders**: Specify who should be responsible for implementing each recommendation to facilitate accountability and collaboration.

5. **Outline Resources Needed**: Indicate what resources (financial, human, or technical) will be required to implement the recommendations. Providing a rough estimate of costs or resource allocation can help policymakers plan effectively.

6. **Suggest Timelines**: Include suggested timelines for implementation to help prioritisation. For example, recommend short-term, medium-term, and long-term actions.

7. **Highlight Potential Barriers**: Acknowledge potential challenges or obstacles to implementation and suggest ways to overcome them. This proactive approach can help policymakers anticipate issues and develop strategies to address them.

8. **Include Evaluation Metrics**: Recommend specific metrics or indicators to assess the effectiveness of the proposed actions.

9. **Engage with Policymakers**: If possible, involve policymakers in the development of recommendations. Their insights can help ensure that the recommendations are grounded in reality and aligned with current priorities.

10. **Use Clear Formatting**: Present recommendations in a clear and organized manner, using bullet points or numbered lists.

☉ Example

Report shedding light on the mental health crisis of asylum seekers on the Greek island of Lesvos and its recommendations

In 2018, more than 8,500 asylum seekers were crammed into Moria refugee camp on the island of Lesvos, a site that only had the capacity to host 3,100. Asylum seekers there were under enormous mental strain. With no choice but to live in unacceptable conditions, with little concrete information about their futures and long waits to have their asylum claims heard, suicide rates among the people the International Rescue Committee (IRC) supported through its mental health programme were astonishingly high: thirty percent of IRC clients had attempted suicide. Sixty percent had considered attempting suicide.

The IRC 'Unprotected, unsupported, uncertain' report aimed at shedding light on the situation and putting forward recommendations for the Greek local and central government, European Union leaders and donors, to ensure that all asylum seekers at Moria in need of mental health services were able to access them and that living conditions did not trigger or exacerbate existing trauma.
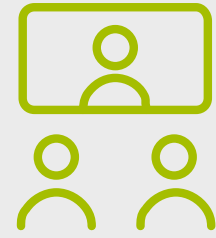
Engagement steps

To start with, IRC Hellas teams on the ground alerted IRC Hellas advocacy staff on the mental health crisis affecting our clients on Lesvos. The data was frightening, but the human suffering behind them was worse. After holding various internal and external meetings and studying the programme data, it was decided that we had to shed light on the situation and call on policy makers to act.

A methodology was drafted, which included data analysis, desk research, focus group discussions and interviews with a variety of stakeholders and people affected, as well as in situ visits. Special attention was paid in ensuring that all relevant policymakers were interviewed to express their views and their recommendations on what needed to be done to improve the situation (covering tips 3,7 & 9 in the list above).

The report was drafted and particular emphasis was given to the recommendations so they covered all levels of responsibility: from the camp manager to the EU member states (covering tips 1 & 4 in the list above). It was then reviewed by a variety of people involved in the response from different positions.

Success factors

The relevant and actionable recommendations were definitely one of the key ingredients of the success of this report. From the programme manager in his/her dealings with the Moria camp manager of the municipality to the Country Director in meetings with central government or donors and Brussels-based colleagues, everyone felt equipped to advocate for the improvement of the situation at their level.

The data and analysis were also strong and sound (tip 2 in the list above), and the involvement of policymakers in the drafting and reviewing stage ensured the information was accurate, political sensibilities were addressed and the recommendations were specific and separated by duty bearer (tips 4 & 10 above). A couple of relevant examples:

- To the Municipality of Lesvos: "*Reverse the Municipal Council decision 503/2018 of 16 July 2018 to not accept women refugees at the Safe Shelter for Women Victims of Gender Based Violence, except in very urgent cases and for two days only.*"

- To the Hellenic Police: "*Ensure there is consistent police follow-up to reports of sexual abuse, which should result in the legal prosecution of the perpetrator, as provided by Law (Articles 336 and 337 of the Penal code).*"

Impact and lessons learned

Policymaking is a complicated process. It is difficult to say whether the IRC recommendations were a catalyst for some of the recommendations coming to fruition. In addition, priorities across stakeholders vary, so some policymakers supported some of our recommendations more than others.

There is no doubt that many of our recommendations were taken into account and acted upon, especially those that were more practical and less political. Finding these actionable solutions was key in a heavily politicised field. A couple of examples from the said report to the manager of the Moria RIC are:

- "*Strive for better allocation of shelter. Gender separation should be ensured to avoid women being forced to share shelter with unknown males or living in the unaccompanied children section*"

- "*Ensure security and lighting in commons areas, especially toilet and shower areas.*"

- The IRC initiated or was invited to various follow-up meetings with policy makers at all levels. The fact that our report was based on data, rather than 'ethics' was appreciated and led to informed and sensible discussions.

Learn more

Some examples of IRC policy reports that include accessible, relevant, and actionable recommendations:

- Unprotected, unsupported, uncertain
- Please wait: Barriers to access the procedure for international protection in Italy
- A chance for a better future: Supported independent living and the protection of unaccompanied children in Greece
- Two years on: Still no safe pathways for Afghans

Concrete, useful, and sufficiently brief recommendations

Contributing INNOVATE partner: ECRE European Council on Refugees and Exiles

General objectives, basic principles & potential impact

This good practice aims to support the engagement of important stakeholders who can help achieve your advocacy goal. As stakeholders are often busy with multiple areas of interest and different groups vying for their attention, it is important to provide the relevant information in a format that is most likely to be taken on board. Good practices include that:

• Recommendations can be delivered to stakeholders in different ways including in reports, at meetings, and at events. They should be targeted, brief, and actionable.

• Targeting a recommendation means it is the right recommendation for the right person or institution. Think ahead of what you think stakeholders will want to discuss and how this fits with the recommendations that you wish to advocate for. What are they interested in? What do you want to tell them and why would it be useful for them to know?

- Be brief and to the point. Comprehensive discussions on all that works or does not work do not function well.

- Prepare evidence and statistics, where available, which make your point. Presenting numbers can have more impact than presenting general complaints and challenges.

- At the same time, stakeholders and participants are likely to know the situation well, so it is wise to avoid flooding them with your own analysis. This can be shared ahead of a meeting in the form of your report or evidence, with the key, most relevant points prepared for the concrete stakeholder meeting or event.

- Recommendations can be as simple as bullet points with the relevant statistics and some targeted recommendations.

- (Very) short summaries and/or recommendations are important in any research or report, since policymakers and politicians are short on time and will not read long texts.

- If a policymaker is known to work on a specific dossier, highlight the related recommendation, the more concrete the better. Try to understand the current political context and policy developments.

- Concrete proposals on how to change draft legislation are usually well received by all those working on the file, that can include co-legislators, other policy makers, advocates and allies.

Example

Funding for asylum and migration inside the European Union: how to ensure compliance with fundamental rights 2022-2023?

This example looks at work undertaken by ECRE together with PICUM – the platform for undocumented migrants, to ensure that actions supporting asylum and migration inside the EU, funded by the EU, were compliant with fundamental rights.

Engagement steps

1. **Evidence/research**: ECRE and its partner PICUM first researched a topic they considered problematic, in this case, how to ensure funding for asylum and migration inside the European Union complies with fundamental rights, after reports had emerged of EU funds directly or indirectly supporting actions that violate fundamental rights. Ideas were explored in a short policy note, that laid out the main issues as well as conclusions and recommendations.

2. **Identifying stakeholders**: Recommendations were addressed to the main stakeholders who could affect change in this field, in this case, the European Commission, EU Member States, the European Parliament, and the Fundamental Rights Agency.

3. **Useful recommendations**: The research and recommendations addressed a topic that was of great concern to different stakeholders and so were both needed and timely. The recommendations covered a reasonably technical topic and so were able to provide guidance to network members from both ECRE and PICUM's membership, so recommendations could be echoed at national level in EU Member States.

4. **Dissemination of recommendations**: The recommendations were included in the report but also in a short article on ECRE's webpage and in ECRE's weekly bulletin that goes out to over 15,000 subscribers each week. A list of important stakeholders in each institution and in Member States permanent representations was also drawn up for dissemination of the report after it had been published.

5. **Recommendations used at a dedicated round table**: ECRE and PICUM then organised a round table to discuss the responsibilities, roles, and opportunities for the most relevant players to contribute to the accountability of EU-funded actions and compliance with fundamental rights. This ensured that recommendations were repeated for important stakeholders who were invited as speakers or participants. There was also an opportunity to engage directly with different stakeholders, receive feedback and discuss recommendations. In addition to the recommendations being short, the event itself was short and was held in a convenient location for stakeholders.

6. **Other follow up**: The impact was followed up through ECRE's overall impact monitoring as well as through discussions with the ECRE membership on advocacy. The roundtable event was specifically followed by a workshop for 35 ECRE and PICUM members on practical avenues for addressing fundamental rights abuses in EU-funded activities inside the EU.

Success factors

Recommendations were brief, targeted to specific institutions, based on evidence in the form of a policy note, timely and addressed a topic that was of interest for a wide variety of stakeholders. They were also disseminated in different fora including in the research itself, in communication tools, online, throughout the ECRE and PICUM membership and with stakeholders at an event.

Impact and lessons learned

Recommendations were disseminated to targeted stakeholders by email, in ECRE's weekly news, and at a targeted event, as well as through the ECRE and PICUM membership. This ensured around 15,000 stakeholders were made aware of the report and its recommendations to different degrees.

Over 60 people from national and European civil society organisations, national and EU institutions, and academia participated in the round table. 35 ECRE and PICUM members attended the workshop on practical avenues for addressing fundamental rights abuses in EU-funded activities inside the EU.

The Fundamental Rights Agency quoted the research in its paper from December 2023, EU funds: Ensuring compliance with fundamental rights.

Learn more

ECRE-PICUM policy note, <u>Fundamental rights compliance of funding supporting migrants, asylum applicants and refugees inside the European Union</u>

ECRE weekly bulletin <u>article</u>.

ECRE-PICUM roundtable <u>agenda</u>.

Framing and phrasing of negative results and policy gaps

Contributing INNOVATE partner: SDU Süleyman Demirel University

Objectives, basic principles & potential impact

The goal of this practice is to communicate critical findings to policymakers in a way that fosters constructive engagement and encourages positive change. When research highlights sensitive issues, such as policy gaps or serious human rights concerns, delivering these insights constructively can make a significant difference in how they are received. This approach aims to avoid confrontation, instead promoting open dialogue and improvement.

Key principles include involving policymakers early in the research process to establish alignment and shared ownership of the outcomes. Early engagement reduces the risk of resistance to findings by ensuring that policymakers feel included rather than blindsided by unexpected critiques.

Another essential principle is framing critiques around international standards or best practices

instead of directly attributing blame. This depersonalised approach encourages policymakers to reflect on their practices without feeling attacked.

Balancing criticism with recognition of positive practices is also crucial, even if finding positives can be challenging. Additionally, preparing for defensive or hostile reactions is critical; by maintaining professionalism and focusing on solutions, the researcher can help keep discussions productive, even when emotions run high.

Example

Learning from mistakes – presenting critical findings to policymakers

This example recounts a challenging experience where the research team presented critical findings from a long-term academic project on human rights issues to a group of approximately ten senior policymakers. The project did not involve these policymakers in its development stages, but the final outputs directly critiqued their institution's practices, particularly regarding human rights compliance.

The presentation, aimed at highlighting gaps and areas of concern within the institution, was met with resistance. As the research team delivered harsh critiques, the policymakers became increasingly hostile, defensive, and dismissive. This experience underscored the need for careful framing of critiques and balancing critical insights with constructive, solutions-focused feedback, especially in high-stakes settings with senior officials.
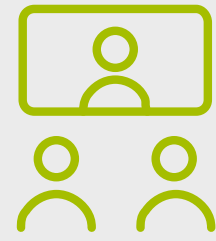
Engagement steps

The research team completed a long-term academic study on human rights practices within the institution. Given the academic nature of the project, there was limited collaboration or consultation with the policymakers throughout the process, which in hindsight contributed to a lack of alignment and understanding between the research team and the audience.

During the presentation, the research team delivered straightforward, uncompromising critiques regarding human rights violations and policy gaps within the institution. The feedback was framed in a way that highlighted failings without contextualising them in terms of broader standards or offering mitigating perspectives. This approach was taken with the intent of honesty but inadvertently intensified the defensiveness of the audience.

Instead of framing critiques in terms of missed international standards or broader best practices, the research team presented findings as direct criticisms of the institution's actions. This approach resulted in a perception of blame, which led to increasing hostility from the policymakers. As the presentation continued, the policymakers' resistance became evident, with many appearing visibly uncomfortable and defensive.

The Q&A session turned tense as multiple policymakers responded with dismissive comments. The researchers, who had travelled from different countries specifically for this presentation, grew increasingly frustrated with how the session was unfolding. The lack of respect and openness from the policymakers was disheartening, especially considering the time and effort invested in the research and presentation.

Success factors

This experience highlighted key factors for successful engagement with policymakers, serving as a lesson on what not to do. Critical practices include involving policymakers early to build alignment and reduce defensiveness, framing critiques around international standards to keep feedback constructive, and balancing criticism with positive acknowledgements to foster goodwill, even if identifying positives is challenging. It is also essential to anticipate and calmly handle defensive or hostile reactions, ensuring the dialogue remains focused on solutions rather than confrontation.

Do

- engage policymakers early to foster alignment;

- use international standards as a neutral framework for discussing policy gaps;

- remain composed and professional in the face of hostility, redirecting to constructive discussion;

- offer actionable solutions for improvement alongside critiques to make feedback more palatable.

Don't

- present critiques as direct accusations, which can create defensiveness;

- focus solely on negative findings without acknowledging any achievements, if applicable;

- take hostile reactions personally; keep the discussion focused on outcomes;

- underestimate the importance of framing; how issues are presented can influence receptiveness.

Effective communication of indicator-based research: a clear and accessible approach

Contributing INNOVATE partner: MPG Migration Policy Group

Objectives, basic principles & potential impact

In this good practice, we share the national and EU level dissemination strategy of MPG's flagship Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX). This tool is widely used by researchers and policymakers alike, thanks to a clear strategy of engagement with policymakers which matured over the years. Our recommendations informed by this experience highlight the importance of easily digestible communication material, including visuals to present diagnostics, comparisons and highlighting good practices. Our engagement strategy also rests upon multi-level engagement with an extended network and a constructive language of mild 'naming and shaming', to point out policy gaps while providing realistic and straightforward policy recommendations. These priorities have proven to be useful in establishing the 'brand', pushing for an alternative framing of integration in a highly securitised policy environment surrounding migration, and becoming a reliable partner in promoting actual policy change.

This example closes the research policy gap by highlighting the importance of evidence-based policy recommendations, where evidence is produced through a rigorous project with an extended network of researchers, and disseminated in a way to ensure policymaker engagement from lowest to higher levels. The following specific priorities should be considered in reaching policymakers:

1. **Provide good evidence/diagnostics**: Clearly lay out the state of the current policy frameworks.

2. **Easy to digest visual communication tools**: Produce and disseminate visual material nicely summarising findings, such as infographics and maps informed by evidence/statistics.

3. **Communicate importance and potential impact**: Outline the importance of taking action in the given policy area and potential impacts on outcomes.

4. **Provide alternative and realistic policy options**: Here comparisons with other national contexts with similar challenges are very useful.

5. **Consider feasibility**: Rather than targeting a distant ideal, address easy "low hanging fruits" to fix.

6. **Provide examples from familiar cases**: Consider the constraints of the policymakers in a given national context and provide examples from similar contexts, from previous policies in the same national context and even local good practices from home.

7. **Adopt a constructive language**: Address areas with room for improvement rather that major deficiencies.

8. **Identify stakeholders**: Specify who should be responsible for implementing each recommendation to facilitate accountability and collaboration.

9. **Provide a roadmap**: The policy recommendations should feature starting points for policy makers to improve policy.

Example

The dissemination of regularly updated MIPEX scores

The Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) is a unique tool which measures policies to integrate migrants in countries across six continents, including all EU Member States, other European countries (Albania, Iceland, Moldova, North Macedonia, Norway, Russia, Serbia, Switzerland, Turkey, the UK and Ukraine), Asian countries (China, India, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, UAE), North American countries (Canada, Mexico and the US), South American countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile), South Africa, and Australia and New Zealand in Oceania. Policy indicators have been developed to create a rich, multi-dimensional picture of migrants' opportunities to participate in society. In the fifth edition (MIPEX 2020), we created a core set of indicators that have been updated for the period 2014-2019 (see methodology) and are currently being updated for 2024.

Launched in 2004, MIPEX has been the first indicator-based, international comparative monitoring of integration policies conducted by MPG. More recently instruments like the refugee integration NIEM National Integration Evaluation (--> see section 3, practice 'Helping policymakers to monitor their integration policies'), the REGIN regional-level MIPEX-R, the WholeComm local-level MIPEX-L, or most recently the New Europeans Participation Policy Index, have complemented this research strand.

MIPEX is a useful tool to evaluate and compare what governments are doing to promote the integration of migrants in all the countries analysed. The index informs and engages key policy actors about how to use indicators to improve integration governance and policy effectiveness. To that end, the project identifies and measures integration policies and identifies the links between integration policies, outcomes and public opinion, drawing on international scientific studies.

Thanks to the relevance and rigor of its indicators, MIPEX has been recognised as a common quick reference guide across Europe. Policymakers, NGOs, researchers, and European and international institutions are using its data not only to understand and compare national integration policies, but also to improve standards for equal treatment. While revealing past policy changes, it also allows to assess the impact of policy changes as they occur or create scenarios to experiment with different ways to improve a country's score.

Engagement steps and success factors

To enhance the dissemination impact, tailored outputs were produced for national and international contexts and the MIPEX website was enhanced for a user-friendly experience. The global results are portrayed in an interactive map interface where different years, regions, and dimensions can be portrayed separately and comparatively. Key comparative findings were illustrated in the interactive MIPEX webpage as a landing page and as a separate policy note with very clear recommendations.

For each scored country, a country sheet is produced which encompasses the trends over the years, evaluation current state of development across all eight dimensions as well as very clear policy recommendations on how to improve the areas where they fall behind. This information was embedded in press releases and standardized slides to be used in presentations.

Several country launches were planned in scored countries to communicate the main findings and recommendations with the policy makers and NGO community in collaboration with MPG's national networks. These launches were strategically timed to coincide with key policy events in each country, such as discussions on integration policy, elections, and parliamentary or regional events focused on migrant issues.

For example, the recent launch of the Finnish country report for the 2020-2024 period was held during their national integration event in Turku, in collaboration with the Moniheli Network of Multicultural Associations, a leading NGO in migrant integration. The hybrid event, attended by 1,000 people in person and 500 online, included a wide range of stakeholders, both public and private. To ensure the launch was relevant to the national context, the results were linked to ongoing policy debates, such as language and integration requirements for naturalisation, with specific MIPEX data highlighting these issues. The presentation also showcased changes over time and compared Finland's policies with neighbouring countries, Sweden and Denmark, which serve as important benchmarks. Policy recommendations focused on areas of weakness were complemented by discussions on the challenges of maintaining inclusive policies when faced with the changing political environment (i e increasing impact of far-right political parties).

Following the country launches, global scores are presented at both EU-level and international events, with a strong emphasis on comparing these scores, highlighting trends over time, and discussing the challenges to migrant integration.

These discussions also explore the potential impact of policies on social cohesion between migrant and local communities, migrant well-being, trust in national institutions, and integration into the labour market, among other factors.

Some of these engagements were public events, enabling interaction with a broad range of stakeholders, while others were more targeted briefings at policy-maker events held at international or regional levels, such as those hosted by the European Commission, European Parliament, UNHCR, ILO, or GIZ. These briefings allowed ministerial experts to be informed about the necessary steps ahead for inclusive policies with a very constructive language also emphasizing the positive aspects of their integration policies. In parallel, the data was made publicly available on the website, and key findings and recommendations were widely distributed.

Impact and lessons learned

As a result of this structured dissemination efforts MIPEX has become a tool, widely cited in academic and policy circles, frequently referred in national and global media and a flagship project allowing MPG to extend its expertise on indicator-based research with complementary indexes (NIEM, REGIN, MIPEX-L, forthcoming FAIR Migrant Return Index). Even years after an update, MPG is asked to present MIPEX at various policy venues (at least 2-3 times a month) and discuss the findings in the wake of new developments in the media (at least 1-2 media requests per month). Researchers refer to its findings with hundreds of citations every year while presenting policy recommendations based on its comparative focus.

Due to its rigorous yet easy to digest methodology, it now helps to set the agenda in global and national discussions of migrant integration policy, steering the debate away from more securitised avenues of decision making. For example, at the recent Finnish national launch, several attendees noted that MIPEX inspired and set the benchmark for policy discussions over the following three days. All policy options were assessed based on their potential impact on the country's MIPEX score. Following the presentation, several national and local Finnish policymakers reached out to MIPEX researchers for additional data. The updated results were also featured in two major Finnish media outlets, one as a news story and the other as a special podcast. Similarly, at an event organised by DG Home of the European Commission, which was attended by integration ministries, a preview of results on political participation (linked to MPG's new Participation Policy Index) new sparked an engaging debate, especially among countries that lag behind in this area, prompting an active search for ways to improve.

Learn more

Migrant Integration Policy Index: results, data, methodology & history

Other comparative policy indices developed or co-developed by MPG:

NIEM National Integration Evaluation Mechanism

REGIN/MIPEX-R migrant integration governance at the regional level

Whole-COMM/MIPEX-L pilot local-level integration policy index

New Europeans Initiative Political Participation Policy Index