



Council of the
European Union

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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Permanent Representatives Committee/Council

Subject: *Preparation of the Council (Competitiveness (Internal Market, Industry, Research and Space)) on 1-2 December 2022*
Science as an instrument to facilitate policy making in the Member States
- Policy debate

Delegations will find attached a Presidency note on "Science as an instrument to facilitate policy making in the Member States" with a view to the policy debate at the Competitiveness Council on 2 December 2022.

**PREIDENCY NOTE FOR THE POLICY DEBATE ON “SCIENCE AS AN INSTRUMENT
TO FACILITATE POLICY MAKING IN THE MEMBER STATES”**

SCENE SETTER

In October 2022, the Commission published a Staff Working Document (SWD) on “Supporting and Connecting Policymaking in the Member States with Scientific Research”, developed jointly by Directorates-General Joint Research Centre (DG JRC) and Research and Innovation (DG RTD), and supported by the Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support (DG REFORM). The document invites the EU Member States to debate and consider building capacity for better use of scientific knowledge in their policy making.

The document lays out a rationale for building capacity for science for policy, identifies the key challenges for the use of scientific knowledge in policy making both on the side of knowledge-supplying scientific and knowledge-using policy making communities, and draws attention to policy frameworks, support instruments, and good practice at both EU and national levels that help address these challenges.¹

The Covid-19 pandemic underlined both the value of science for policy and the challenges in using it. Scientific knowledge, from virology and epidemiological modelling to behavioural science, was critical to map out and appraise policy options. Yet, variable, poorly coordinated science for policy led to a situation where “*evidence was patchy, sometimes contradictory and often confusing as a result of different messaging in different Member States*”.² These lessons drawn by the Commission were reflected in the Council’s call for better coordination between health experts and policy-makers in national capitals and Brussels, and for support for translating academic research into clinical practice.³

¹ For more details, see the Annex “SWD in a Nutshell”.

² [Communication Drawing the Early Lessons from the Covid-19 Pandemic.](#)

³ [Council Conclusions on Strengthening the European Health Union.](#)

With Covid-19’s sharp reminder of the need for better science-for-policy capacity, research and innovation (R&I) policy has moved centre stage. In fact, R&I policies support activities in science for policy. In November 2021, the Council recommended “*increasing the impact of R&I by transforming Europe’s leadership in knowledge creation by making use of the knowledge in society, for instance through products, services, processes and solutions that support (...) evidence-informed policymaking*” in its recommendations on Pact for Research and Innovation⁴. More recently, in June 2022⁵, the Council suggested as one of the guiding principle for research assessment to take into account the “*diverse career paths and all research and innovation activities, including (...) support for evidence-informed policymaking*”. The recent discussions at the Council level on knowledge valorisation also touched upon the idea to strengthen structure, processes, and practices in the use of research results and scientific knowledge for designing and implementing public policies.

The recognition of the importance of science for policy in R&I policy is a timely response to the increasing demand for scientific knowledge across all the sectorial policy domains. At the EU level, the update of the Better Regulation agenda⁶ identifies scientific evidence as one “*cornerstone*” of Better Regulation, and identifies the need to reach out to scientific communities as early as possible to encourage them to submit relevant scientific evidence at the beginning of the process. In May 2021, the Council concluded⁷ that robust, evidence-based decision-making is a “*key requirement*” for anticipating complex policy problems, such as those linked to climate or new technologies. Moreover, in a recent Commission Staff Working Document, the “*systematic consideration of scientific knowledge*” is described as important for public administrations to become fit for present and future with its wicked problems.⁸

⁴ [Council Recommendation on a Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe.](#)

⁵ [Council Conclusions on Research Assessment and Implementation of Open Science.](#)

⁶ [Communication Better Regulation: Joining Forces to Make Better Laws.](#)

⁷ [Council Conclusions on Data Technologies to Improve ‘Better Regulation’.](#)

⁸ [Commission Staff Working Document Supporting Public Administrations in EU Member States to Deliver Reforms and Prepare for the Future.](#)

National reforms and capacity-building initiatives introduced by the EU Member States demonstrate that these EU initiatives resonate across Europe. Recovery and Resilience Plans in several EU Member States (e.g., Czechia, Croatia, Greece, Malta and Romania) include provisions for better data and evidence use in policy making. Further actions typically include the establishment of novel analytical and/or knowledge mobilising and translating bodies and networks in support of Governments and Parliaments (e.g., Estonia, Finland, Lithuania, Portugal and Spain).

Moreover, a project on “*Building Capacity for Evidence-Informed Policymaking in Governance and Public Administration in a Post-Pandemic Europe*” funded by the Commission’s Technical Support Instrument involving Government and scientific institutions from seven EU Member States has been launched in early November. Running until October 2024, the project will provide country roadmaps with policy recommendations to improve their national science-for-policy ecosystems, capacity-building exercises for practitioners, and international mutual learning exercises.

QUESTIONS FOR THE POLICY DEBATE

- (1) What further measures could be considered at national level to increase public trust in the use of scientific research to support policy making?
- (2) How can Research Ministers support connecting policy making with scientific research in other sectoral areas (e.g., climate, energy, security, defence, health, etc.)?
- (3) How can the Commission further support the debate and policy development in the EU Member States in the field of science for policy – both in terms of stimulating demand for scientific input (e.g., through public sector innovation, better regulation, foresight, etc.) and promoting the provision of policy-relevant knowledge (e.g., in the context of the new European Research Area via policy dialogue, codes of practices, inter-sectoral mobility schemes, etc.)?

SWD in a Nutshell

The SWD provides an analysis of:

- (1) the rationale for science for policy capacity building;
- (2) the challenges at the science-policy interface; as well as
- (3) good practice cases, supportive EU policy frameworks, existing professional networks, and support instruments that enable the EU Member States to address the challenges.

Building capacity for science for policy is important for several reasons. In addition to developing capacity to address today's complex policy problems, from global pandemics to energy crises and geopolitical challenges, the document identifies that independent and transparent science-for-policy processes strengthen democracy in Europe. Most citizens want scientists to engage in political debates.⁹

Three challenges to better use of scientific evidence for policy making have been identified:

- (1) lack of connections between scientific and policy making communities, including missing boundary organisations and networks and/or weak coordination between established actors;
- (2) missing professional competences for providing and using science for policy on the part of both scientists and policy-makers, including e.g., scientific and data literacy among policy-makers and an understanding of policy processes and science communication skills among scientists; and
- (3) weak understanding of the limitations in using science for policy making and the need for a good governance of evidence use in policy making, including the recognition that science cannot resolve value trade-offs and the need for transparency and inclusiveness in science advice processes.

⁹ See the [Special Eurobarometer 516: European Citizens' Knowledge and Attitudes Towards Science and Technology](#), April-May 2021, ISBN: 978-92-76-41143-7.

The document also points to concrete policies, resources, and support instruments provided and facilitated by the Commission to address these challenges, including:

- (1) technical support, expert assessments, and mutual learning instruments;
 - (2) pan-European professional and organisational networks working on science-for-policy issues;
 - (3) conceptual and evaluation tools for science-for-policy capacity;
 - (4) inter-sectoral mobility schemes, which would allow mobility between academia and the public sector; and
 - (5) numerous fora for broader, cross-country discussions and practice exchanges both in R&I policy and public administration reform.
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