# SPRING

# Toolkit for Evidence-Informed Policymaking in Migrant Integration

**Section 1
An Introduction to Evidence-Informed Policymaking and This Toolkit**

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The full toolkit can be found at:
www.migrationpolicy.org/research/toolkit-evidence-policymaking

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**SPRING** is a EU-funded project focusing on the integration of recently arrived migrants in the context of the large-scale arrivals of refugees and other migrants since 2014. It aims to develop a toolbox to improve the innovation, effectiveness and sustainability of the work done by Europe's integration stakeholders at national, regional and local levels. The project mobilises significant research, networks and communications capacity and gathers, summarises and shares the best available research and evidence on the effectiveness, innovation, transferability, sustainability and evaluation methods for integration policies and practice.

**The SPRING Platform [integrationpractices.eu](integrationpractices.eu) is the main hub to make the project results available to practitioners as well as to the general public.**

## Acknowledgements

# 1.   An Introduction to Evidence-Informed Policymaking and This Toolkit

## Key takeaways

★ Evidence-informed policymaking is a process that embraces evidence at each stage of the policy cycle. This requires policymakers to use evidence to inform policy design and implementation, to evaluate existing policies' effectiveness, and to disseminate evidence and recommendations from those policy evaluations. Effective evidence-informed policymaking also requires policymakers to engage relevant stakeholders and allocate sufficient funding throughout the process.

★ Evidence-informed policymaking can make policies more cost-effective, promote better policy outcomes and prevent failures, improve learning from contemporary and past experiences, optimise decisions between policy options, and strengthen accountability, legitimacy, and transparency.

★ This toolkit, which aims to promote an evidence culture in migrant integration policymaking, offers a range of essential resources and tools for policymakers and practitioners as they navigate each phase of the policy cycle.

Research, data, and lessons learnt from past experiences are powerful tools in any policy area. By putting important resources at the fingertips of immigrant integration policymakers and other stakeholders, this toolkit aims to help them embrace evidence at each stage of the policymaking cycle and thus make integration policies more effective. Importantly, though this toolkit refers to evidence-informed *policymaking,* many of the practices and resources it offers can also be used to make projects, programmes, and initiatives that promote migrant integration more effective and more strongly rooted in an evidence base.

### *In this section, you will learn…*

- what evidence-informed policymaking is;

- why building a culture of evidence matters in the migrant integration field; and

- how this toolkit can help policymakers and other integration stakeholders embrace an evidence culture.
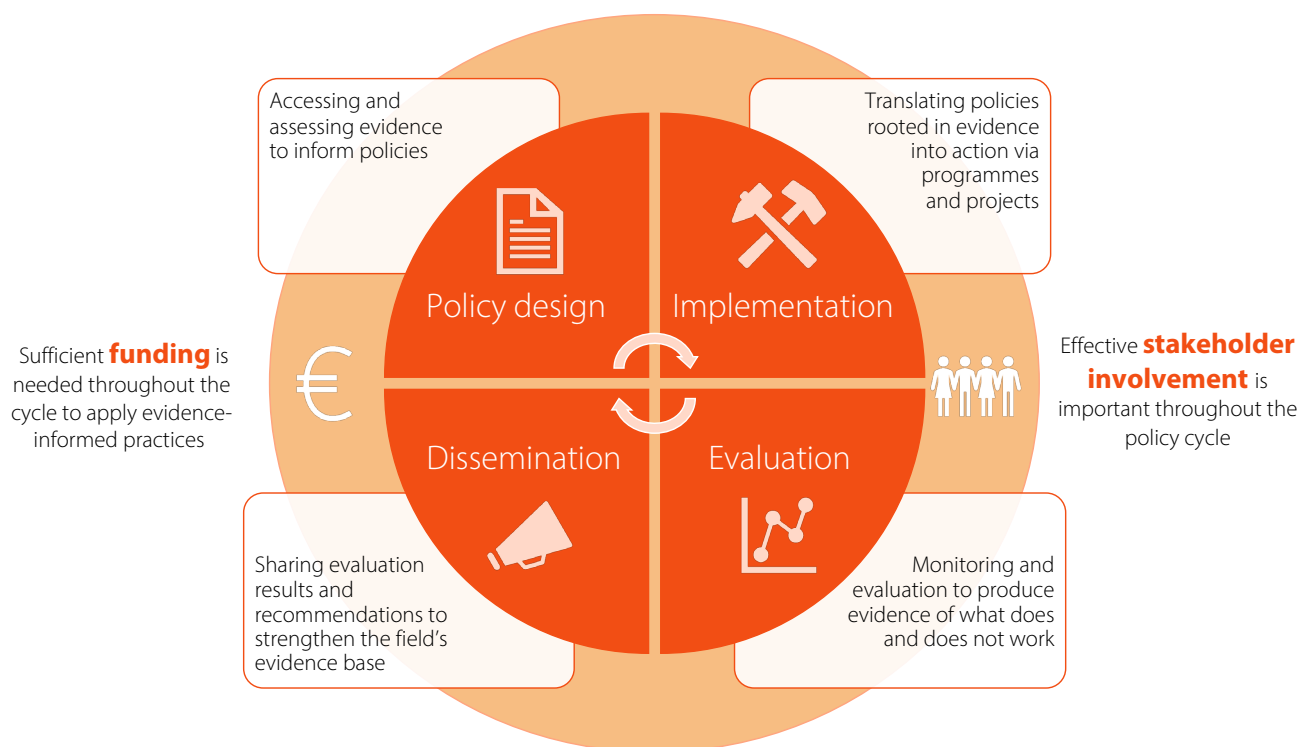
# 1.1    What is evidence-informed policymaking?

As described by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development,[1]

> '*Evidence-informed policymaking can be defined as a process whereby multiple
> sources of information, including statistics, data, and the best available research
> evidence and evaluations, are consulted before making a decision to plan,
> implement, and (where relevant) alter public policies and programmes.*'

Most efforts to promote an evidence culture in the migrant integration field have focused on the evaluation stage of the policy cycle, but for evidence to truly inform policy, it needs to permeate each stage of the cycle (see Figure 1.1). First, in the **policy design** phase, policymakers should be able to easily access existing evidence, assess its quality and relevance, and use it to inform the design of new policies. Second, in the **implementation** phase, policymakers should be able to translate evidence-informed policies from paper into practice in ways that improve integration outcomes. Next, political willingness and specialised skills are needed to **evaluate** existing policies and create new evidence. And lastly, the evidence collected should be **disseminated** to fuel mutual learning among policymakers and other stakeholders that supports improvements to existing policies and shapes the design of future ones. Throughout this cycle, adequate **funding** and **stakeholder involvement** are crucial.

FIGURE 1.1
**An evidence-informed policymaking cycle**



Accessing and assessing evidence to inform policies

Translating policies rooted in evidence into action via programmes and projects

Policy design

Implementation

Sufficient **funding** is needed throughout the cycle to apply evidence-informed practices

Effective **stakeholder involvement** is important throughout the policy cycle

Dissemination

Evaluation

Sharing evaluation results and recommendations to strengthen the field's evidence base

Monitoring and evaluation to produce evidence of what does and does not work

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1    Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *Building Capacity for Evidence-Informed Policy-Making: Lessons from Country Experiences* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2020), 9.

It should be noted that while Figure 1.1 presents the policy cycle as a neat process that is conceptually useful when discussing these elements, in reality policymaking is often more complex. The different stages of the policy cycle do not always take place sequentially, and some stages may take a longer time to complete than others, occur simultaneously, or be skipped altogether. Political, social, and economic factors can also affect how the policy cycle plays out. To add to the complexity, policymaking involves a variety of actors who, through their formal or informal involvement, aim to influence policy.[2]

## 1.2   What are the benefits of evidence-informed policymaking?

Using evidence to inform policymaking helps governments learn what works and under which conditions, and prepares them to meet policy challenges both old and new—all while ensuring that public funds are used as effectively and efficiently as possible. In the integration field, it can help promote the well-being of both migrants and the societies in which they live. Table 1.1 provides a brief overview of some of the main benefits of embracing an evidence culture.

TABLE 1.1

**Key benefits of evidence-informed policymaking**

| Benefit | Description |
|---|---|
| **Optimised decisions between policy options** | • Evidence allows policymakers to weigh policy options and assess their potential impacts. |
| **Enhanced policy learning** | • Policymakers can use evaluations to assess programme performance and identify how to improve or whether to suspend policies.<br>• Policy evaluation is an important tool for feedback and learning, both within and across policy initiatives. |
| **Cost-effectiveness** | • Policy evaluation can reduce wasteful spending by establishing what works and what does not.<br>• When decisionmakers have information on the costs and cost-effectiveness of different measures, they can select those that make the best use of public funds and efficiently reach their policy goals. |
| **Better policy outcomes** | • Policies that are based on systematic evidence of what works produce better outcomes for the individuals and communities involved.<br>• Policy failures are more easily avoided when policies are rooted in evidence. |
| **Strengthened accountability, legitimacy, and transparency** | • Evidence-informed policymaking encourages transparency and accountability by comparing the initial goals of a policy or programme with its results, as determined through evaluations. |

Sources: Michael Howlett, 'Policy Analytical Capacity and Evidence-Based Policy-Making: Lessons from Canada', *Canadian Public Administration* 52, no. 2 (2009): 153–175; Mark Bovens, Paul 't Hart, and Sanneke Kuipers, 'The Politics of Policy Evaluation', in *The Oxford Handbook of Public Policy*, eds. Robert Goodin, Michael Moran, and Martin Rein (Oxford, UK: Oxford Academic, 2008); Pew Charitable Trusts and MacArthur Foundation, *Evidence-Based Policymaking: A Guide for Effective Government* (Washington, DC: Pew-MacArthur Results First Initiative, 2014); Andrew Feldman and Rebecca Maynard, 'The Evidence-Based Policy Revolution Waiting to Happen', Government Executive, 30 January 2020; Martin Baldwin-Edwards, Brad K. Blitz, and Heaven Crawley, 'The Politics of Evidence-Based Policy in Europe's "Migration Crisis"', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45, no. 12 (2019): 2139–2155; Sophie Sutcliffe and Julius Court, *Evidence-Based Policymaking: What Is It? How Does It Work? What Relevance for Developing Countries?* (London: UK Overseas Development Institute, 2005).

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2   International Network for Advancing Science and Policy (INASP), *Evidence-Informed Policy Making (EIPM) Toolkit* (Oxford: INASP, 2020).

# 1.3 Why is a stronger evidence culture needed in migrant integration policymaking?

Despite a surge in research and knowledge on immigrant integration, the integration field is far behind other policy areas when it comes to embracing an evidence culture and key evidence gaps remain. Some progress has been made in trying to establish a causal link between integration policies and outcomes, but these studies often have a narrow focus on specific aspects of integration (namely, labour market mobility, education, social inclusion, and political participation), leaving gaps in others (such as nationality and long-term residence, family reunification, and antidiscrimination).[3] Most of these efforts are also taking place in just a handful of countries that already have a stronger national commitment to evidence-informed policymaking.

Throughout the integration policymaking process—from agenda-setting to policy design, and from implementation to evaluation—opportunities to learn from what works are still being missed. The barriers that have hindered integration policymakers' embrace of an evidence culture include:

- **The politicised nature of migrant integration policymaking.** Fears that evaluations would draw more attention to an already contentious policy area have often dampened policymakers' commitment to an evidence culture.

- **The need for a quick response in times of crisis.** This urgency makes it difficult to leverage existing knowledge for policy design and to set up a monitoring system for new policies.

- **Frequent shifts in policy aims and actors.** This can include changes to integration policy goals (e.g., assimilation vs. integration approaches), target groups (e.g., based on migrants' nationality, background, or reason for moving), and government actors in charge of integration (e.g., which ministry and at what governance level), all of which can obstruct institutional learning and the measurement of policies' long-term effects.

- **Insufficient stakeholder engagement.** Integration programme beneficiaries, practitioners, and other key stakeholders have valuable insights to share yet are often not consulted and involved in the evidence-informed policy cycle.

- **A range of methodological challenges.** This includes the frequent inability to establish a control group in studies, the potential overlapping effects of different policies and programmes migrants may benefit from, and challenges accounting for a high level of diversity in data collection tools—all of which make it difficult for evaluations to establish direct causality between a certain integration policy and observed outcomes.

- **The wide range of issues and actors involved in migrant integration.** The fact that integration cuts across policy areas (from housing and education to the labour market) and involves multiple levels of government, civil society, and other actors creates obstacles to mutual learning, both within and across countries.

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3    Özge Bilgili, Thomas Huddleston, and Anne-Linde Joki, *The Dynamics between Integration Policies and Outcomes: A Synthesis of the Literature* (N.p.: Migrant Integration Policy Index, 2015).

- **Resource and capacity gaps.** These affect every stage of the evidence-informed policymaking cycle and are often particularly acute in organisations on the front lines of immigrant integration, leaving little capacity for data collection and evaluation.

Despite these obstacles, integration policymakers can draw from an ever-increasing body of evidence to design more effective policies and leverage the growing number of networks that facilitate mutual learning. This toolkit features many initiatives and resources that have pushed the field forward—from ambitious projects to map evidence and make it easily accessible (including the SPRING project), to the innovative use of (quasi-)experimental study designs to test whether integration policies are effectively meeting their goals.

> *Want to learn more* about the state of play of evidence-informed policymaking in the integration field? Check out:
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> ★ The Migration Policy Institute Europe's policy brief Promoting Evidence-Informed Immigrant Integration Policymaking, which is also part of the Horizon 2020 Sustainable Practices of Integration (SPRING) project, covers recent developments in the field, challenges to creating an evidence culture, and opportunities to address them.
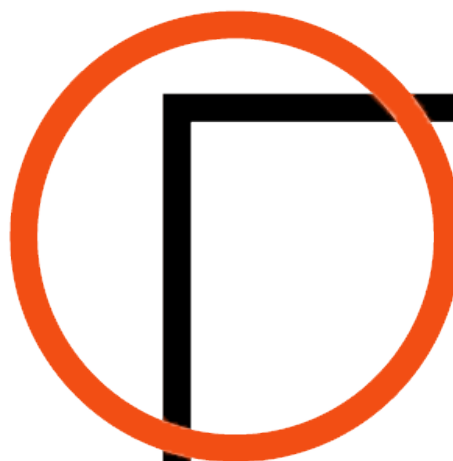
## 1.4    How to use this toolkit

This toolkit aims to promote an evidence culture in migrant integration policymaking by placing essential resources and tools at the fingertips of policymakers and practitioners. A wealth of resources and tools exist, yet these can be hard to find and are at times overly technical. This toolkit maps these resources, provides tips on how to use them, and suggests strategies to infuse evidence into all stages of the policy cycle.

The toolkit is organised into different sections based on the different elements of the policy cycle described above. It first presents tools and strategies to infuse evidence into each phase of the policy cycle (Sections 2–4), before turning to two issues that are important throughout the cycle: funding (Section 5) and stakeholder engagement (Section 6). The toolkit can be used in multiple ways, including chronologically as a training guide or as a reference document to look up information on specific topics. The sections of this document cover the following topics:

- **Section 1: An Introduction to Evidence-Informed Policymaking and This Toolkit.** This section introduces the aims and structure of the toolkit. It also provides an overview of what evidence-informed policymaking is and why it would benefit migrant integration policymaking.

- **Section 2: Finding and Assessing Evidence to Support Policy Design and Implementation.** This section provides an overview of different types of evidence and how users can search for and assess the quality and relevance of available data and information. In doing so, it highlights different databases that can be used to gather evidence on integration. Because these resources can support both the design and implementation of policies, and because these steps are closely linked, this section covers these two phases of the policy cycle together.

- **Section 3: Evaluation to Strengthen Ongoing and Future Integration Programmes.** This section highlights the benefits of policy evaluation, reviews the pros and cons of different approaches to and types of evaluation, and provides tools to help integration stakeholders carry out and commission evaluations.

- **Section 4: Amplifying Impact through the Dissemination of Evidence.** This section explores different strategies to maximise the impact of evaluation findings and other types of evidence, with a focus on ensuring that evidence reaches its target audience and creates change.

- **Section 5: Using Funding to Promote an Evidence Culture.** This section provides an overview of funding opportunities, a practical guide on how to most effectively use funding, and examples of how different funding models function and how they can contribute to the development of an evidence culture and to more effective integration policies.

- **Section 6: Engaging Stakeholders in Evidence-Informed Integration Policymaking.** This section explores why stakeholder engagement is essential in integration policymaking, who should be considered a key stakeholder, when to seek engagement, and what the ideal levels of engagement are. As part of this, the section offers practical examples and tips on how to improve stakeholder engagement.

Suggested citation: Slootjes, Jasmijn and Maria Belen Zanzuchi. 2023. *Toolkit for Evidence-Informed Policymaking in Migrant Integration*. Brussels: Migration Policy Institute Europe and SPRING Project.