

Summary report on the
**Advanced workshops
on policy briefs for
researchers, policy
developers and policy-
makers**

Virtual Meetings
March–June 2022



**World Health
Organization**

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE **Eastern Mediterranean**

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Eastern Mediterranean Region

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1. Introduction

WHO has taken several steps in recent years to enhance the institutional capacities of the countries in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region in the use of evidence and data for policy-making. In 2019, a landmark resolution (EM/RC66/R.5)¹ was endorsed by the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean on enhancing national institutional capacity for the use of evidence and data in policy-making for health of the countries in the Region. In 2020, a regional action plan² was published to guide the implementation of the resolution and advance the institutionalization of evidence-informed policy-making in the Region.

The regional action plan includes a comprehensive set of strategies and objectives that apply to both WHO and its Member States, and one of the strategies mandates WHO to enhance the development and use of policy briefs. Policy briefs represent one of the most effective evidence products, as they present a concise summary of the best available evidence to be considered for the development of a policy.

Policy briefs can be used to address a variety of questions raised during the policy-making cycle, such as:

- What are the main priority issues/problems for decision-making?
- What are the potential effective and safe policy options?

¹ WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean resolution EM/RC66/R.5 on developing national institutional capacity for evidence-informed policy-making for health. Cairo: WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean; 2019.

² Regional action plan for the implementation of the framework for action to improve national institutional capacity for the use of evidence in health policy-making in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (2020–2024). Cairo: WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean; 2021.

- Are the policy options cost-effective and affordable?
- Are the policy options feasible to implement and sustainable?

Countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region face a number of challenges when it comes to the use of policy briefs. Limited capacity for their development is paired with difficulties in aligning policy briefs with the needs of policy-makers. Moreover, policy-makers may not be necessarily willing to use them, leading to low demand for such products. Enhancing capacities for the development and use of policy briefs is therefore paramount.

In line with the objectives outlined in the regional action plan, WHO arranged a series of capacity-building workshops focused on policy briefs. Specifically, in October 2021, a virtual workshop on the development of policy briefs was held.¹ During the workshop, an in-depth overview of the various elements of the policy-making process was presented, and the policy brief was introduced as an effective resource to informing policy-making decisions.

To further strengthen the capacities of Member States, two additional workshops were organized, each designed to be more advanced and tailored for distinct target groups. The first of these was advanced training of trainers for researchers and policy developers, which took place in March 2022. The workshop focused on the methodological aspects of developing a policy brief. The second workshop, held in June 2022, was an advanced workshop for policy-makers on utilizing policy

¹ [Summary report on the workshop for capacity-building for the development of policy briefs: general principles for NEDtP members](#). Cairo: WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean; 2022.

briefs in health policy-making and provided practical insights into the application of policy briefs within the policy-making process.

The workshops were inaugurated by Dr Rana Hajjeh, Director of Programme Management, and Dr Arash Rashidian, Director of the Department of Science, Information and Dissemination, at the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean. Both workshops used real-life examples and lessons learnt and provided opportunities to participants to interact with the lecturers and share their experiences.

The lectures were delivered by regional and international experts, including and Dr Christopher Colvin (University of Virginia), Dr Fadi El-Jardali (American University of Beirut), Dr Mehrnaz Kheirandish (WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean), Dr John Lavis (McMaster University), Dr Olufemi Oladapo (WHO headquarters), Dr Jan van der Meulen (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine) and Dr Arash Rashidian (WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean).

The workshops were virtually attended by over 60 participants, including members of the regional [Network of Institutions for Evidence and Data to Policy \(NEDtP\)](#), policy-makers and researchers from ministries of health and other institutions, and WHO staff.

2. Summary of discussions

Key topics for researchers: Advanced training of trainers for researchers and policy developers

The workshop started with a lecture on the use of systematic reviews of effects in policy brief development. When developing a policy, policy-makers need to evaluate the best policy options available for the main

priority issue. To determine the comparative effectiveness of policy options, systematic reviews are required to be conducted. The focus of the lecture was on quality appraisal to identify the best systematic reviews for the selection of policy options. Helpful tools were introduced, together with the factors that may raise or lower the quality of evidence and the grading criteria. The importance of consolidating systematic findings with local evidence was also highlighted. During the lecture, the participants were given the opportunity to take part in exercises that presented different scenarios and different options to evaluate the quality of systematic reviews.

There was then a presentation on qualitative evidence and qualitative synthesis, as well as their use in policy briefs. Qualitative research can be used to answer a very wide variety of questions; therefore, it can be used in several parts of policy briefs. For instance, it can provide information on what the problem is, where it comes from, how it is understood locally and what factors might affect implementation. Tools for the critical appraisal of qualitative evidence synthesis findings were introduced and explained.

A presentation was then given on the use of cost and economic evaluation in policy brief development. An economic evaluation study was defined as the comparative analysis of the costs and consequences of two or more possible options. The main steps for conducting economic evaluations were outlined, along with realistic examples on the use of economic evaluations in decision-making for key policy questions.

This was followed by an introduction to the key elements of national data and surveys, and real-life examples of their use to develop policy briefs. It was highlighted that they play a role in better understanding the processes and outcomes of specific interventions.

Participants were then asked to identify possible topics for policy briefs for which national data and survey can provide relevant evidence. When selecting a policy option, it is important to consider the factors that may negatively affect or facilitate the policy's implementation. Many frameworks are available to identify and organize these factors and may be used in the selection of the best policy option(s). For instance, a conceptual framework may be used to categorize and organize all the factors affecting the implementation. A theoretical framework provides explanations and linkages among factors.

Lastly, there was discussion on how to include the monitoring and evaluation of identified policy options in the policy brief.

Key topics for policy makers: Advanced workshop for policy-makers on utilizing policy briefs in health policy-making

The workshop started with an overview on policy briefs and how to develop them. Clear definitions of “policy”, “evidence” and “policy briefs” were followed by a description of how policy briefs can be used to address the main categories of questions that most policy-makers may have. Examples of best and poor practices were presented, together with a WHO-recommended template for their development.

The workshop proceeded with a focus on the evidence support system and the role of policy briefs within the system. The evidence support system consists of processes to prioritize policy-makers' needs, and to package evidence that meets these needs within set time constraints. A policy brief integrates different forms of evidence into a timely, demand-driven, contextualized and equity-focused evidence product.

Policy dialogues and their key features were then introduced. While policy briefs are tools that synthesize the relevant evidence to be presented to policy-makers, policy dialogues ensure that the evidence is contextualized and discussed by all the relevant stakeholders. Policy-makers normally work in a time-constrained environment that does not always allow them to read and understand the latest evidence on a specific issue. On the other hand, they normally need to make rapid decisions on issues that require coordination and negotiation with more stakeholders, in different ministries and sectors.

Despite the lack of time, many policy-makers would welcome access to the best available evidence, possibly presented in a user-friendly format.

Against this backdrop, policy dialogues represent an effective approach to supporting the use of research evidence in policy-making. Policy dialogues are national meetings or a series of brief meetings that provide a platform for policy-makers and different stakeholders to address a priority policy issue, while contextualizing and discussing the latest evidence in policy briefs. These meetings facilitate the process of translating evidence into action and allow policy-makers to share their tacit knowledge and concerns, which may not necessarily be publicly available and which can significantly contribute to the decision-making process.


A series of best practices can contribute to the meetings resulting in successful outcomes. For instance, the policy dialogue's efficiency may be enhanced by making sure that stakeholders have read and understood the policy brief in advance. Conducting a power-analysis to clearly appreciate the power, interests and conflicts of interest of all the stakeholders would facilitate the creation of the most effective environment to engage them in a constructive discussion. A fair representation of all interests should be paired with transparency and

neutrality on the side of the facilitator, who would aim towards discussion and not consensus, and who would present the evidence as options to be discussed rather than imposed decisions. Other key elements that guarantee successful engagement include a good management of conflicts of interests and competing ideas, and the creation of trust, in particular in relation to the sources of evidence used.

3. Conclusions

Enhancing technical capacities for the development and use of policy briefs is a priority need in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. This is reflected in country requests to WHO to implement further capacity-building initiatives on the topic and to work jointly on the development of policy briefs. In alignment with this, WHO plans to collaborate with NEDtP members in the development of policy briefs for the Region.

All materials relevant to this workshop including presentations and recordings are accessible through the website of the Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean: [Development and use of policy briefs](https://www.emro.who.int/evidence-data-to-policy/eipm-capacity-building-programmes/policy-briefs.html) (<https://www.emro.who.int/evidence-data-to-policy/eipm-capacity-building-programmes/policy-briefs.html>).



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