

# EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY FOR SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

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*Social sustainability is becoming more and more important in many countries around the globe, and especially in Latvia, due to the increase of the share of retired people and, in recent years, restrictions of COVID-19 limitations for work: it was discovered that a big part (estimated so by different sources — State Revenue Service of Republic of Latvia, State Social Insurance Agency of Republic of Latvia, etc.) of the population in Latvia could not get support in case of limited work possibilities because their social contributions before the pandemic were very small or missing. Those aspects affect more and more the society mood, and influence state and municipality institutions to fulfil their obligations foreseen by the legislative norms, even if some of them concern only the pandemic time.*

*The aim of this paper is to explore the possibilities to increase the application of evidence-based approach in social policy making in Latvia to maintain social sustainability. The research methods used are literature review, analysis of previously conducted research results that were published as results of several projects but not prepared as scientific publications, legislative document analysis, expert interviews and statistical analysis of expert evaluation results in order to identify the main issues and opportunities in the social policy-making process and in the application of the evidence-based approach.*

*During the interviews, all experts were asked to give answers to three questions. First, the experts were asked to evaluate the significance of the main groups of stakeholders involved in the social policy making in Latvia in scale 1–10. Expert answers showed that some groups of stakeholders have more impact on decision-making policy than others (with arithmetic means of the evaluations from 4.14 till 9.43).*

*Additionally, experts were asked to evaluate the extent of application of evidence-based decision-making approach in different stages of social policy-making cycle in Latvia in scale 1–10. Expert answers showed that in all stages the application of evidence-based approach is already significant (with arithmetic means of the evaluations from 7.43 till 7.86).*

*Also, experts were asked to evaluate in scale from –2 to 2 how different policy-making aspects of evidence-based policy development influence application of evidence-based approach in policy making currently in Latvia. The results of expert interviews showed that almost all policy-making aspects are more likely to benefit rather than to impede the application of evidence-based approach to decision-making (with arithmetic means of the evaluations from –0.29 to 1.57).*

*In conclusion, the authors determine the main possibilities for improvement of the application of the evidence-based decision-making in the social policy-making process in Latvia.*

## Literature review

The terms “sustainability” and “sustainable development” have been developed to a great extent in the scientific literature in the past decades due to increasing concerns about the world ecosystem and the capacity in which human-made technologies are developing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Lisa M. Butler Harrington<sup>1</sup> has defined sustainability as a capacity to maintain or improve the state and availability of desirable materials or conditions over the long term.

United Nations (UN) World Commission for Environment and Development in 1987 published the report “Our Common Future”<sup>2</sup> that contained a definition of sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The UN World Commission determined that the main goal of sustainability is to satisfy human needs. Needs are considered the basic needs to eliminate poverty in the world and provide the opportunity to satisfy inclinations for better life.

Following the report, an important step into maintaining sustainability was taken during UN Sustainable Development Summit in New York in 2015. During this Summit, on 25 September 2015, the UN’s General Assembly adopted a Resolution “Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” that announced 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) with 169 associated targets which are integrated and indivisible<sup>3</sup>. It was envisaged to achieve these targets till 2030<sup>4</sup>. The main target areas are poverty, health, education, equity, energy, infrastructure, climate change, oceanic resources, peace, security, and good governance.

Of 17 Sustainable Development Goals 8 goals may be directly attributed to the social development. These are: (1) Reduced poverty; (3) Good health and well-being; (4) Quality education; (5) Gender equality; (8)

Decent work and economic growth; (9) Industry, innovation, and infrastructure; (10) Reduced inequalities; (16) Peace, justice and strong institutions. Others, such as, for example, goal (6) Clean water and sanitation or goal (11) Sustainable cities and communities, provide for general well-being or are not relevant for Latvia (for example, UN SDG goal (2) Zero hunger).

The Triple Bottom Line concept of three sustainability elements (economy, environment, social well-being) was developed based on the 1987 UN declaration on development by John Elkington<sup>5</sup>, which changed the way organisations measure development and efficiency from measuring only profit to measuring the profit, social responsibility and the environmental footprint. The most recent scientific research shows that strong sustainability is possible only when the economy’s dependence from society is clearly defined.<sup>6</sup> In case all three elements are not balanced, a threat may appear of one element developing disproportionately and impacting the overall development negatively.

In the scientific literature there is no common agreed definition for social sustainability because of the many different approaches used by the scientists<sup>7</sup>. The available definitions tend to analyse the social sustainability as long-term development of society and necessary requirements to maintain the positive changes focused on solving social challenges<sup>8</sup>. Researcher Konstantinos Alexander Polomarkakis<sup>9</sup> defined social sustainability in the European Union “as a set of policies, rules and principles laid down in the EU legal order, and which aim to reinforce the social dimension of the EU as a long-term solution, ring-fencing it from any relapse into a position of hierarchical subordination to the markets [...]”. In recent scientific publications social sustainability is analysed for all fields of national economy and in most of the countries around the globe, on environment<sup>10</sup>, on health care<sup>11</sup> and other fields.

In order to achieve sustainable development on a national level, government must make evidence-based decisions to ensure that policies are implemented effectively. On the governmental level, decision-making can be impacted by political ideology, emotions<sup>12</sup>, values and/or biases<sup>13</sup>. In the management science there are two main approaches to decision-making — systematic and intuitive<sup>14</sup>. Already since the 1950s when Herbert Simon<sup>15</sup> with his theory of bounded rationality set the foundation for development of the theory of rational decision-making, it has been one of the leading systematic decision-making approaches. Rational decision-making includes such critical aspects<sup>16</sup> as defining the issue — identification of stakeholder's needs; determining specific and measurable criteria for success; analysis of alternatives — identification of all possible alternatives, analysis and evaluation; effective collection of information and quality check; comparison of the alternatives according to the criteria; receipt of feedback and necessary modifications; making the decision on the best solution for the problem. There are different approaches to the comparison of alternatives, for example, the most commonly used one in public management is cost–benefit analysis<sup>17</sup> where all the values must be expressed as financial values, which is not often suitable especially when decision-making contains complex social and economic considerations.

Evidence-based approach in policy making is being used more and more in the modern management theory. This approach is part of knowledge management theory<sup>18</sup>, and is being analysed according to the rational decision-making process where the basis for decision-making is determined by information, facts and data that are obtained by scientific methods<sup>19</sup>. Evidence is considered to be a result of scientifically substantiated methodology and statistical data analysis<sup>20</sup>. The process of evidence-based policy planning and implementation is a decision-mak-

ing cycle in which collection and evaluation of evidence to support the solution to a problem, as well as communication of these opportunities between stakeholders is an integral part<sup>21</sup>.

This approach in public management is criticised mainly because of the following restrictions<sup>22</sup>: political commitments of the government; decision-makers' lack of scientific communication and understanding of research; researchers' distance from the political context and needs. Knowledge management requires certain skills<sup>23</sup> like scientific research synthesis, management of expert communities, understanding of policy and science, intercommunication skills, cooperation with society and stakeholders, scientific evidence communication, monitoring and evaluation and advising to policy makers.

### Legislative document analysis

After the financial crisis in 2008 and especially after the establishment of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals<sup>24</sup> (UN SDG) in 2015, the European Commission began focusing on the well-being of society and the need to strengthen the social sustainability aspect in European Commission policy. Certain efforts to balance out the social sustainability pillar in the policy planning are visible in the European Pillar of Social Rights (SRP)<sup>25</sup> established in 2015 and being implemented since 2017. The policy contains three main objectives: (1) Equal opportunities and access to the labour market; (2) Fair working conditions; (3) Social protection and inclusion. These three objectives contain 20 principles which are established based on the above mentioned UN SDG<sup>26</sup>.

Until now already a few SRP related directives have been implemented — EU Work-life Balance Directive for Parents and Carers No. 2019/1158<sup>27</sup>, Directive on Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions in the European Union No. 2019/1152<sup>28</sup>, Council Recommendations on Access to Social

Protection for Workers and the Self-employed No. 2019/C 387/01<sup>29</sup>; and European Labour Authority has been established in 2019<sup>30</sup>. The European Union member countries must implement these directives by 2022.

Gender Equality Strategy<sup>31</sup> is an important document in the European Pillar of Social Rights and the central value of the EU. The gender perspective is being built in the EU policy design internally and externally. This strategy is also linked to the UN SDG fifth goal — gender equality.

In order to assess the results from implementation of the Pillar of Social Rights, a Social Scoreboard<sup>32</sup> is used. These results are the main evidence for the decision-making for the next implementation period (calendar year). Social Scoreboard contains three dimensions: (1) Equal opportunities and access to labour market — UN SDG 4, 5, 10; (2) Dynamic labour market and fair working conditions — UN SDG 8; (3) Public support/social security and inclusion — UN SDG 1, 3. In the 2020 Social Scoreboard assessment for Latvia<sup>33</sup> is critically low on the income level, poverty level and social inclusion risk (SD goal 1), poverty reduction with transfers, unsatisfactory health care and level of digital skills (SD goal 3).

The European SRP is an important tool to maintain sustainable development where economy is a tool for developing social sustainability in combination with the European Green Deal (GD)<sup>34</sup>. The Green Deal is social sustainability policy that determines that climate neutrality can be reached only when social policy is maintained effectively. Society and people are in the centre of the policy, and by preserving and maintaining the environmental capital it is possible to protect health and well-being of society members. The GD is the first visible attempt to implement all three pillars of sustainability with an integrated approach.

In Latvia policy making is regulated by several legal regulations including the De-

velopment Planning System Law<sup>35</sup> in force since 2009. The main goal of the law is to promote sustainable and stable development of the country, as well as improvement of the quality of life of the population. The policy-making cycle<sup>36</sup> is consistent with the cycle of European Commission (EC) and both are based on the rational decision-making model. The main elements of the cycle are preparation (defining problem, identification of alternative solutions, collection of information and analysis and comparison based on criteria, feedback from stakeholders); decision-making on solution; implementation of the policy; impact analysis and modifications. Since 2000, every year on average 41 new laws, 200 changes in law, 351 Cabinet of Ministers regulations and 547 changes in the regulations<sup>37</sup> are issued in Latvia. (The concrete numbers mentioned here were obtained by the authors of this paper by summarising the available data from the sources.)

In order to determine the quality of the regulation, the World Bank has established Worldwide Governance Indicators<sup>38</sup> (WGI) where results are read from -2.5 to 2.5<sup>39</sup>, where 2.5 is very high quality. Latvia in 2019 was assessed with 1.19 points which is the same as average EU-28.

According to another evaluation, the OECD 2017 assessment of Better Regulation Practice<sup>40</sup>, results are read 0–4 where 4 is completely implemented in a country. In 2017, in Latvia the result in the category Regulatory Governance was low for regulatory impact assessment practice for primary regulation (0.45 points or 11% of maximum) and regulatory impact assessment for subordinate regulation (0.20 points or 5% of maximum), the last being much lower than the average of all OECD countries (2.04 points) and European Commission (3.33 points). The main reason why the result is so low is that the impact analysis in Latvia is done only by determining the impact of the regulation on financial, budget and administrative cost

aspect. Much better result is for the stakeholder's engagement practice for primary laws (2.23 points or 56% of maximum) and subordinate legislation (2.17 points or 54% of maximum) that levels with OECD countries average (2.20 and 2.11 points, respectively, but is lower than EU countries average (3.41 and 3.56 points, respectively).

EU has also contributed to the implementation of a better regulation principle by establishing the Better Regulation agenda<sup>41</sup>. Objectives of the Better Regulation agenda are: EU actions based on evidence; making simpler and better EU laws; involving citizens, businesses and stakeholders in the decision-making process. The main goal for the Better Regulation Agenda is to ensure that policy allows to maintain maximum benefit for citizens at minimum cost whilst the economic growth and job creation supports social and environmental sustainability<sup>42</sup>.

## Empirical research design

In order to understand the main challenges and opportunities in the process of policy making that promote social sustainability in Latvia, the authors conducted expert interviews in March and April, 2021. During the research designing stage, the authors determined seven qualified experts mostly involved in the policy planning and decision-making — representatives from Latvian ministries and Cross-Sectoral Coordination Centre: Senior Expert in Gender Equality in Social Policy Planning and Development Department, Ministry of Welfare; Senior Expert in Social Inclusion Policy Department, Ministry of Welfare; Consultant in Development Supervision and Assessment Division, Cross-Sectoral Coordination Centre; Deputy Director of Labour Market Policy Department, Ministry of Welfare; Senior Expert in Policy Initiatives and Development Department, Ministry of Education and Science; Head of Policy Coordination Department, Ministry of Health; Senior Expert in Social Policy Plan-

ning and Development Department, Ministry of Welfare. Although there could be experts also from the Ministry of Economics and the Ministry of Finance, it was assumed that their views are taken into consideration when documents are developed in the Ministry of Welfare.

Such a composition of experts was chosen in order to obtain information on how the evidence-based approach is used precisely in the stages of preparation and decision-making.

During the interview, policy planning and implementing experts provided assessment and opinion on the current situation in the evidence-based decision-making process in social policy making in Latvia. All of the experts filled a questionnaire with three questions. These questions addressed the challenges of evidence-based policy-making and looked for ways to strengthen this approach to decision-making. Experts were asked to express their attitude to each of the given answers by giving evaluation within a determined scale.

In the first question, the experts evaluated the significance of the ten groups of stakeholders involved in the formation of social policy in a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is not significant, 10 — very significant.

The second question focused on the extent of the application of evidence-based approach in the policy-making process in 2021. The experts evaluated the application of evidence-based approach in four stages of policy cycle: defining the problem; planning of policy objectives, results and actions; policy implementation; and policy impact analysis and assessed application of evidence-based approach on each stage in a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 — not used, 10 — used extensively.

In the third question experts were asked to evaluate how different policy-making aspects influence application of evidence-based approach in social policy making currently in Latvia in scale from -2 to 2, where -2 means

that an aspect clearly impedes more frequent application, -1 — that an aspect rather impedes more frequent application, 0 — that an aspect is neutral in influencing application, 1 — that an aspect rather benefits more frequent application, and 2 means that an aspect clearly benefits more frequent application of the evidence-based approach.

Statistical analysis was conducted in order to analyse and summarise the gathered data and make conclusions.

## Results of empirical research

As far as by definition evidence is an approach to a rational decision-making process that builds on a database of information, data or facts derived from scientific research, there is a need to involve researchers and qualified industry experts in this process.

The first question was: “Please evaluate the significance of stakeholders involved in the social policy making based in Latvia in scale 1–10, where 1 — not significant; 10 — very significant”. Seven responses were

received from seven experts on all ten positions, except for small business associations where reply from one expert was missing.

According to experts (*Table 1*), educational and scientific institutions are very important in the policy-making process, as their importance is assessed by an arithmetic mean ( $\bar{x} = 8.29$ ) with a range 4, which indicates that the expert evaluation was in consensus. However, it should be noted that the mode (Mo) or the most frequent values for this group of stakeholders are in fact three different values: 6, 9 and 10. The expert opinion was positive, and five out of seven experts considered that educational and scientific institutions play a very important role in policy making in Latvia, however, according to two experts, these groups of stakeholders play only a minor role in the policy-making process. The main indicators of descriptive statistics on expert evaluations are included in *Table 1*.

The same value of arithmetic mean as for educational and scientific institutions ( $\bar{x} = 8.29$ ) is also for policy implementation

*Table 1. Evaluation of the significance of the groups of stakeholders involved in the social development policy making in Latvia*

	Groups of stakeholders	Arithmetic mean	Mode	Median	Range	Standard deviation
1	Decision-makers	9.43	9	9	1	0.535
2	Educational and scientific institutions	8.29	6	9	4	1.704
3	Policy implementation agents	8.29	8	8	4	1.496
4	Large and medium-size enterprises	7.71	7	8	2	0.756
5	Other not mentioned organisations	7.29	8	8	5	1.976
6	Trade unions	7.14	6	7	4	1.574
7	Individuals	7	5	7	4	1.528
8	Youth organisations	6.71	4	7	5	1.976
9	Small business associations	6.67	7	7	3	1.033
10	Religious organisations	4.14	3	4	6	2.035

Source: Authors' calculations based on expert interviews conducted by D. Indriksone in 2021, n = 7

agents, so they also are considered as an important group of stakeholders. According to experts in the policy-making process the most significant group of stakeholders ( $\bar{x} = 9.43$ ) is decision-makers. Experts think that decision-makers have the highest impact on the policy choices, however as already discussed in the literature review, these choices can be easily impacted by biases, stereotypes and other influences. The range or R calculated in this respect is 1, which indicates similar expert opinion.

According to experts, large and medium-sized enterprises ( $\bar{x} = 7.71$ ), trade unions ( $\bar{x} = 7.14$ ) and individuals ( $\bar{x} = 7$ ) also play an important role in the policy-making process. Youth organisations ( $\bar{x} = 6.71$ ), small business associations ( $\bar{x} = 6.67$ ) and the least — religious organisations ( $\bar{x} = 4.14$ ) are assessed with medium importance, however, one must take into account that the calculated range for religious organisations was 6, which indicates disagreement among experts in this aspect. Experts have assessed “Other not mentioned organisations” as relatively significant ( $\bar{x} = 7.29$ ).

As already discussed in the theoretical part, in policy-making cooperation with stakeholders is extremely important. The results from document analysis prove that policy-makers should strengthen cooperation

and communication with all stakeholders, especially to explain notions such as evidence and decision-making.

The second question was: “Please evaluate the extent of application of evidence-based decision-making approach in the different stages of social policy-making cycle in Latvia in 2021 in scale 1–10, where 1 — not applied; 10 — applied extensively”.

Seven responses were received from seven experts in all four positions.

Answering to the second question, experts assessed that in 2021 in Latvia evidence-based approach in policy-making cycle was used extensively, especially during the planning of policy objectives, results and actions ( $\bar{x} = 7.86$ , Mo = 8, Me = 8) and policy impact analysis ( $\bar{x} = 7.86$ , Mo = 6, Me = 8) stages of the policy cycle (Table 2).

Analysing the results of expert evaluations, the authors concluded that evaluations are relatively close in almost all stages and the range is small (in the problem identification stage R = 1; in the objectives, results and action planning stage, as well as in the policy implementation stage R = 2); and the opinion of experts is unambiguous, however, it should be noted that in the policy impact analysis stage the range of the expert evaluation is R = 4, which indicates a consensus among experts.

Table 2. Evaluation of the extent of application of evidence-based approach on stages of policy making in Latvia

	Policy-making cycle	Arithmetic mean	Mode	Median	Range	Standard deviation
1	Defining problem	7.57	8	8	1	0.535
2	Planning of policy objectives, results and actions	7.86	8	8	2	0.690
3	Policy implementation	7.43	8	8	2	0.976
4	Policy impact analysis	7.86	6.9	8	4	1.574

Source: Authors' calculations based on expert interviews conducted by D. Indriksone in 2021, n = 7

In authors' opinion, it is necessary to take into account the OECD 2017 evaluation of Better Regulation practices, which clearly pointed out shortcomings in the policy impact analysis stage of the policy cycle and was valued as extremely low in Latvia. The Better Regulation Practice Guidelines state that regulatory impact analysis should have a rationale linked to the problem (consistent with the theory of a rational decision-making method), to the cause of the problem and the objectives and respective alternatives to the solutions expressed in the policy options.

As already concluded during the analysis of secondary data, the OECD assessment of the implementation of Latvia's Better Regulation practice is extremely low. However, as the latest data is only available for 2017, it is possible that the situation has changed over the last four years and Better Regulation practice in 2021 is already being implemented according to EC recommendations, as a result of which it would be in line with expert evaluations. The fact that the mode values are very close to the arithmetic means of assessment (except for the impact analysis stage) also indicates that the opinion of the experts is unambiguous. However, the authors recommend in depth analysis of the results of the next available evaluation of OECD Better Regulation practices, when it is available.

In scientific literature evidence-based policy making is criticised, and several limitations are pointed out such as governments political commitments, legislator's ability to communicate research and low understanding of research, and scientist's distance from the political context and management needs. Therefore, in the third question the authors included 20 policy-making aspects such as the ability of policy makers to apply data and research, communication between researchers and policy makers, researchers' active involvement in policy making, and others selected after the authors analysis of the theory and analysis of the previous research.

The third question was: "Please evaluate frequency of application of evidence-based approach in policy making currently in Latvia based on different policy-making aspects in scale from -2 to 2, where -2 – impedes to apply more frequently; 2 – benefits to apply more frequently".

Seven responses were received from seven experts regarding all 20 aspects.

Policy making is influenced by many aspects, not only the integration of evidence, therefore the authors asked the experts to evaluate whether the 20 different aspects could impede or, on the contrary, benefit decision-makers to apply evidence-based approach more frequently in the social policy-making in the Latvian context (*Table 3*).

The availability of data for policy makers is more often assessed as an aspect that almost unequivocally benefits more frequent application of the evidence-based approach ( $\bar{x} = 1.57$ ,  $Mo = 2$ ,  $Me = 2$ ). There is a consensus among specialists in this respect, as the calculated range  $R = 1$ .

Aspects such as policy makers' understanding of the impact analysis process and knowledge transfer between policy makers in different sectors have been assessed as benefiting to application of the evidence-based approach more frequently ( $\bar{x} = 1.14$ ), and there is also expert consensus on these aspects, as the calculated range  $R = 2$ .

Data, as one of the main types of evidence, is very important in the policy-making process, as it directly supports the problem identification phase, the choice of alternative solutions, and the impact analysis. In addition to this study, it is necessary to study in depth the quality of available data and the possibilities to use and process them in Latvia in order to understand whether there are any obstacles for those involved in policy making.

According to the expert evaluation, aspects approaching value 1 (meaning that the aspect rather benefits to apply more frequent) are communication between researchers and

Table 3. Evaluation of how policy-making aspects impact the application of evidence-based approach in the social sustainability policy-making process in Latvia

Policy-making aspects	Arithmetic mean	Mode	Median	Range	Standard deviation
Data availability for policy planners	1.57	2	2	1	0.54
Policy makers' understanding of the impact analysis process	1.14	2	1	2	0.90
Knowledge transfer between sectoral policy makers	1.14	1	1	2	0.69
Communication between researchers and policy makers	0.86	1	1	2	0.69
Decision-makers' understanding of the policy-making process	0.86	2	1	3	1.22
Policy makers' ability to apply data and research to policy	0.86	2	1	3	1.22
Scientific research availability to policy planners	0.86	2	1	3	1.22
Quality of government-funded research (possibility to apply to policy)	0.71	1	1	3	1.25
Clarity and formulation of the objectives and tasks of government-funded research projects	0.71	0	1	2	0.76
Active involvement of researchers in the policy-making process	0.57	1	1	1	0.54
Researchers' understanding of the policy-making process	0.57	1	1	1	0.54
Policy stakeholders' understanding of the use of evidence-based instruments	0.57	1	1	2	0.79
Policy makers' understanding of what is evidence-based instruments	0.57	-1	1	3	1.51
Expert availability for consultation in the policy-making process	0.43	-1	1	3	1.40
Society's involvement in the policy-making process	0.29	0	0	2	0.76
Technical requirements for public research	0.29	0	0	2	0.76
Decision-making speed in the policy-making process	0.14	0	0	2	0.69
Budget availability for public research	0.14	1	1	4	1.46
Procurement process of government-funded research	-0.14	1	0	3	1.22
Society's understanding of the policy-making process	-0.29	0	0	3	0.95

Source: Authors' calculations based on expert interviews conducted by D. Indriksone in 2021, n = 7

policy makers ( $\bar{x} = 0.86$ ), decision makers' understanding of the policy-making process ( $\bar{x} = 0.86$ ), policy makers' ability to apply data and research to policy ( $\bar{x} = 0.86$ ), the scientific research availability to policy planners ( $\bar{x} = 0.86$ ). The last two aspects are assessed as important in the policy-making process and are closely linked to the use of evidence. This is in line with the scientific information analysed in the theoretical section.

Aspects such as the quality of publicly funded research ( $\bar{x} = 0.71$ ) and the clarity and formulation of the objectives and tasks of publicly funded research projects ( $\bar{x} = 0.71$ ) were assessed as less important. The diversity of expert opinions on these aspects (up to  $R = 3$ ) indicates that there are big differences in evaluations as in this case the evaluation scale was from  $-2$  to  $2$ .

Aspects such as researchers active involvement in the policy-making process ( $\bar{x} = 0.57$ ), researchers' understanding of the policy-making process ( $\bar{x} = 0.57$ ), policy stakeholders' understanding of the use of evidence-based instruments ( $\bar{x} = 0.57$ ), and policy makers' understanding of what are evidence-based instruments ( $\bar{x} = 0.57$ ) are between values  $1$  and  $0$ , hence it might be concluded that while these aspects tend to favour the use of evidence-based approach in average estimation, in three cases the expert estimation was  $2$  or that the aspect clearly benefits.

According to expert evaluation, rather neutral effect on the use of evidence-based approach has such aspects as expert availability for consultations in the policy-making process ( $\bar{x} = 0.43$ ), society's involvement in the policy-making process ( $\bar{x} = 0.29$ ), technical requirements for public research ( $\bar{x} = 0.29$ ), decision-making speed in the policy-making process ( $\bar{x} = 0.14$ ), and budget availability for publicly funded research ( $\bar{x} = 0.14$ ). From these results, it is concluded that according to expert opinion, these aspects are not crucial for evidence-based approach in the policy-making process. Simi-

lar to the previous example, in answers regarding expert availability for consultations in the policy-making process, the most frequent answers also indicated three different modes:  $Mo = -1$  (2 cases),  $Mo = 1$  (2 cases) and  $Mo = 2$  (2 cases).

Two aspects are evaluated as such that are approaching the value of  $0$  (neutral effect), but are still negative (between neutral and  $-1$ ). These are: procurement process of publicly funded research ( $\bar{x} = -0.14$ ) and society's understanding of policy-making process ( $\bar{x} = -0.29$ ).

Experts' opinion on public understanding of the policy-making process does not coincide with the results of the authors' analysis of the policy documents, in particular emphasising that public understanding and accessible information on decisions and transparency are necessary to gain public support and successfully implement policies on sustainable development. If societies do not understand the policy-making process, it is impossible to understand its rationale and build trust.

## Conclusion

Although in theory the social sustainability concept is being increasingly researched, there is a lack of research on practical approaches on how to maintain social sustainability concept in policy. Since 2008, EU and Latvia as a member state are extensively working on policies that promote social sustainability and put society as the main element, whilst environment and economy are elements that drive social development. There are visible efforts to continuously improve social policies in Latvia based on available data and other evidence.

In 2021, application of evidence-based approach already is extensive in all stages of social policy-making cycle, especially during the planning of policy objectives, results and actions and policy impact analysis stages of the policy-making cycle. However, based on information from the secondary data

analysis, the process and application of evidence-based approach to policy impact analysis must be improved, and not only financial evidence should be used for the impact analysis, but other non-financial evidence must be integrated.

Educational and scientific institutions already play a very important role in policy making in Latvia together with decision-makers which confirms that non-biased advice and evidence is being applied to social policy making in Latvia.

Data availability is the most important aspect that benefits application of evidence-based approach to social policy making, as well as improving communication between researchers and policy makers and knowledge transfer between different sectors in different stages of policy cycle, and communication with stakeholders has a positive impact on maintaining policy that supports social sustainability. In the next research it is important to involve more experts from different fields.

It is recommended that policy makers should strengthen cooperation and communication with all stakeholders, especially in order to explain evidence and decision-making process as transparency and understanding of the decision-making are the key aspects in building trust.

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**Dārta Indriksone**, recently working as a research assistant at the University of Latvia, has obtained Master's degree in Management of Public Administration. Has also received Bachelor's degree in International Economics and Diplomacy. Latest professional experience — as the head of Finance and Administration of Corporate & Public Management Consulting International branch in Latvia, a company implementing EU-funded projects with the focus on public sector reforms.

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**Dārta Indriksone**, darbojusies kā zinātniskā asistente Latvijas Universitātē, vienlaikus studējot maģistra programmā “Sabiedrības vadība”, un ir ieguvusi sociālo maģistra grādu sabiedrības vadībā. Pirms tam saņēmusi sociālo bakalaura grādu starptautiskajā ekonomikā. Pēdējā profesionālā pieredze bijusi kā uzņēmuma *Corporate & Public Management Consulting International* filiāles Latvijā finanšu un administrācijas vadītājai — uzņēmums nodarbojas ar ES finansētu publiskā sektora reformu projektu ieviešanu.

*Dr. oec. Biruta Sloka*, profesore un vadošā pētniece Latvijas Universitātes Vadības zinību nodaļā un Latvijas Universitātes Ekonomikas un vadības zinātniskajā institūtā. Pētījumu intereses saistītas ar dažādu procesu, t.sk. izglītības un zinātnes aspektu kvantitatīvo analīzi, kā arī digitālās vides izmantošanu izglītībā, zinātnē un informācijas vadībā.

## PIERĀDĪJUMOS BALSTĪTA POLITIKA SOCIĀLAJAI ILGTSPĒJĪBAI

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### Kopsavilkums

**Atslēgas vārdi:** *pierādījumos balstīta pieeja, lēmumu pieņemšana, politikas veidošana, sociālā ilgtspējība*

Sociālā ilgtspējība kļūst arvien nozīmīgāka daudzās pasaules valstīs, bet Latvijā jo sevišķi — arvien pieaugošā pensionēto iedzīvotāju īpatsvara, kā arī COVID-19 izraisīto ierobežojumu dēļ, kad atklājās, ka liela daļa iedzīvotāju Latvijā nevar saņemt palīdzību ierobežota darba apstākļos, jo pirms tam sociālās iemaksas bijušas veiktas mazā apmērā vai nemaz. Tas arvien vairāk ietekmē sabiedrības kopējo noskaņojumu, kā arī iespaido valsts un reģionālo institūciju iespējas izpildīt pienākumus, kas noteikti likuma normās.

Šī raksta mērķis ir izpētīt iespējas stiprināt pierādījumos balstītas pieejas pielietojumu sociālās politikas veidošanas procesā Latvijā, lai nodrošinātu sociālo ilgtspējību.

Pētījumā izmantotās metodes ir zinātnisko publikāciju analīze, iepriekš veiktu pētījumu analīze, dokumentu analīze, ekspertu aptauja un tās rezultātu statistiskā analīze, lai identificētu galvenās problēmas un iespējas sociālās politikas veidošanas procesā, kā arī pierādījumos balstītas pieejas izmantošanā.

Aptaujas laikā eksperti novērtēja galveno ieinteresēto pušu nozīmīgumu sociālās politikas veidošanas procesā Latvijā skalā 1–10. Rezultāti parādīja, ka dažas no ieinteresētajām pusēm ir nozīmīgākas un vairāk ietekmē lēmumu pieņemšanu politikas veidošanas procesā nekā citas (ar aritmētisko vidējo no 4,14 līdz 9,43).

Papildus tam eksperti veica novērtējumu tam, cik lielā mērā sociālās politikas veidošanas procesā Latvijā šobrīd tiek pielietota pierādījumos balstīta pieeja skalā 1–10. Rezultāti parādīja, ka visos politikas veidošanas procesa posmos pierādījumos balstīta pieeja tiek pielietota lielā mērā (ar aritmētisko vidējo no 7,43 līdz 7,86).

Eksperti novērtēja arī dažādu politikas veidošanas aspektu ietekmi uz pierādījumos balstītas pieejas izmantošanu politikas veidošanas procesā skalā no –2 līdz 2. Rezultāti parādīja, ka vērtēšanai izvirzītie aspekti drīzāk rada priekšrocības nekā bremsē izmantot pierādījumos balstītu pieeju (ar aritmētisko vidējo no –0,29 līdz 1,57).

Noslēgumā autori noteikuši galvenās iespējas uzlabot pierādījumos balstītas pieejas pielietojumu sociālās politikas veidošanas procesā Latvijā.