

CREATING AN EFFECTIVE POLICY BRIEF

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WHAT IS A POLICY BRIEF?



A concise summary of a specific issue



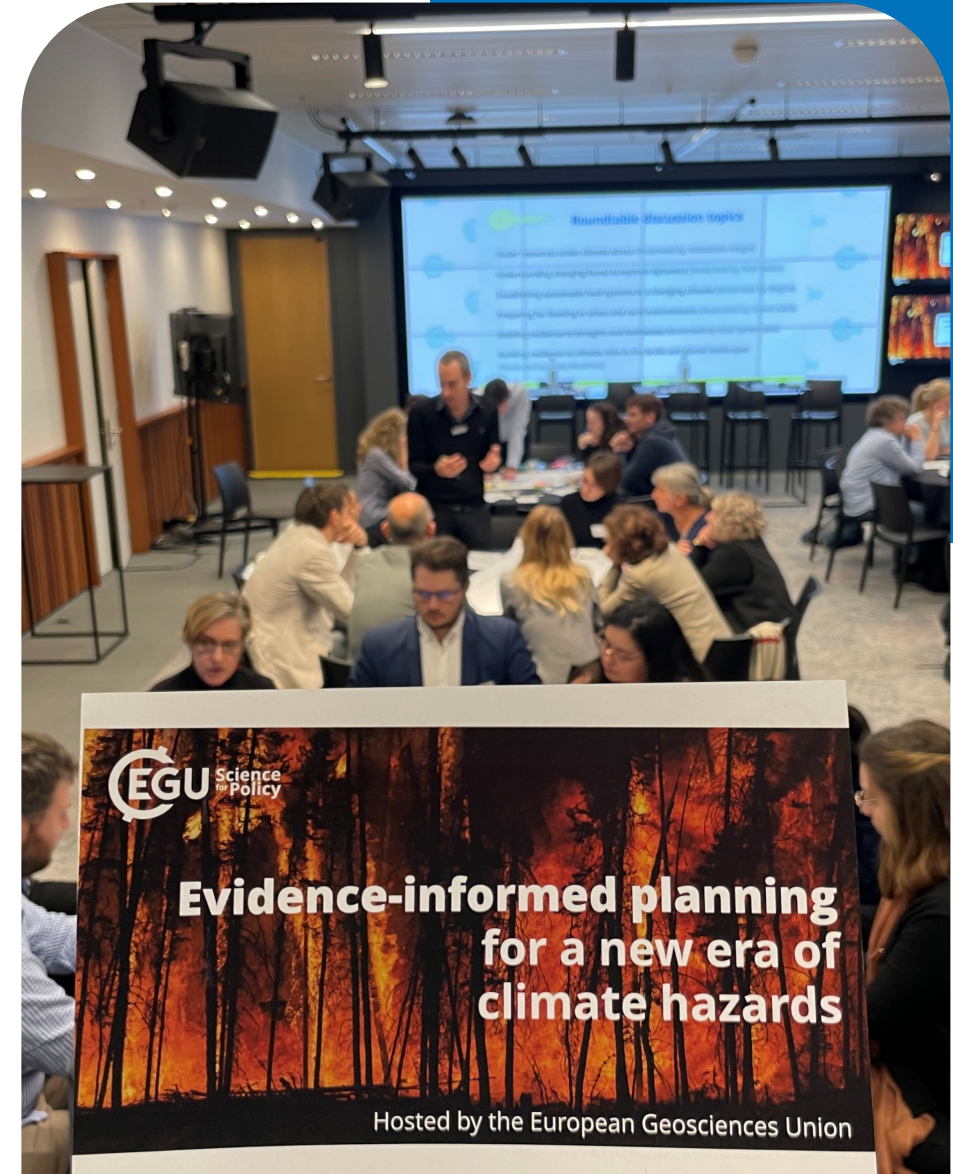
Provides policy options or recommendations



Targets government workers, policy advisors, policymakers, decision-makers and practitioners



Can take different formats!



WHY WRITE A POLICY BRIEF?

We want legislation and policy to be informed by scientific evidence!

Science evidence:

- Helps to identify the key issues (and their scale)
- Supports policy design & ensure unintended consequences are minimised
- Outlines policy options and key trade-offs
- Supports in implementation, monitoring, and evaluation

Engaging in policy can also support your career

- Increase the impact of your research or work
- Expand your professional network

WHY WRITE A POLICY BRIEF?

Policymakers can only use scientific evidence if it is accessible!

Policy Briefs are a useful tool to help communicate evidence effectively

- Focus on a topic that is **directly** related to legislation or policy area
- Use accessible language
- Ideally consider the policy problem from multiple perspectives
- Are concise and easy for non-experts to read
- Provide options to address the challenges that policymakers are facing



STEPS TO WRITING A POLICY BRIEF

- 1 Identifying challenges and understanding policy questions
- 2 Selecting your target audience
- 3 Deciding on your overarching message
- 4 Outlining key policy options
- 5 Engaging your audience
- 6 Disseminating your policy brief

IDENTIFYING CHALLENGES AND UNDERSTANDING POLICY QUESTIONS

“If I had an hour to solve a problem, I'd spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and 5 minutes thinking about solutions”

– “Albert Einstein”

THE COMPLEXITY OF **POLICY CHALLENGES**

Policy Challenges involve complex, multi-faceted issues! They require:

- Balancing diverse perspectives
- Managing stakeholder conflicts, priorities, and incentives
- Consideration of political and social pressures
- Overcoming implementation barriers

WORKING IN INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAMS

Working in an interdisciplinary team is a challenge & a skill!

It is essential for providing information & recommendations that support evidence informed policymaking.



Understand each other's expertise, skills, and motivations



Establishing common goals and drivers



Recognise different approaches to problem solving, writing, and presenting



UNDERSTANDING THE “POLICY QUESTIONS”

A policy brief is far more likely to have impact if it addresses an identified issue

- What issues, challenges, or questions exist within your select theme exist?
- What solutions are already in place to solve these issues?
- Could your policy brief provide evidence for a current or upcoming legislation that will address the challenges?

Outside of the week:

- Attend relevant policy events
- Meet with those working on the topics
- Read [and answer] calls for evidence

SELECTING YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE

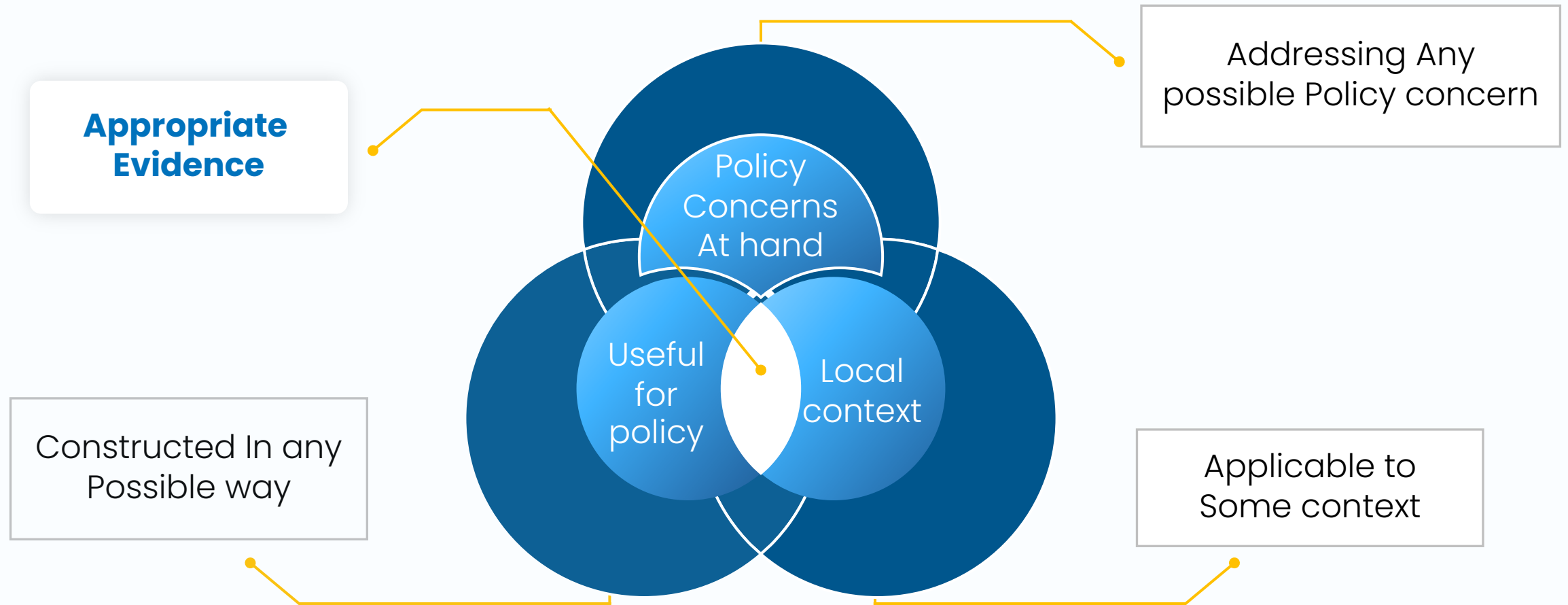
Who is working on the identified problem?

- What legislation, frameworks or projects are relevant or related?
- What organisation or government department is responsible?
- What problems might those working on the issue have? How might you help solve it?
- What do you think motivates those working on the issue (based on what you know)
- How could you best reach them? How might they resist?
- How much knowledge do they have on the topic?

Stakeholder mapping can be a useful

tool

DECIDING ON YOUR OVERARCHING MESSAGE



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS VS OPTIONS

Policy Recommendations

Presents one preferred action

Gives justifications for the selected action

Focuses on what **should** be done. Tone is more persuasive

Policy Options

Presents a range of feasible, contextualised alternatives

Gives advantages and disadvantages of options presented

Focuses on what **could** be done. Tone is neutral & comparative

Let's policymakers do the policymaking

EXAMPLE: EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARY RESEARCH SERVICE – POLICY OPTIONS

Option 2.2 – Lower the EU Working-Time Directive (WTD) provisions to 38 hours per week and remove the opt-out clause

The report sets out two further policy options. Firstly, it suggests that the working time provision in the EU WTD be lowered to a maximum of 38 hours per week. It is recognised that, in the short-term, this move would cause disruption for some Member States and employers. In this sense, a phasing in (by negotiation) may be agreed by Member States. More radically, the report suggests removal of the opt-out clause and the move to collective agreement on a cut in working hours. The intention in lowering the limit in the EU WTD would be to ensure that, where gains in technology accrue, these feed through to reductions in working time. Reform of the EU WTD, in this case, could help to improve the balance between work and life, and provide EU citizens with more time away from work.

Scientific Foresight Unit (STOA)

PE 656.311 – January 2021

EN

Option 1: Industry and sectoral skills alliances that focus on facilitating transitions for workers in 'at risk' jobs and reskilling for workers in transformed jobs

The report makes clear that one of the greatest challenges for states and employers responding to

RECIPE FOR A **POLICY BRIEF**

1. **A catchy title:** To communicate the content in a memorable way
2. **An overview:** Outlines the key points up front. Bullet lists are a useful tool.
3. **Background:** Explains why the topic is important. Engage your readers' interest!
4. **Additional context:** Outlines the cause of the issue and its current relevance
5. **Approaches and findings:** Explains key findings and the methods used
6. **Policy options/recommendations:** Provides clear statements with concrete advice
7. **Sources:** Highlights where the information is from and where more can be found
8. **Your contact details:** Enables policymakers to follow-up for more information

HOW TO PLAN THE LOCAL ENERGY TRANSITION

IN BRIEF

- The energy transition calls for far-reaching changes at local and regional level, which include social rules, infrastructures and technologies.
- Backcasting is a qualitative form of scenario analysis that can make significant contributions to the planning of local change processes.
- In one example, normative scenarios for the year 2036 were created for the city of Korneuburg, making it possible to derive tangible strategies and measures.
- Backcasting reveals different futures, broadens the local scope of action, and helps to set temporal priorities.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

The energy system is to become more climate-friendly. If this is to succeed, processes of change need to be initiated at various levels. Against this backdrop, the local and regional context is of particular importance. Examples from Germany and Denmark have shown that municipalities, cities, and regions have considerable room for manoeuvre with regard to the implementation of concrete measures for an

have strong backing from the community as well as active support of local businesses and interest groups. Effective planning methods are needed to make the goals of national and European climate and energy policies a reality in our immediate environment.



Scenarios and backcasting for the energy transition

A method that was developed specifically for such tasks is the so-called backcasting. Backcasting is a qualitative form of scenario analysis that is consciously oriented towards political goals. In a first step, several desirable visions of the future (normative scenarios) are developed together with stakeholders and experts. In a second step, strategies and measures based on these visions are planned – in retrospect, as it were – to achieve these visions of the future.

This shows that different measures can succeed and that they complement each other. On the other hand, it also becomes clear which steps must be started immediately and which issues can be addressed later.

Backcasting is particularly well suited for planning processes that deliberately break with current developments or trends, such as the phasing out of coal combustion. The Korneuburg 2036 backcasting process is a specific, practical example of such procedure.

BASIC DATA

KEY RESULTS

In 2014, the city of Korneuburg set itself the goal of being climate-neutral and achieve independence from fossil fuels by 2036. For the backcasting process, these two ambitious goals were outlined using three different scenarios based on local circumstances. In all three scenarios, it was assumed that the goals from the municipality's mission statement could actually be achieved in 2036.

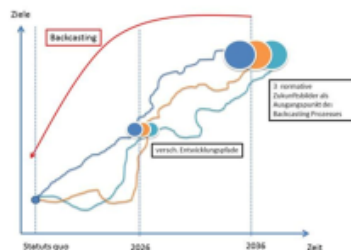


Diagram of the process

The first scenario focused on the local generation of renewable energy ("Korneuburg power plant"): locally available resources for the generation of renewable energy (wind, photovoltaic, geothermal energy) would be upgraded to maximum capacity. The second scenario focused primarily on efficient use of energy ("Energy-saving champion Korneuburg"), assuming a significantly lower demand for energy. Especially for the building sector, significantly lower consumption could be achieved because of extensive renovations. The third scenario emphasised local community initiatives ("Together into the future") which can also be very important for achieving the goals, for example by greatly reducing the volume of traffic.

These three scenarios were discussed with representatives of politics and administration, citizens, and experts, and specific strategies and measures were developed by means of backcasting. Because each scenario had a different focus, it was also possible to show a very wide range of possible actions. It also became clear that many of the measures discussed would have to be launched very quickly.

WHAT TO DO?

The energy transition involves a clear departure from what has been the norm so far, including at local level. New technologies, infrastructures, new forms of cooperation, but also new social practices in everyday life are needed. To achieve this, visions and goals must be developed from which specific, feasible actions must be derived. Backcasting can be a useful tool in this process.

- Normative scenarios facilitate a common understanding of the different local futures that are possible and desirable. Diverging views or political positions can be represented by scenarios with different directions.
- Having a variety of scenarios also contributes significantly to breaking with prevailing thought patterns whilst allowing considering new options that have not been considered so far.
- The aspiration to actually achieve the goals set in the course of the discussions highlights the urgent need to formulate specific measures. This facilitates the setting of clear priorities.
- Qualitative scenarios and backcasting are just one element to support long-term change processes. For the implementation and ongoing review of specific measures, broad political support, administrative and planning skills, knowledge as well as financial and social resources are also very important.

FURTHER READING

IBO – Österreichisches Institut für Bauen und Ökologie
Cockle 0000: Way2Smart Korneuburg. Blue Cloud
Report, Smart Cities #4/2020
smartcities.at/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/IBOGR4_2020_Way2SmartKorneuburg.pdf

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ADDITIONAL TIPS

- Keep it simple with short sentences and paragraphs
- Give it an appealing and reader-friendly layout. Subheadings are your friend!
- Be clear about how the issue you are addressing relates to policy
- Start each paragraph with the most important information
- Use eye-catching photos and graphs that are relevant to the information
- Avoid jargon and acronyms
- Be upfront about any **uncertainty**
- Ask a non-group member to read it to make sure it's easy to understand and follow

DISSEMINATION

A policy brief doesn't share itself! You must actively seek out your audience and make sure the right people read it.

- Send personalised emails to your target audience
- Request a meeting to share key information and answer any follow-up questions
- Host an event or webinar and invite your target audience to speak on that topic
- Share it with partners and other relevant institutions who may be able to send it to their members and policy contacts
- Share it via social media, news item, blog post, etc.

A policy brief is just the beginning...