ESI⦿ EVIDENCE SYNTHESIS INFRASTRUCTURE COLLABORATIVE

Memo:	Last updated:
Terms and frameworks using in the ESIC planning process	**20 March 2025**

This draft 'living' summary of terms and frameworks used in the ESIC planning process was developed at the request of the Co-leads. Many of the terms and framework have been used in ESIC documentation since the ESIC planning process was launched, but they were not always defined or explained. Many of the definitions and explanations are drawn from the Global Commission on Evidence to Address Societal Challenges (GCESC), which many of the Co-leads were involved in (as a GCESC co-lead, commissioner, collaborating centre director or other role). The 'SHOW ME' consensus involved more than 100 authors, many of whom are Co-leads and working/planning group members. Most of the terms and frameworks have been translated into five UN languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, and Spanish) and into Portuguese, and some of the terms and frameworks have been translated into German, Japanese and Russian. Available translations can be found by clicking on the appropriate language link on the right-hand side of this GCESC webpage. The highest-level category of term or framework has been hyperlinked below to help you navigate quickly to the right part of the document.

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Capability [framework]

Stages 1 and 2 of the ESIC planning process were focused on assessing current capabilities and gaps. We defined a capability as the systems, resources, technologies, data, platforms or processes available to support the production and use of living evidence syntheses. We define the constituent elements of this term below.

Element	Definition
Data	A value or set of values representing a specific concept or concepts
Technologies	Applications that support data analytics, data sharing, process automation, and communication
Platforms	A website or portal used to collect and store information
Processes	Ways of working within groups and organizations
Resources	People, tools and funding
Systems	A combination of the above elements interacting to form a unified whole; may exist at organizational, national or global levels

Note that we are assessing existing capabilities, and proposing how to equitably build capabilities, for each of the five elements of the evidence-synthesis infrastructure (the work of the five working groups) and for governance, as well as proposing how to equitably build capabilities for partner engagement, communications, change management, and monitoring, evaluation and learning (i.e., the work of the five planning groups)

Collective impact [framework; source]

The 'collaborative' part of the Evidence Synthesis Infrastructure Collaborative is a nod towards the collective-impact framework that underpins much of the aspiration of ESIC. The framework provides a structured approach to addressing complex societal challenges by fostering collaboration among diverse organizations from various sectors. ESIC will not be a single entity. It will be a distributed infrastructure supported by a common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communications, and an agile backbone function.

Element	Definition
Common agenda	Collective definition of the problem and shared vision for solving it
Shared measurement	Tracking progress in the same way, allowing for continuous learning and accountability
Mutually reinforcing activities	integrating the participants' many different activities to maximize the end result
Continuous communications	Building trust and strengthening relationships
Backbone function	Having a team dedicated to aligning and coordinating the work of the group

Note that we are moving towards a collective-impact approach with the ESIC planning process, including how we govern for collective impact (by involving peak bodies and, in their absence, groups without peak bodies), and we are moving towards shared measurement specifically through the work of the ESIC monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) planning group

Evidence

Research evidence (typically shortened to evidence)

We consider research evidence to be: 1) an output of empirical research that was conducted systematically and reported transparently; 2) an input to advisory and decision-making processes and to learning and improvement processes; 3) typically taking one of eight forms (as defined below); and 4) a form of evidence for which explicit criteria can be used to assess its quality (or credibility or risk of bias depending on the evidence paradigm being used), such as those described in section 4.5 of the Global Evidence Commission report. We consider research evidence to include both evidence published in academic journals and in a range of other publishing channels (e.g., UNEG database).

Forms of research evidence [framework; source]

Terms	Definitions	Focus
Data analytics	Systematic analysis of raw data to make conclusions about that information	What has been learned in the jurisdiction (e.g., community, province/state, country or region)
Modeling	Use of mathematical equations to simulate real-world scenarios (i.e., what is likely to happen if we don't intervene) and options (i.e., what happens if we intervene) in a virtual environment	
Evaluation	Systematic assessment of the implementation (monitoring) and impacts (evaluation) of an initiative for the purposes of decision-making or learning *Note that evaluation includes the full range of performance, process and impact evaluations used by, for example, evaluation offices in the UN system*	
Behavioural / implementation research	Study of methods to promote the systematic uptake of effective approaches into routine practices at citizen, professional, organization and government levels (implementation research) Systematic examination of what people (citizens and professionals) do, what drives them to do it, and what can sustain or change what they do (behavioural research)	
Qualitative insights	Study of (typically non-numerical) data – obtained from interviews, focus groups, open-ended questionnaires, first-hand observation, participant-observation, recordings made in natural settings, documents, and artifacts – to understand how individuals and groups view and experience problems, options, implementation considerations (barriers, facilitators and strategies), and metrics	
Evidence synthesis	Systematic process of identifying, selecting, appraising and synthesizing the findings from all studies that have addressed the same question in order to arrive at an overall understanding of what is known, including how this may vary by groups (e.g., racialized communities) and contexts (e.g., low socio-economic neighbourhoods or Latin American countries) *Note that an evidence synthesis can be conducted on any of the above forms of evidence. A synthesis of evaluations may be called an evaluation synthesis.*	What has been learned from around the world and how it varies by groups and contexts
Technology assessment/ cost-effectiveness analysis	Assessment of all relevant aspects of a 'technology' (e.g., a product or service), including safety, effectiveness, and economic, social and ethical implications (technology assessment), with an evidence synthesis often contributing to the assessment of effectiveness	What insights or recommendations have been offered for the jurisdiction

	Comparison of the relative outcomes (effectiveness) and costs of two or more options, again with an evidence synthesis often contributing to the assessment of effectiveness	
Guidance	Systematically developed statements that recommend a particular course of action, often for citizens and professional and sometimes for organizations and governments, with one or more evidence syntheses contributing to the assessment of effectiveness, values and preferences, and other factors	

Note that we consider researchers who produce any of the above forms of evidence to be evidence producers. We recognize that there are researchers who conduct other types of research to advance scientific knowledge rather than to inform decision-making specifically.

Other types of information that are very important for decision-making

Other highly relevant types of information can include: 1) what other jurisdictions (communities, states/provinces or countries) are doing (especially if they have evaluated it); 2) what issues and innovations are emerging; 3) people's lived and living experience; and 4) Indigenous knowledges.

Some of these other types of information can be elicited through approaches such as: 1) jurisdictional or environmental scan; 2) horizon scan; 3) key informant interviews; and 4) deliberative processes (that put evidence alongside other ways of knowing and other factors that will influence decision-making).

Evidence intermediaries are typically the ones who combine the many needed forms of research evidence and the many needed forms of other types of information.

Decision-maker [framework]

Individuals who make choices individually or in groups and who can be grouped into four categories:

Decision-maker	Definition
Government policymakers	Government policymakers include politicians and public servants in central agencies, line departments like health or education, and parliamentary bodies. They are one of four key types of decision-makers. They also shape the scope and supports for decision-making by organizational leaders, professionals and citizens, just as organizational leaders can do this for professionals and citizens, and professionals can do it for citizens. *See GCESC report 2022 section 3.3 for context for how government policymakers make decisions, using questions likely to elicit factors that could support (or discourage) their use of evidence.* *Given the array of policy, system and political analysis skills required to answer policy questions, some evidence intermediaries focus exclusively on government policymakers, and specifically on providing timely, demand-driven evidence support aligned to advisory and decision-making processes.*
Organizational leaders	Organizational leaders include both business and non-governmental organizational leaders. They make decisions in their own right, and can shape the scope and supports for decision-making by the professionals who work for them and the citizens they serve. *See section 3.4 for context for how organizational leaders make decisions using questions likely to elicit factors that could support (or discourage) their use of evidence.*
Professionals	Professionals include doctors, engineers, police officers, social workers and teachers, among others. What typically unites members of some professions is that they have acquired formal qualifications through specialized training, have been admitted and are subject to discipline by a regulatory body, provide objective counsel and service in the interest of their client and the public, and have been given some degree of monopoly rights to do so. Membership in other professions may be much less formalized. Countries differ significantly in which categories of workers are considered professionals. *See section 3.5 for context for how professionals make decisions using questions likely to elicit factors that could support (or discourage) their use of evidence.* *Given the array of profession-specific analysis skills required to answer professionals' questions, some evidence intermediaries focus exclusively on a category of professionals, and specifically on providing timely, demand-driven evidence support aligned to learning and improvement platforms (e.g., EEF for teachers and clinical guideline platforms for doctors).*
Citizens	Citizens include all of us as members of society. We use the term 'citizen' to keep the focus on the individual, and not to imply formal citizenship status as determined by a government. For example, we include undocumented individuals and we recognize that Indigenous peoples were sometimes forced to decline their Indigenous status to achieve citizenship of a country that now includes their traditional lands. Alternative terms like 'public' or 'publics' are often considered a group, not individuals. More specific terms are often sector-specific, such as consumers (consumer protection), parents (education), patients and caregivers (healthcare), residents (housing), service users (child, community and social services), taxpayers (economic development and growth), voters (citizenship), and workers (employment). *See section 3.6 for context for how citizens make decisions using questions likely to elicit factors that could support (or discourage) their use of evidence.* *Given the array of communication, engagement and EDI-related skills required to answer citizens' questions, some evidence intermediaries focus exclusively on a category of citizens, and specifically on providing the best available evidence in a particular domain.*

We return in the 'Interest holder' section and in the 'Users of ESIC' section to the relationship between the above groupings and the categories of ESIC interest holders and types of users of ESIC.

Equity

Global South

According to UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the Global South broadly comprises Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia (excluding Israel, Japan, and South Korea), and Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand). The concept intersects with but is different from low- and middle-income countries. Chile and Trinidad & Tobago, for example, are considered part of the Global South but are high-income countries. The concept of Global South is not connected to being in the southern hemisphere.

ESIC is prioritizing the Global South in considering its performance both from a process perspective and later an outcome perspective. From a process perspective: 1) at least one co-chair of each of the five working groups and the Governance planning group are from the Global South; and 2) at least half of the members of the six groups are from the Global South. From an outcome perspective, each group is considering how transformations in their respective focus areas can support a transition in leadership and execution to the Global South.

Other dimensions of equity

ESIC is also using a range of other dimensions of equity in considering how it monitors, evaluates and learns about its performance:
1) diversity in regions (Africa, East Asia and Pacific, Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and Caribbean, Middle East and North Africa, South Asia, and USA and Canada)
2) category of interest holder (which we return to below)
3) diversity in languages in which people are comfortable reading, speaking and writing (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and 'other languages')
4) diversity in sector (climate; peace, security and defence; economic affairs; education; health, housing and community amenities; public order and safety; recreation, culture and religion; social protection; general public services; and the cross-cutting category of international development)
5) gender
6) early, mid and late career stage
7) experience working with different types of decision-maker (which we cover above).
ESIC used these considerations in selecting co-chairs and members of working and planning groups and will use them in selecting additional invitees to Cape Town.

Note that we will elaborate on this based on the input of the sub-group advancing work on this topic (Fadi, Patrick and Veronica).

Expectation of the planning process [framework]

The three main expectations of the planning process are:
1) deliver value (via reports) on time – learning and improving as we go – while ensuring equity in process and quality of outputs
2) secure buy-in to emerging ideas by the many categories of interest holder and across sectors
3) contribute to an ambitious transformation in how (living) evidence syntheses are produced and used, and not adhere to 'business-as-usual' by the 'usual suspects.'
While all four types of decision-makers are of interest to the 'Funders interest group,' the Wellcome Trust is particularly interested in a fourth expectation:
4) contribute in particular to achieve 'impact on policy' from evidence synthesis.

The process will yield a fully costed 'menu of options' for funders on pieces of infrastructure they might want to invest in and/or leverage and a consensus roadmap of actionable insights to deliver on the promise of a step-change improvement.

Evidence synthesis

Terms	Definitions	Focus
Evidence synthesis (also listed as a form of evidence earlier in this document)	Systematic process of identifying, selecting, appraising and synthesizing the findings from all studies that have addressed the same question in order to arrive at an overall understanding of what is known, including how this may vary by groups (e.g., racialized communities) and contexts (e.g., low socio-economic neighbourhoods or Latin American countries) *Note that an evidence synthesis can be conducted on any of the above forms of evidence. A synthesis of evaluations may be called an evaluation synthesis.* *Note also that ESIC's focus is supporting the production of easily contextualizable 'global public goods,' the insights from which can then be placed – typically by evidence intermediaries – alongside the many needed forms of local evidence, other types of information (including lived and living experiences and Indigenous ways of knowing), and other considerations to inform decision-makers.*	What has been learned from around the world and how it varies by groups and contexts
Living evidence synthesis	A version of the above that is updated as the evidence, issue and context evolves. Updates as the evidence evolves are supported by continuous evidence surveillance by evidence-synthesis producers. Updates as the issue and context evolve are typically triggered by requests from decision-makers or from evidence intermediaries who support them.	
Evidence synthesis infrastructure	Capabilities needed to support the production and use of evidence syntheses, including capabilities for: 1) demand-side engagement; 2) data sharing and reusing; 3) safe and responsible use of AI; 4) methods and process innovation; and 5) capacity sharing. *Note that each infrastructure element is supported by an ESIC working group.* *Note that funding for ESIC includes funding for: 1) infrastructure described above; 2) (living) evidence syntheses to address societal challenges, including to accelerate achievement of the SDGs; and 3) 'serving up' actionable insights served up in different ways for different decision-makers, sectors, regions and languages.*	Capabilities needed to learn from evidence from around the world

Groups involved in the ESIC planning process

Six groups (the five working groups and the Governance planning group) were activated from the beginning of the planning process (in January 2025). The MEL planning group was activated in March. The Partner engagement and Communications planning group will be activated in early April.

Groups	Focus
Facilitation group	Support the working and planning groups to deliver a fully costed description of what is needed
WG1: Demand-side engagement	Get producers and potential users working together to understand and meet user needs
WG2: Data sharing and reusing	Make it normal to study a question once and use the answers many times in many different contexts
WG3: Safe and responsible use of AI	Bring evidence synthesis to the forefront of technology so that we can get the best impact from the people and resources we have
WG4: Methods & process innovation	Devise synthesis methods and processes that enable radically more timely, relevant, and affordable synthesis
WG5: Capacity sharing	Build a global community with the capabilities to deliver and use evidence synthesis across all major societal questions
PG1: Governance	Devise options for how key interest holders can continue to set and achieve shared goals beyond this process
PG2: Partner engagement	Liaise with peak bodies and work with identify and work with at least some groups without peak bodies to help them shape the Cape Town report and to help make change happen after Cape Town
PG3: Communications	Lead the drafting of headings, messages and text for the Cape Town report, ongoing refinements to our communications strategy and assets, and the drafting of the final report after Cape Town
PG4: Change management	Support the engagement of behavioural science, implementation research and organizational change experts and practitioners in strategizing about how to support the needed behaviour changes among the groups that are part of this collaborative effort
PG5: Monitoring, eval. & learning	Understand and help improve the effectiveness and value for money of this work (both for ESIC later and the ESIC planning process now)

Interest holders

ESIC is engaging or will engage many categories of interest holder, only some of which have what we are calling a 'peak body,' which is a group that can act as a 'voice' on behalf of all members when promoting the interests of its members and which can in turn be a vehicle for communicating with its members.

These peak bodies include:
1) Global SDG Synthesis Coalition (GSDGSC), which is comprised primarily of evaluation offices in the UN system, multilateral development banks, and international financing partnerships, and which is co-chaired by UNDP and UNICEF
2) Building a Global Evidence Synthesis Community (BGESC), which is comprised primarily of evidence-synthesis producers and which is co-led by senior leaders from Campbell, Cochrane and JBI
3) International Network for Government Science Advice (INGSA) and its Francophone counterpart, RFICS, which are comprised of science advisors
4) Funder Interest Group (FIG), which is comprised of funders with an interest in shaping, funding and benefiting from ESIC and which is co-convened by the Wellcome Trust and the Economic and Social Research Council.

Important categories of interest holder where peak bodies do not exist in the same way include:
1) national (and local) policymakers, both parliamentarians and public servants (although there are some peak bodies specifically for parliamentarians and some that focus on subsets of public servants, such as OECD)
2) groups working with other forms of evidence (e.g., Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data focused on data analytics)
3) evidence-support units supporting advisory and decision-making processes (e.g., ACRES and Veredas)
4) evidence (e.g., guidance) units supporting or operating as learning and improvement platforms (e.g., Education Endowment Foundation)
5) citizen-serving NGOs that prioritize evidence in their work (e.g., Sense About Science).
ESIC will need to work hard to identify efficient mechanisms to engage these groups.

'SHOW ME the evidence' features [framework]

The world is poised for a step-change improvement in how we use evidence to address societal challenges. Given the speed at which plans are being made to support this once-in-a-generation transformation, the Implementation Council of the Global Commission on Evidence to Address Societal Challenges developed a working version of the features of an approach to reliably getting research evidence to those who need it and achieved consensus among leaders drawn from the Implementation Council, as well as the Alliance for Living Evidence (Alive) Council and Evidence Synthesis International (ESI). Drawing an acronym from the first letter of the six features, the 'SHOW ME the evidence' features are:
1) Support systems locally that use many forms of research evidence to help address local priorities
2) Harmonized efforts globally that make it easier to learn from others around the world
3) Open-science approaches that make it the norm to build on what others have done
4) Waste-reduction efforts that make the most of investments in evidence support and in research
5) Measured communications that clarify what we know from existing evidence and with what caveats
6) Equity and efficiency in all aspects of this work.
ESIC is primarily focused on feature 2, however, its impacts will be felt in significant part through features 1,4 and 5 while features 3 and 6 are key mechanisms of action.

Users of ESIC

We consider there to be five many types of users of ESIC:
1) evidence intermediaries supporting advisory and decision-making processes (e.g., science advisors, evidence-support units) and learning and improvement platforms (e.g., EEF) that support decision-making by
   a. Government policymakers
   b. Organizational leaders
   c. Professionals
   d. Citizens
2) evidence synthesizers, which includes evidence-synthesis tool developers
3) evidence producers dealing with other forms of evidence that can be synthesized (e.g., researchers undertaking modeling, evaluators preparing for a process and impact evaluation, and citizen scientists generating qualitative insights) or that draw on evidence syntheses (e.g., an economist undertaking a cost-effectiveness analysis or best-buys initiative and a guidance producer developing recommendations)
4) evidence (or research) funders, both those funding evidence syntheses and those funding primary research
5) evidence (or research) publishers (e.g., journals, Cochrane).

While there may be government policymakers or professionals, for example, who use ESIC directly, we anticipate that it will be the evidence intermediaries supporting them who will be the key, direct users of ESIC.

Andrea Ordóñez mapped these users of ESIC against the groups that ESIC is or should be engaging, an edited version of which appears below. As a reminder, we consider the groups in green and bold to be peak bodies.

Groups that ESIC is/should be engaging	Intersections with users of ESIC
Global SDG Synthesis Coalition [UN, MDB & IFP evaluation offices]	• Primarily 3 (evaluators) and 2 (synthesizers) • Occasionally 4 (funders) & 5 (publishers) • Pathway to 1a (government policymakers) via multilateral processes and via UN country offices
Building a Global Evidence Synthesis (ES) Community [ES producers]	• Primarily 2 (synthesizers) • Occasionally 1 (evidence intermediaries supporting all four types of decision-makers)
INGSA and RFICS [science advisors]	• Primarily 1 (evidence intermediaries supporting government policymakers)
Funder interest group [a WT/ESRC convened group]	• 4 (funders)
National (and local) policymakers, both parliamentarians and public servants	• 1a (government policymakers), however, these groups are also the focus of the groups two rows down
Groups working with other forms of evidence (e.g., data analytics, modeling)	• 3 (evidence producers dealing with other forms of evidence)

Evidence-support units supporting advisory and decision-making processes	• 1 (evidence intermediaries) and through them:
	  o Primarily 1a (government policymakers)
	  o Occasionally 1b (organizational leaders)

Evidence (e.g., guidance) units supporting learning and improvement platforms	• 1 (evidence intermediaries) and through them:
	  o Primarily 1c (professionals)
	  o Occasionally 1b (organizational leaders) & 1c (citizens)

Citizen-serving NGOs that prioritize evidence in their work	• 1 (evidence intermediaries) and through them: o Primarily 1d (citizens)