



## **The Evidence Synthesis Infrastructure Collaborative Roadmap: Faster Learning from the Best Available Evidence for Better Results**

Everybody making decisions about their own lives, or other people's lives, should have access to everything the world knows to help them make those decisions. That evidence needs to be found, quality assured, and distilled into actionable insights that they find useful. It needs to be delivered through trusted partners and become the first choice for users.

That is what evidence synthesis can offer. This roadmap sets out how we can deliver this for four types of decision-makers: government policymakers (making decisions on their own and through multilateral processes), organization leaders (in businesses and NGOs), professionals (and other types of practitioners and service providers), and citizens.

Some of these users look for evidence themselves. Most rely on people around them, who we call evidence intermediaries. Government policymakers may turn to multilateral organizations like the United Nations or the World Bank, to science advisors, and to groups providing demand-driven evidence support (which we call evidence-support units). Citizens may rely on citizen-serving and citizen-led NGOs. Others may rely on groups working with different forms of evidence, such as implementation researchers and guidance developers.

The Evidence Synthesis Infrastructure Collaborative (ESIC) exists to deliver actionable insights served up in different ways for different decision makers, sectors, regions, and languages.

It will provide evidence intermediaries with open reusable data on tap that can be rapidly contextualized, reanalyzed and repackaged to meet user needs alongside the many required forms of local evidence. This will be made possible by suites of AI-enabled living evidence synthesis on global priorities or widely shared local priorities. A new user centred evidence synthesis infrastructure will cover demand side engagement, data sharing and reusing, safe and responsible use of AI, methods and process innovation, and capacity sharing.

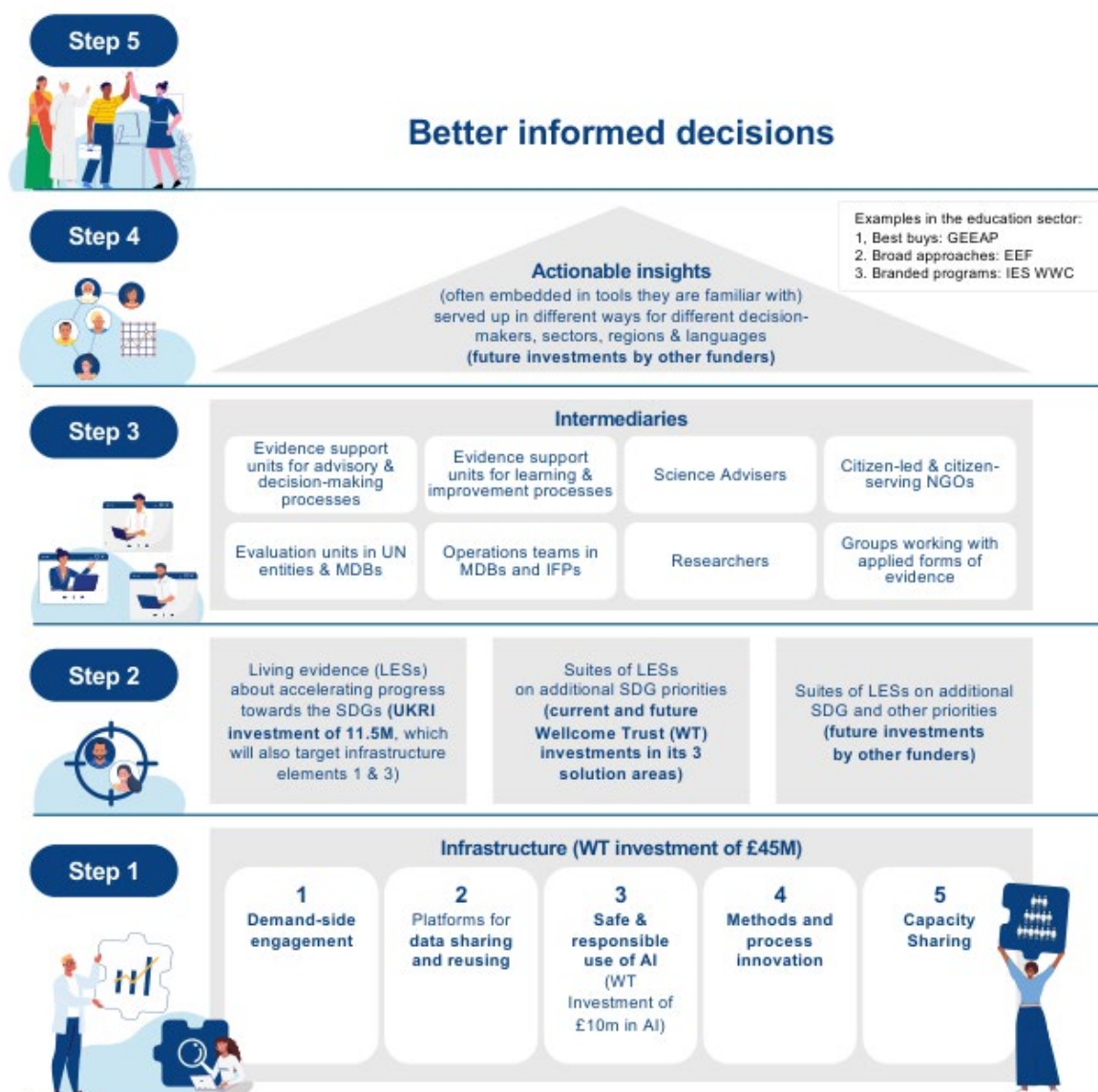
Decision makers will then see these actionable insights via the evidence intermediaries they trust and the tools they are familiar with and work with.

Equity is central to ESIC and critical to both the infrastructure and its impacts. We are committed to a strategic shift of power to the Global South acknowledging the wealth of knowledge and expertise in these regions, ensuring that ESIC responds to its diverse needs, and that ESIC is built on a foundation of global representation and relevance. The ESIC planning process prioritized diversity across seven criteria including region, sector, language, gender, and career stage as well as different kinds of expertise and experience.

ESIC is a significant investment and it will come with significant accountability. We will deliver value from year one through minimal viable products rapidly iterated into optimized

and scaled solutions. Clear metrics will track value for money and justify future investments. But the real payoff will come from getting dramatically better evidence much more quickly into the hands of decision makers when ‘windows of opportunity’ open.

Billions of people could be better off if only we used the evidence we already have and the budgets we already have more effectively. The ESIC roadmap shows how. It now needs your support.



## **STEP ONE: Build a user centred evidence synthesis infrastructure to serve everyone**

Modern evidence synthesis infrastructure is urgently needed in five areas: demand side engagement, data sharing and reusing, safe and responsible use of AI, methods and process innovations, and capacity sharing. Recommended solutions for each area were developed by the working groups of the ESIC planning process. Current evidence synthesis infrastructure is fragile, inadequate, volunteer-dependent, inequitable, and unsustainable.

The ESIC planning process proposed 39 costed solutions as part of an evidence synthesis infrastructure that will make synthesis radically more timely, relevant and affordable.

**Demand side engagement:** we will support and create structures for collaboration with users and funders of evidence including regional demand side secretariats, embedded evidence support units, and co-production labs. This will ensure synthesis meets user needs and is ready when windows of opportunity open.

**Data sharing and reusing:** we will create shared open data infrastructure enabling everyone to find and quickly use evidence synthesis data and build on the work of others. The heart of this will be a connected system of living evidence data repositories, backed up by appropriate open access standards for equitable data sharing and reusing. Quality assurance will make it possible for users to trust data from the repository system. This will stop the wasteful duplication of effort that is common now.

**Safe and responsible use of AI:** we will create AI tools for both synthesis use and production, backed up by validated ethical and quality assurance. These tools will improve the speed and quality of each stage of synthesis production, and then give users the ability to learn from all over the world while understanding variations between groups and contexts.

**Methods and process innovation:** we will develop new methods to answer broad, complex questions that senior decision makers deal with, to draw on the full range of research, evaluation and other evidence, and to support learning between different contexts. We will also work to harmonize efforts and standards globally.

**Capacity sharing:** we will enable a strategic shift to the Global South and ensure that ESIC is built on a foundation of truly global representation and relevance. We will share existing capacity and build new capacity all over the world in user engagement, communication, delivery, standards, training, and access to resources with leadership from the Global South.

Collectively, this new infrastructure will bring evidence synthesis in line with mature parts of the global evidence architecture, such as data analytics, that already have this kind of infrastructure to help them function, improve, and deliver for users.

The infrastructure will be underpinned by governance mechanisms to support a collective impact approach. These will be based on work done by the Governance Planning Group during the ESIC planning process. A collective impact approach has five aspects: common agenda; shared measurement; mutually reinforcing activities; continuous communications; and a practical backbone function. It will include coordinating functions, Monitoring Evaluation and Learning mechanisms, and a funders forum to ensure that both resources are used to best effect.

## **STEP TWO: Make user centred evidence synthesis the norm**

Evidence synthesis needs to change so that the rigorous evidence it can offer is provided in a way that becomes the first choice for users. But in practice high quality evidence synthesis too often loses out to guessing, bluffing, late night internet searches, familiar experts, individual studies, and now AI tools that are not designed to reliably use rigorous evidence.

### **Delivering for users: suites of living evidence synthesis**

One of ESIC's first major initiatives will be to deliver suites of AI-enabled living evidence synthesis.

ESIC will work with the Global SDG Synthesis Coalition to prioritize candidates for this coverage, and with input from other specialists on priorities such as climate action and global health. The suites will cover both long-term priorities such as the SDGs, and new suites to meet both predictable and emergent windows of opportunity in decision making processes identified with partners through the demand side engagement infrastructure.

Delivering these will catalyze work on every aspect of the ESIC infrastructure. It will start by rapidly delivering minimum viable products and then progressively improve them with user feedback until both the methods and the products are as good as they can be.

### **Creating products that compete effectively for users' time and attention**

In an age of contested information, evidence synthesis has unique strengths: it does not rely on the opinion of any single person; it is designed to make the most of all the evidence; it uses transparent methods; and it challenges low quality and biased evidence. It will become more timely, relevant and affordable thanks to the new infrastructure.

In addition, the new suites will meet growing demand for evidence synthesis to answer large-scale questions about entire policy areas and not just individual policy interventions.

There is now a body of experience of different ways to approach such large scale synthesis projects. In education, it enables schools to compare different approaches on impact, cost, and evidence strength; in health, it offers a real time view of Covid-19 treatment and vaccine effectiveness; and in global policy, it provides actionable insights across Sustainable Development Goal themes using the full range of research and evaluation evidence.

### **Creating and keeping new users**

ESIC has made three commitments that together will dramatically grow our user base:

**Global coverage.** Billions of people are currently not served well or often at all by evidence synthesis. Equitable global provision and the strategic shift to the Global South are key practical steps to understanding and serving the needs of billions more users.

**Comprehensive coverage.** ESIC's goal is comprehensive evidence synthesis on all major societal issues. Most important subject areas lack high quality evidence synthesis.

**Integration into users' preferred sources of information.** ESIC's open and modular infrastructure will enable partnerships that increase its reach.

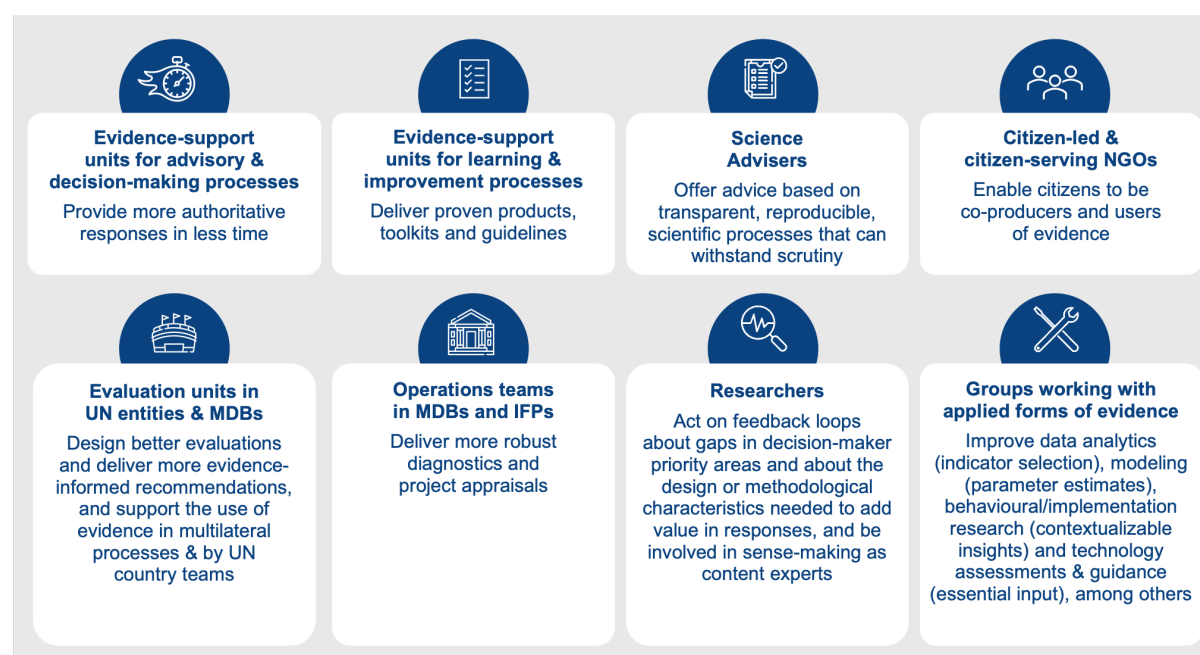
## STEP THREE: Work with intermediaries who support decision makers

Supporting evidence intermediaries is the critical step for ESIC. Most users rely on some kind of intermediary to help them access and analyze evidence so user centred evidence synthesis relies on partnerships with a wide range of evidence intermediaries.

The ESIC planning process has involved a wide range of people and organizations who have a role supporting users as evidence intermediaries. They find relevant evidence, analyze it and package it to meet user needs. ESIC will provide:

- **Actionable insights** into what has been learned from around the world, and from relevant or comparable settings, to place alongside national and local evidence
- **Open reusable data** on tap that can be rapidly contextualized, reanalyzed and repackaged to meet user needs
- **Quality assurance** that is core to the synthesis process to reduce the practical and reputational risks from low quality, partial, self-serving, or biased evidence providers
- **More authoritative responses in less time**

Through the planning process and extensive two-way engagement we have validated that faster, cheaper, and more useful evidence synthesis will create real world benefits for a wide range of evidence intermediaries and the users they support in specific fields.



User focused evidence synthesis depends on understanding user needs. Evidence intermediaries, who may also be evidence users and producers themselves, will be vital contributors to the collaborative demand side engagement structures that are part of the ESIC infrastructure. Working with intermediaries will enable ESIC to draw on their understanding of users, such as: topics of interest to different users; decision making processes, and windows of opportunity for providing useful evidence. Intermediaries can also offer understanding of context, including what further locally or contextually relevant analysis the data needs to support; and the political context that evidence must be useful in.

## **STEP FOUR: Ensure more people start using and keep using high quality evidence synthesis**

ESIC exists to deliver actionable insights served up in different ways for different decision makers, sectors, regions, and languages. Synthesizing the evidence and extracting useful insights is not enough: competing effectively for users' time and attention means delivering those insights in the right format for the right audience through the right channels.

We will embed these actionable insights into a wide range of advisory and decision making processes by working with the full range of users and intermediaries and provide open reusable data to integrate into existing tools and workflows.

Crucially, ESIC will enable dramatically faster delivery of high quality evidence so that it is ready for the often brief windows of opportunity for evidence to inform decision making, whether that is in the policymaking process, organizational decision making, service delivery by professionals, in individuals' lives, or in funding processes.

### **For government policymakers**

- ESIC will deliver higher quality evidence products for senior decision makers such as reviews of policy alternatives, or best buy assessments
- ESIC will be embedded in decision support and knowledge management tools and processes used by governments and multilateral institutions, giving access to open reusable quality assured data that can be reanalyzed and contextualized as needed
- ESIC will support domestic and multilateral evidence teams supporting policy and practice to quickly and efficiently draw on the full range of quality assured global evidence

### **Organizational leaders in all sectors, including NGOs and businesses**

- ESIC will support continuous improvement and innovation both in established areas of work, and in adapting to new and emerging conditions
- ESIC will enable a shift in staff time from gathering and synthesizing evidence to contextualizing evidence alongside other inputs to decision-making

### **Professionals and other practitioners and service providers**

- ESIC will enable rapid identification and adoption of best practices and learning between places and contexts by supporting continually-updated learning and improvement platforms that offer professionals guidance on best practices and the evidence for them, often provided by professional bodies and similar intermediaries

### **Citizens**

- ESIC will support citizens and citizen-led NGOs by providing shortcuts to the world's best evidence and products and a guarantee of evidence you can trust
- ESIC will embed high quality evidence in the everyday services and tools that people use to find and check information, or to support their decision making on important life choices, so that evidence-based choices become the default or easy option
- ESIC will engage citizens in asking questions and answering them (with new research or with existing evidence)

**For funders including government, philanthropic, development funders, who have a vital role support the operationalization of these decisions**

- ESIC will transform the work done by in-house or funded evidence intermediaries that support evidence-informed decision-making by government policymakers, organizational leaders (particularly in NGOs), professionals (and other practitioners and service providers), and/or ‘citizens’ by enabling them quickly and efficiently to put actionable insights from AI-enabled, living evidence syntheses on what has been learned from around the world, particularly for groups and contexts relevant to them alongside the many needed forms of local evidence in program development, science advice, briefing notes, learning and improvement initiatives, etc.
- ESIC will enable funders to rigorously create lists of ‘best buys’ in a given sector (instead of current more ad hoc approaches to estimating effect sizes)
- ESIC will inform evaluation designs, diagnostics, project analysis, and recommendations and in turn support accountability for and learning about equitably improving people’s lives

**For research and evidence funders**

There is a specific additional use case for supporting funders of research and evidence. ESIC will give research funders an opportunity to use rigorous, objective, reproducible evidence to ground their prioritization, funding decisions, and impact assessment.

Research and evidence funders have an ‘upstream’ role to ensure that the high quality evidence base needed to achieve the benefits listed above actually exists. However, too often strategic decisions about where research funding can make the most difference are based on opinions and beliefs, and individual research and evidence production efforts end up being duplicative, underpowered, or otherwise wasteful.

- ESIC will direct attention to where **‘solutions’ or applied research** are most needed, to support ‘evidence-based research’ (i.e., using findings from syntheses of previous studies to inform new research, rather than relying on beliefs and opinions), and to reduce research waste
  - Point primary researchers to gaps in decision-maker priority areas, needless duplication of effort, and the design or methodological characteristics needed to add value on top of what is already known
  - Point evidence-synthesis teams to gaps and duplication
  - Point peer-review panels assessing applications for primary research and for evidence synthesis to a way to independently verify assertions about what types of primary research and evidence synthesis are needed
- ESIC will direct attention to promising approaches in **‘discovery’ research** (e.g., finding ‘signals’ in foundation science and early translational studies)
- ESIC will support assessments of **research impact** (e.g., by linking a list of research projects funded by a specific research funder to ESIC data about the primary research studies that ‘tipped the balance’ on questions like what works or how and why something works)
- ESIC will transform the work done by in-house or funded **evidence intermediaries**

## **STEP FIVE: Enable better informed decisions to improve people's lives and save money**

ESIC will act urgently to establish a short term strategy for action with input from the interest holders involved in ESIC. With a collective impact approach, transformative gains are possible very quickly:

### **In 1 year: Early impacts visible while the foundation is being laid:**

- Execution of evidence synthesis is led by the Global South in a distributed system with growing leadership capacity across countries in the Global South
- Evidence-savvy decision-makers—government policymakers, organizational leaders, professionals and citizens—have greater confidence in, and increasingly rely on, the evidence being presented to them
- Feedback loops are instigated with the funders and producers of primary research and evaluation evidence to ensure next-generation primary research addresses priority questions and uses appropriate designs, which will in turn inform quality synthesis products
- Actionable insights are available by standing up initial versions of evidence synthesis products that are the first step towards living evidence syntheses on 100 of the biggest societal challenges of our time
- Early adopting evidence intermediaries—evidence-support units, science advisors and citizen-serving NGOs—can increasingly easily put the many needed forms of local evidence alongside what we've learned from around the world and how these learnings vary by groups and contexts
- Five elements of the ESIC infrastructure are transforming evidence synthesis from its fragmented state to a responsive, agile, efficient and decentralized supply chain

### **In 2 years: Impacts are more widely distributed and the foundation is more developed:**

- Leadership for and execution of evidence synthesis accelerates in a distributed system across the Global South
- A growing proportion of decision-makers consider the systematic and transparent use of evidence to be the 'new normal'
- Actionable insights are available from living evidence syntheses on 100 of the biggest societal challenges of our time
- A growing proportion of evidence intermediaries have the capacity and access needed to draw on ESIC in providing high quality, timely, demand-driven evidence support
- Marginal costs continue to drop while the complexity of questions that can be addressed continue to rise as data sharing and reusing accelerate, AI performance metrics improve for different tasks, and new methods and processes are scaled up

**In 5 years: A fully transformed evidence synthesis ecosystem able to pivot quickly to emerging priorities as a cornerstone of the global evidence architecture.**



## IMPLEMENTATION

ESIC gained immediate momentum after the original announcement at the UN General Assembly meeting in September 2024.

The six month ESIC planning process produced the first version of this roadmap, with many hundreds of people from different parts of the world and from different sectors contributing.

The Cape Town Consensus meeting stress tested and refined the roadmap resulting in this new edition and confirmed wide support for the recommendations.

### Act now

The Cape Town Charter summarizes the commitments from the consensus meeting and is open for any individual or organization to sign.

In the coming months, we anticipate significant announcements from across the ESIC community of communities to start implementing the roadmap. For example:

- Evidence synthesis producers will commit to new ways of working to better meet user needs and implement new technologies
- Multilateral institutions will commit to creating processes to identify and share their evidence needs, and to share the evidence they produce
- Funders will start to share how they will resource further progress

As this shows, significant steps can be taken by existing actors with existing resources. These steps will contribute to a test and learn approach to developing ESIC.

### Start small

Many of the solutions in this roadmap will be tested rapidly. The starting point will be to create or identify minimum viable products that can be used to get feedback from users, intermediaries, and other partners.

Testing and learning and applying that feedback will strengthen the thinking behind the solutions as well as how they are implemented.

Some of these minimum viable products will be deliverable within existing resources and funding commitments. Many others can be delivered with affordable targeted investments.

Smaller investments of new resources will enable step changes in aspects of the shared infrastructure or in its application to specific issues, if those resources are deployed within the context of a collective impact framework. This might range from small investments in user engagement in specific contexts to larger investments in entirely new technologies.

This means that sectors and places that have not historically benefited from strong evidence infrastructure will be able to set higher expectations in future as ESIC proceeds, and help to make sure that ESIC is flexible and tailored to different needs and contexts.

## Think big

Our ultimate goal is comprehensive evidence synthesis across all major societal issues. The paradigm shift that ESIC represents is a permanent and generational improvement in synthesis capability: faster, cheaper, and more useful.

This requires sustained commitment from across the community and investment at a scale comparable to other significant shifts in evidence capability, such as the investment in measuring the SDG indicators. As previous successful shifts in the evidence ecosystem show, this can be achieved through a combination of existing organizations prioritizing new ways of working, leadership from large scale funders, and a collective impact approach from a wide range of funders. Collaboration will ensure that ESIC does not just take a one size fits all approach but understands and meets the needs of diverse users, sectors and contexts.

ESIC will develop open and equitable coordination functions for the Collaborative which will draw on input from evidence users, intermediaries, and producers as well as funders. We proved during the planning process that this community of communities can come together effectively. A coordination function can build on the lessons of that experience by continuing to engage equitably in the ways that have been successful so far, and extending and adapting that work to better engage neglected audiences.

ESIC will establish a robust and independent Monitoring Evaluation and Learning function to support the collective impact approach.

Independent cost estimates for implementing each solution globally and across all sectors over the next five years show that 37% of the \$278m total cost is already funded.

## Your next step

This is a roadmap for collective impact. We can transform evidence synthesis to improve lives and it will take all of us working together. Whatever your role and expertise, and whatever part of the ESIC community you come from, we ask you to:

1. **Commit to collective impact.** Review the roadmap and look for where you can harmonize your efforts with others. You might join up your approach to user engagement, share data or technology, co-develop methods and processes, or share capacity with others in the community.
2. **Learn and share.** Join the ESIC mailing list and regular online meetings. Say publicly what you and your organization are doing to pursue this roadmap, seek feedback through open processes, and work with others to strengthen your ideas.
3. **Foreground equity in what you do and how you do it.** Consider how you can work better with a wider range of leaders and participants. Put interdisciplinarity at the core of all you do. Consider what you have to share, and what you can benefit from others sharing.

Over the coming months we will share updates from across the ESIC communities on what we are all doing next.

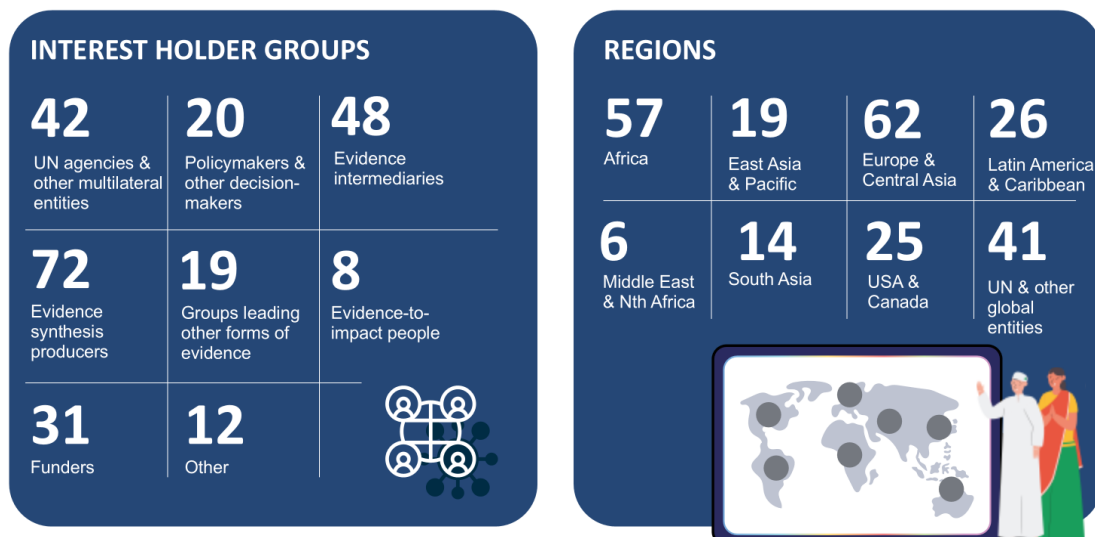
## ABOUT THE ESIC PLANNING PROCESS

Everything about the Evidence Synthesis Infrastructure Collaborative can be found at [evidencesynthesis.wiki](https://evidencesynthesis.wiki). Regular updates will be available on the site and mailing list.

The full roadmap has more detail, including on the 39 recommended solutions for evidence synthesis infrastructure set out in the reports of the planning process working groups and the governance planning group, and on complementary documents like the [citizen call to action](#).

The roadmap was developed through an open process involving hundreds of experts from a broad range of interest holders, including the multilateral system, government policymakers, citizen-serving NGOs and citizen leaders, science advisors, evidence intermediaries, evidence synthesis producers, groups working with other forms of evidence, and funders. Most group members were paid small stipends and they and many people donated significant amounts of time and expertise above the funded commitment.

Seven hundred people applied to join groups covering demand side engagement, AI, data, methods and process innovations, capacity sharing, and governance. 52% of group members were from the Global South, 46% spoke languages other than English, 69% were from sectors other than health, 52% were female, and 33% were early or mid-career.



The planning process followed a “double-diamond process” with deliberate stages in-built to encourage divergent and convergent thinking, before the proposed solutions were stress-tested and refined at the Cape Town Consensus Meeting in June 2025.

