**Evidence Synthesis Infrastructure
Collaborative (ESIC) planning process:**
Summary Report - WG4 Methods & Process Innovation

Global SDG Synthesis Coalition (GSDGSC)
Building a Global Evidence Synthesis Community (BGESC)
Pan-African Collective for Evidence (PACE)
Center for Rapid Evidence Synthesis (ACRES)

Advancing methods and process innovation

The vision of Working Group 4 (WG4) was to explore ways that would support the production of trustworthy, timely, relevant and cost-efficient evidence syntheses, capable of addressing the most significant challenges of our time. While areas for methodological innovation were identified, the more critical need is to strengthen connections: across sectors, with citizens, and throughout the research and policy cycle. This includes fostering collaborative, integrated approaches to evidence synthesis that place citizens at the centre, are embedded within policymaking, and are agile in responding to diverse contexts. It envisions a shift from synthesis as a siloed activity to a connected process that shapes evidence synthesis from its production through to its impact on people's lives.

WG4 recognises that strengthening methods and process innovation is critical to supporting equity-centred, timely, and decision-relevant evidence. Across diverse sectors, there is a lack of shared fit-for-purpose tools, quality standards, and agile methodologies that can respond to urgent policy needs. Current approaches often prioritise narrow study designs and exclude grey literature, lived experience, and local knowledge, limiting the relevance and utility of syntheses. WG4's solutions emphasise methodological pluralism, inclusive co-design, and dynamic evidence practices to support a globally adaptable infrastructure that can meet diverse decision-making contexts.

The landscape: who needs methods innovation and why?

Demand for innovation comes from policy actors, institutions, and communities navigating urgent and complex decisions, particularly in areas such as climate, education, humanitarian response, and health equity. These users require methods that are faster, more inclusive, and able to handle multiple forms of evidence beyond standard randomized controlled trials. Demand is also growing from within research communities themselves, particularly those in the Global South, who often find dominant evidence paradigms to be ill-fitting for the questions and contexts in which they work. Calls for more inclusive, agile, and contextualized approaches reflect both dissatisfaction with the current system and a readiness to co-create new models. However, methodological advances remain fragmented and inaccessible, particularly in the Global South. To support equitable participation and real-time decision-making, evidence synthesis methods must evolve to become more agile, inclusive, accessible, and contextually grounded.

Capability gaps and maturity: where are we now?

Many systems lack the capacity to conduct rapid, context-sensitive synthesis. Methodologies remain concentrated in a few domains, often prioritizing randomised controlled studies and overlooking diverse forms of evidence such as non-randomised data, grey literature or experiential knowledge. Tools and standards are fragmented and living evidence practices are unevenly adopted. Additionally, global coordination and training mechanisms are insufficient to build and sustain methodologically robust synthesis ecosystems across sectors and regions.

Key issues: what's holding us back?

Progress is constrained by limited cross-sectoral learning, weak incentives for innovation, and gaps in global coordination. Method development often lacks user involvement, particularly from the Global South. Existing standards are inconsistently applied, and innovations in synthesis dissemination and contextual translation remain underdeveloped and fragmented. A lack of common quality benchmarks, limited inclusion of citizen perspectives, and insufficient investment in agile methods have also stifled progress. Additionally, the absence of governance structures to coordinate methodological innovation across sectors hinders coherence and limits strategic investment.

Solutions for progress: what can we do next?

To address entrenched capability gaps and fragmented innovation efforts, WG4 proposes eleven practical, scalable solutions to transform evidence synthesis methods and processes. These 11 solutions are aligned with the AACC framework, in that solutions will address issues of Agility, Access, Connections and Context, so that we can produce timely, relevant and affordable ES addressing challenging questions of our time

4.1 Evidence support units for rapid synthesis embedded in user organizations: Create agile, embedded teams within key institutions to deliver rapid evidence syntheses and respond to time-sensitive demands (WG1 1.1 & 1.2).

4.2 Shared quality standards for different types of synthesis: Establish a unified framework for quality standards across sectors to ensure consistency, credibility, and comparability in evidence synthesis (WG2 2.2, 2.3, 2.4).

4.3 Cross-sector funding calls and communities of practice: Promote joint funding calls and form communities of practice to foster cross-sectoral collaboration in evidence synthesis initiatives addressing policy-scale questions. Cross-sector will also include improving methods and processes to inform and improve the planning conduct, quality and transparency of primary research (WG1 1.1, 1.2, 5.9).

4.4 Coordination of ongoing synthesis projects to avoid duplication: Develop a centralized database to track living evidence syntheses (LES), avoid duplication of synthesis efforts globally, and implement quality control and governance for the system.

4.5 Panel of citizen partners at global, regional, and sub-regional levels: Establish a diverse global panel to embed citizen perspectives more meaningfully into evidence synthesis development and governance (WG 1.3).

4.6 Methods for synthesis of evidence not controlled by commercial publishers ('grey literature'): Create a taxonomy and tools to locate, appraise, and synthesize grey literature effectively, especially from underrepresented sectors.

4.7 Methods for assessing the certainty of evidence: Develop and refine tools to better evaluate the certainty of evidence, particularly from qualitative, observational and mixed-methods studies.

4.8 Interactive tools for evidence dissemination: Design interactive tools that allow decision-makers to navigate, filter, and query synthesized evidence in more tailored ways.

4.9 Methods to improve synthesis to meet policymakers' needs: Collate and standardise a toolkit offering flexible methods tailored to the urgency and context of decision-making environments.

4.10 Methods for translating findings from LES to local contexts: Establish guidance and tools to support contextual translation of living evidence syntheses for use in diverse settings and sectors.

4.11 Academy for Evidence Synthesis, and continuous funding to key organizations: Build a global academy to consolidate and enhance training, capacity building, and methodological innovation in synthesis (e.g. methods for integrating different types and sources of data in evidence synthesis).

Outcomes: what is likely to change?

These solutions aim to significantly improve the agility, relevance, and inclusiveness of global synthesis efforts. Together, they will help catalyze a more responsive evidence ecosystem capable of meeting urgent policy needs and supporting equity-centred decision-making. By addressing structural gaps in methods, training, and standard setting, the proposed solutions lay the foundation for long-term system transformation. Improved methodological standards, greater participation from underserved regions, and coordinated investment in tools and training across sectors will accelerate innovation and ensure evidence synthesis remains credible, context-sensitive, and fit for the future.