



# Key Considerations in Developing a policy brief

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# So, what is a policy brief?

- First of all, it is brief!
  - 2-8 pages
  - 1000-3000 words
- Second, it is written for policy makers
  - Hence it uses their language!
- **Practical notes on “policy brief” specifications**
  - Comparing a policy brief with other types of writing

# Policy making stages and processes

Policy processes are very **context specific, policy actor dependant and vary over time in a country**

## Stages

- Problem formation / agenda setting
- Policy formulation
- Policy implementation
- Policy evaluation

## Policy briefs' role

Policy briefs can address all stages of policy-making

As such, they are powerful tools for policy-makers and policy-developers



# Key elements for a policy brief (WHO EMRO, 2021)

1. Title
2. Justification for the brief and policy objectives (introduction/background/purpose)
3. Key messages or policy main recommendations (summary presentation of the main messages)
4. Description of policy options and their advantages and disadvantages (details of the main findings)
5. A description of how the policy brief was developed (methods)
6. Further important considerations
7. Acknowledgements
8. Conflicts of interests
9. Sources of evidence and key references

# A policy brief versus an academic paper

## Policy briefs

- Short
- Includes methods
- Recommendations / conclusions bound within available evidence
- Aims in supporting policy-making
  - Should use plain language
- Address few linked key questions
  - e.g. “policy problem, policy options, implementation of the options, barriers”
- Findings based on data and evidence from variety of sources
- Multiple sources of data and evidence, mixed presentation of the findings
- Gives focus to main findings, interpretation of the findings, recommendations and their contextualization
- Give focus to implementation challenges
  - Discussion of responsibilities and who takes the task forward
- Hence a different order of content

## Academic papers

- Short
- Includes methods
- Recommendations / conclusions bound within available evidence
- Often aims at advancing knowledge
- Focused on 1-2 key questions amenable to one main methodology
  - e.g. “is policy option A more effective than policy option B?” OR “what are the main barriers for the implementation of policy Option A?”
- Findings directly derived from the data generated through the research to generate evidence
- Source of data varies by methodology
- Gives focus to methods, findings and discussing the limitations of the findings
- Often not concerned with the implementation of the findings
- Hence a different order of content

# A policy brief versus an academic paper

Policy briefs	Academic papers
Short	Short
Includes methods	Includes methods
Recommendations / conclusions bound within available evidence	Recommendations / conclusions bound within available evidence
Aims in supporting policy-making - Should use plain language	Often aims at advancing knowledge
Addresses few linked key questions (e.g. “policy problem, policy options, implementation of the options, barriers”)	Focused on 1-2 key questions amenable to one main methodology (e.g. “is policy option A more effective than policy option B?” OR “what are the main barriers for the implementation of policy Option A?”)
Findings based on data and evidence from variety of sources	Findings directly derived from the data generated through the research to generate evidence
Multiple sources of data and evidence, mixed presentation of the findings	Source of data varies by methodology
Gives focus to main findings, interpretation of the findings, recommendations and their contextualization	Gives focus to methods, findings and discussing the limitations of the findings
Give focus to implementation challenges (Discussion of responsibilities and who takes the task forward)	Often not concerned with the implementation of the findings
Hence a different order of content	Hence a different order of content

Capacity Building for Development of Policy Briefs: General Principles for NEDtP Members

# A policy brief versus an advocacy brief or memo

Policy briefs	Advocacy brief / memo
Short	Short
Includes methods	Often does not include methods
Recommendations / conclusions bound within available evidence	Recommendations focused on already made decisions or the direction of advocacy / interest
Aims in supporting policy-making (gives policy options and their pros and cons)	Aims at implementing policies or influencing policy making in a certain direction
Addresses few linked key questions	Focused on key recommendations
Findings based on data and evidence from variety of sources	Selected use of data and evidence
Gives focus to main findings, interpretation of the findings, recommendations and their contextualization	Focused on key recommendations
Give focus to implementation challenges (Discussion of responsibilities and who takes the task forward)	Often not concerned with the challenges – rather encouraging implementation or decision
Hence the recommended order of content	May include different elements in the presentation of content



## Exploitation, trafficking and smuggling can be avoided

The refugee and migrant crisis in Europe is a children's crisis. Between January 2015 and August 2016, almost 1.3 million people crossed Europe in search of safety and a better life. The number of children among them has been on the increase. In September 2015, one in ten of the refugees and migrants was a child, by the end of December it was one in three, and now children make up around 40 percent of the refugees and migrants stranded in Greece and across south-eastern Europe. In 2015, 88,300 asylum seekers applying for international protection in the Member States of the European Union (EU) were considered unaccompanied children.<sup>1</sup> They are the most vulnerable and many have experienced exploitation, the worst forms of child labour and/or other types of abuse, on at least one leg of their journey.

Most often abuse, exploitation and other forms of violence start back in the country of origin. According to UNHCR, 89 per cent of people arriving to Europe by sea in 2016 come from countries experiencing war, conflict and generalised violence. Parents and children escape to seek survival. With ever-tighter border restrictions, and border walls multiplying across the region, they find themselves undertaking longer and riskier journeys.

Violence and abuse experienced in earlier ages at community and family level also increases exploitation and trafficking risks for the children. Domestic violence pushes children away from families and communities, and when not protected and guided, the chances are high that they will continue experiencing abuse and exploitation along their journey.

Evidence shows that the current refugee and migrant crisis has boosted smuggling businesses.<sup>2</sup> With little information available and increasingly restrictive opportunities to move further, very often refugees and migrants see smugglers as their only option



being exploited and abused during the journey. Europe has a solid legal framework criminalising smuggling and trafficking and yet not enough is done to fight exploitation and abuse of the refugee and migrant children.

### European legal and policy framework

The international community developed the legal definitions of smuggling and trafficking in persons in the context of fighting transnational organised crime, with two Protocols supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.<sup>3</sup> Today, both smuggling and trafficking are criminalised regardless of whether committed in the context of organised crime or not.

Smuggling and trafficking are complex offences and it is not always easy to differentiate between the two, especially when children are involved. Smuggling legislation criminalises 'the procurement of the illegal entry, or/and enabling of illegal stay, for the purposes of financial or other material benefit'.<sup>4</sup> It is a crime

# Developing a policy brief from a comprehensive document

- **Don't try shortening a long document into a policy brief**
  - Cutting the text down is not the best approach
  - It is difficult anyhow as you feel attached to the text
- Instead, write the policy based on the key element of the report
  - Note that you may need to have a different focus in the policy making
    - Imagine you are describing a 3h film to a friend in 5 min!
  - Focus on the big picture, on key issues
- **Start writing the policy brief from “key messages” and “policy options”**



# What if you do not have a report?

- You start from describing the issue of interest
- You will need to provide the data and evidence that supports recommendations
  - Searching evidence and consulting stakeholders
    - Evidence from systematic reviews and valid research
  - Identification of policy options and their pros and cons
  - Key barriers and facilitators of policy implementation
  - Use local knowledge and data to complement the evidence
- And prepare the brief based on the proposed standards

# Remember that a policy brief should

- be short!
- be easy to follow and interesting to read
  - use graphs and diagrams if they help delivering the message
- be based on evidence
  - not focused on methods and unnecessary details
- give a lot of attention to policy implementation
  - and potential barriers and facilitators
- remain focused on the key policy question
  - addressing it the main aim of a policy brief!