VIGNETTE 1

Research commissioning

Using the global living evidence map on evidence-informed policymaking (EIPM)

Use case

A research commissioner (for example, a foundation's research division or a dedicated technical unit) is deciding where a single new synthesis commission on EIDM interventions would add the most value this cycle. The commissioner wants to know which mechanisms are already well-populated, which are growing quickly, and which still lack sufficient primary evidence to synthesise, before committing funding to this work. This scenario is illustrative.

1,010
studies now behind the map (latest update), up from 617 in 2024

100%
Of possible mechanism–outcome combinations represented (48 of 48; 98% in 2024)

12%
of studies use a counterfactual design

49
studies on Awareness of EIDM (M1), still the smallest mechanism

> *All four figures are drawn from the live evidence map dataset (latest update, n=1,010), cross-checked against the 2024 World Health Organization (WHO) technical report (n=617) where a comparison is made.*

The decision

Where is there already enough primary evidence to support a meaningful synthesis of EIDM interventions? Which mechanisms have seen sufficient growth since 2024 to justify considering a new synthesis? Where are gaps in the primary evidence base still too substantial, suggesting that further research may be needed before a synthesis is feasible? And what kind of synthesis design can the available study designs support?

Using the map

The research commissioner works through the map in stages, each one narrowing the field toward a shortlist of realistic commissioning options:

1. **Compare evidence volumes across the six mechanisms.** Awareness (M1) has 49 studies, Agreement (M2) has 251, Structure and process (M6) has 307, Skills (M5) has 428, Access (M3) has 464, and Interaction (M4) has 503. A study can carry more than one mechanism, so these counts overlap.

> *What you would see in the map: switch to the mechanism-summary view, or read the matrix column totals, to see counts per mechanism without filtering by outcome.*

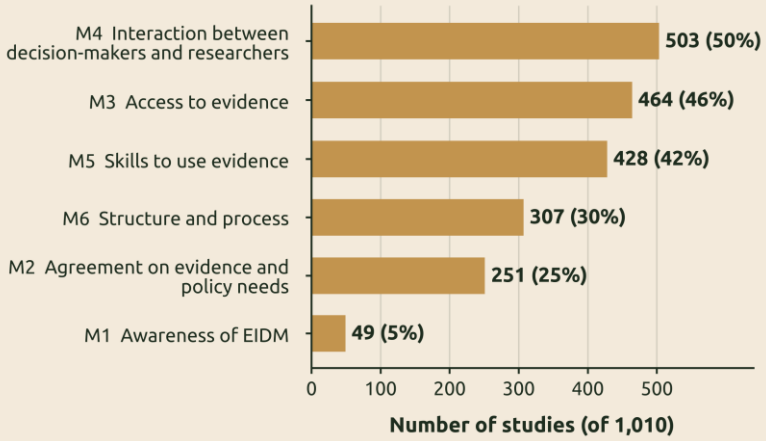


Figure 1. Number of mapped studies per mechanism (of 1,010 studies, latest update). A study can carry more than one mechanism, so the counts and percentages overlap and do not add up to 1,010 or 100%.

Full names: Awareness of EIDM (M1); Agreement on evidence and policy needs (M2); Access to evidence (M3); Interaction between decision-makers and researchers (M4); Skills to use evidence (M5); Structure and process for EIDM (M6).

2. **Check the full mechanism-by-outcome matrix.** All 48 combinations now contain at least one study (100% coverage, up from 98% in 2024). However, coverage remains uneven. For example, awareness (M1) and development impact now co-occur in four studies, illustrating that a populated cell does not necessarily contain sufficient evidence for a detailed synthesis.
3. **Check study design.** Only 123 of 1,010 studies (12%) use a counterfactual-based design, one that compares against a group or setting without the intervention. Most of the evidence base is therefore more likely to support a mixed-methods synthesis than a purely quantitative one that can pool results.
4. **Check the 'type of knowledge' coding.** 696 studies (68.9%) document the science of using evidence and 432 (42.8%) document the art; 118 studies (11.7%) address both. This distinction can help a research commissioner consider whether the proposed synthesis should examine intervention effectiveness, implementation experiences or both.

> *What you would see in the map: the type of knowledge field sits in the study-characteristics panel, not the mechanism–outcome matrix, so filter there directly.*

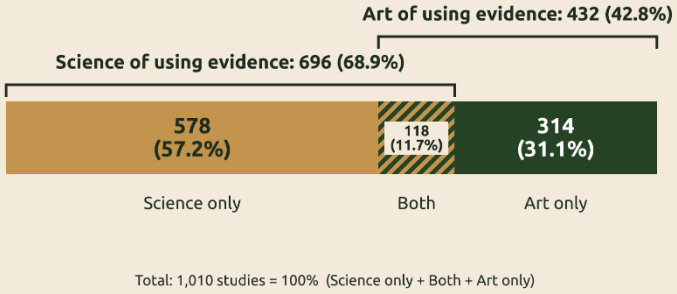


Figure 2. Type of knowledge on evidence use across the 1,010 studies in the map (latest update). Brackets show the totals for science (696, 68.9%) and art (432, 42.8%), which overlap because 118 studies are coded under both.

5. **Identifying potential commissioning options.** Access (M3), Interaction (M4), and Skills (M5) each have more than 400 studies, suggesting substantial evidence bases for further synthesis consideration. Agreement (M2) more than doubled (from 109 to 251 studies) and warrants renewed attention. Structure and process (M6) grew from 189 to 307, While awareness (M1) has only 49 studies and remains the least frequently examined mechanism, this might justify a call for new primary studies to cover any key evidence gaps. These patterns help identify potential synthesis topics and areas where further primary research may be useful. Before allocating funding, the commissioner would need to assess existing syntheses, the relevance and quality of available studies, and the feasibility of addressing a clearly defined research question.

What the map can reveal and what it cannot establish

The map can reveal	The map cannot establish
• How much evidence exists behind each mechanism, and how fast each has grown since the last comparison point. • Whether matrix coverage is complete, and which cells only recently gained their first study. • How much of the base could support a quantitative versus a mixed-methods synthesis design. • Whether the 'art' as well as the 'science' of using evidence is documented.	• Whether a synthesis of a given mechanism already exists outside this evidence base. • Whether the studies in a thin cell are of adequate quality to inform anything; no critical appraisal is built into the coding. • Whether a synthesis-ready mechanism is the right strategic priority for this commissioner. • How rigorous or comparable the existing primary studies are.

Evidence gaps worth knowing about

Awareness of EIDM (M1) remains the least frequently examined mechanism. Only three studies examine awareness alongside development impact. While these figures highlight gaps in research coverage, the map cannot establish whether the available studies are sufficient for a meaningful synthesis or explain why these areas have received comparatively less research attention.

Practical takeaway

> *The commissioner shortlists agreement (M2) for a potential new evidence synthesis, given the substantial growth in its evidence base since 2024. Structures and processes (M6) remain a secondary option, while interaction (M4), access (M3) and skills (M5) offer larger evidence bases for consideration. Awareness (M1), particularly in relation to development impact, is identified as a potential priority for additional primary research. Before committing funds, the commissioner checks for existing syntheses and assesses the relevance, quality and comparability of the underlying studies.*

A note on sources and currency

This vignette is grounded in the interactive evidence map's underlying study dataset (latest update, 1,010 studies) and the 2024 World Health Organization (WHO) technical report, which supplies the 2024 comparison figures used above. The search strategy remained consistent across updates, with studies identified through external contributions also added to the evidence base. The reported 64% increase therefore reflects growth in the mapped evidence base and should not be interpreted as an increase in newly published studies alone. Because this is a living map, updated periodically as new studies are added, later updates may show different figures.

References: World Health Organization (2024). *The art and science of promoting evidence-informed decision-making: a global living evidence map.* World Health Organization. https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/382279. License: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO

About

About PACE

The Pan-African Collective for Evidence (PACE) is a non-profit organisation that supports evidence-informed policymaking across Africa. Its vision is a world free of poverty. PACE works to unlock the potential of evidence capacities, evidence communities, and evidence synthesis to strengthen institutionalised evidence-to-policy systems and support meaningful development and transformation. For more information: https://pace-evidence.org/art-and-science

About this vignette

This vignette is part of a series showcasing how policymakers can use the Global Living Evidence Map on Evidence-Informed Policymaking (EIPM).

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