Geneva
Science-Policy
Interface

# Brokering Scientific Knowledge in Support of Global Governance

## Insights from International Geneva

SURVEY REPORT

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# Acknowledgments


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## About the Geneva Science-Policy Interface

The Geneva Science-Policy Interface (GSPI) is an independent platform with the mission to foster and promote science-informed policymaking, by leveraging its unique position in the heart of Geneva as a hub of international cooperation. Nested within a world-class university, the GSPI addresses some of the key barriers to effective engagement between scientific institutions and international policy professionals.

**www.gspi.ch**

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# 1. Introduction

Never before has science been so critical to political decision-making as in our current era, where societal challenges are increasingly complex, intertwined, globalised and often driven by science and technology. Yet, at the same time, scientific knowledge is also being challenged and misrepresented amid rising mis- and disinformation amplified by social media. The need to provide tailored, consensual, interdisciplinary, policy-relevant knowledge has never been greater. This requires new resources, methodologies, collaborations, networks, and systemic adaptations.

While expert knowledge has always been a key element of multilateral diplomacy, calls for a more effective, transparent and consistent use of scientific expertise have multiplied over the past decades and have led to multiple developments, such as the institutionalisation of new science-policy interfaces, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) being a landmark in this regard; the formal integration of science in global frameworks, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; or the creation of platforms and dashboards to make scientific information more accessible.

These are critical developments, but much remains to be done to ensure the chain of stakeholders essential to broker knowledge effectively – scientists, decision-makers, policy professionals, intermediaries, and civil society actors –, are properly incentivised to engage with one another and are empowered to act creatively and purposefully throughout all stages of the policy cycle.

Mapping the actors, practices, gaps and needs in science-informed international policy processes across communities of actors is important to enhance the way we think about bridging solutions. This study is an attempt to identify the different practitioners engaged at the science-policy interface in International Geneva and to gather insights about their specific activities to contribute to a better understanding of knowledge brokering as a specific field of practice in international policymaking.

The city of Geneva holds a unique position as a global hub of governance where key international policy decisions are taken on a daily basis, with far-reaching implications for communities around the world. It is home to dozens of international institutions and a myriad of multilateral policy conversations on critical transnational issues, including health, trade, migration, refugees, climate and the environment, sustainable development, and many more. Essential for generating effective policy outcomes, a critical mass of actors – international organisations (IOs), diplomatic representations, non-governmental oganisations (NGOs), think tanks and platforms, academic institutions – are mobilised around these different policy issues to broker knowledge for more informed, evidence-based policy deliberations. As the results of this study show, International Geneva hosts an extended community of practitioners engaged in science-policy work, providing a wealth of insights to advance our understanding of what constitutes good practices in knowledge brokering in support of international policymaking.

At the heart of this ecosystem, the Geneva Science-Policy Interface (GSPI) partners with many professional knowledge brokers from that ecosystem, witnessing firsthand their high level of motivation for science-policy work as well as their impressive skills. Our platform is keen to create more learning opportunities and resources to support self-awareness, empowerment, and a sense of community among science-policy practitioners.

This study is a first step towards that goal.

## Approach and methodology

The objective of this study was to generate an overview of the types of actors who engage in bridging scientific research and policymaking in the Geneva ecosystem; to collect data on the types of science-policy activity they perform; and identify the specific challenges they face, with a view to assessing how these challenges can be addressed.

The methodology consisted of four main activities: 1) desk research to establish the conceptual framework and initial categorisation of science-policy activities; 2) a non-exhaustive identification of organisations and individuals engaged in science-policy work; 3) the creation of a database and systematic coding of actors; and 4) distribution of a survey to 500+ individuals to gather insights and data on their science-policy engagement activities.

We sought to examine all aspects of science-policy engagement work, across the entire policy cycle and involving a diverse array of stakeholders – from decision makers to secretariat and technical staff in international organisations, researchers and managers in academia, think tanks, NGOs and more. This work also covered actors working on a variety of policy issues. This wide-reaching focus allowed comparisons between organisational types within a unified framework, yielding valuable insights into their specific areas of expertise, strengths, and constraints. However, it also had limitations. The need to accommodate diverse professional cultures and practice complicated efforts to develop a qualitative typology of actors and to generate a nuanced understanding of specific dynamics within individual practices.

Overall, the data collected offer a high-level perspective on broad characteristics, trends and challenges, which can spark reflection and further study to enhance our systemic understanding of science-informed policymaking at the global level.

This report consists of five sections. This introduction provides a conceptual framework to define the field of science-policy engagement at the multilateral level and presents key information about the demographics of survey participants. Section 2 presents the main findings of the study, based on an analysis of the data gathered across all types of organisations. Sections 3, 4, and 5 present the results of the survey of IOs, academic institutions, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), respectively, and include recommendations for each of them.

# Framing science-policy engagement in global governance

This study revolves around two main conceptual clusters – international policymaking and science-policy engagement. Both are complex and multifaceted notions that are characterised by a proliferation of definitions and models. An exhaustive discussion of these notions is beyond the scope of this report. Instead, we provide operational definitions and an overall framework to contextualise and support the discussions of our results. The literature used to establish this conceptual framework is referenced in the selected bibliography provided at the end of this report.

## Key concepts

In the context of this study, we use the notions of international policy-making, multilateral diplomacy, multilateralism, and global governance interchangeably. These notions refer to the collective management of transnational issues through IOs, agreements, and multilateral frameworks. International policy processes, for the most part, follow a standard – but not always linear – policy cycle, from issue identification and policy

agenda setting, to policy negotiation, policy implementation, and finally monitoring and review. Throughout these various stages, dynamic interactions between diverse actors are at play, with different types of actors often driving different phases of the process.

However, while international policy-making was once predominantly the work of states through inter-governmental organisations, there has been a shift from governments to governance, which is characterised by multiscale dynamics, the participation of actors and coalitions beyond traditional state actors, multiple centres of decision-making, and both formal and informal institutions and practices (Stone, 2020). This increasing complexity creates new opportunities for non-state actors, including scientists, to participate in international policy work, but it also leads to greater complexity in aligning scientific knowledge with policy action across multiple levels and jurisdictions (Talberg et al., 2020; Littoz-Monnet, 2017).

Science-policy engagement is the primary notion used to shape the survey. It encompasses processes, mechanisms and practices of interaction between the scientific and policy-making communities, through which scientific knowledge informs, shapes, and is shaped by policy-making. Based on a review of the literature, we have identified five main clusters of science-policy activities: 1) producing policy-relevant knowledge; 2) facilitating access to knowledge; 3) supporting research uptake in policy work; 4) shaping sustained relations; 5) building capacity for engagement. A detailed presentation of activities including examples of specific activities is presented in the next section under “Typology of Interface Activities”.

We considered that the science-policy activities undertaken by the surveyed actors were – either directly or indirectly - aimed at knowledge brokering. While knowledge brokering is a multifaceted concept that encompasses a diversity of practices and identities, we adopt a broad definition of it as the action of facilitating engagement between knowledge producers and users and ensuring that knowledge flows effectively and is made available for consideration in decision-making.

**“We will seize the opportunities presented by science, technology and innovation for the benefit of people and planet.( …) We decide to increase the use of science, scientific knowledge and scientific evidence in policy-making and ensure that complex global challenges are addressed through interdisciplinary collaboration.”**

UN General Assembly, Pact for the Future (2024)

# Knowledge brokering in international policymaking: Actors and activities

Knowledge brokering encompasses a spectrum of roles and organisational configurations. Below we present a categorisation of the main types of actors, mechanisms, and activities to provide an overview of this diversity, while recognising that it does not reflect all the dynamic, multiscale and multistakeholder initiatives that shape sector-specific or thematically focused science-policy ecosystems across the local, national, regional, and international level. A more in-depth mapping of specific science-policy ecosystems across scales would be a valuable exercise for leaders and practitioners in their respective fields and geographic contexts. However, the sample in International Geneva provides substantive diversity in terms of actors, policy issues, and types of activities from which valuable lessons can be drawn and insights shared on good practice, challenges and recommendations for future development.

## Typology of actors

Knowledge brokers can be found in domestic political institutions, diplomacy, international bureaucracies, academic institutions, NGOs and the private sector. Knowledge brokering activities can be initiated by policy actors (pull factor), scientific actors (push factor) or intermediaries (push/pull or relational approaches), and are recognised to be most effective when conducted through collaboration (co-production approaches)(Oliver et al., 2014).

Knowledge brokering can be performed at different scales by:

- individuals acting in formal or informal capacities (policy advisors, science advisors, consultants, data specialists, researchers, etc.);
- initiatives or mechanisms, which can be formal or informal, time limited or permanent (expert panels; transdisciplinary research projects, consultations, etc.);
- organisational units, departments or programmes (sectoral policy departments, evidence units, science and technological review panels, public engagement offices, advocacy units, etc.);
- specialised organisations, networks or partnerships formally dedicated to science-policy knowledge brokering (research organisations, knowledge translation platforms, think tanks, boundary organisations, thematic platforms and networks, etc.).

Effective science-policy knowledge brokering is best achieved through systemic strategies and the proactive shaping of science-policy ecosystems that connect various types of stakeholders across these levels.

The main types of institutional actors and mechanisms involved in knowledge brokering in support of multilateral processes in International Geneva are as follows:

- Many **International Organisations** (IOs) have units and departments that produce and broker authoritative knowledge. They coordinate, support, and standardize data production at the country level, and then compile, harmonize, and analyze it for global use, often with the help of extensive networks of scientific actors. Beyond their role as knowledge producers, IOs also often create and support science-

policy interfaces and advisory mechanisms, such as formal scientific advisory committees or expert panels. Additionally, they frequently mobilise internal resources within policy or technical units to synthesise and translate scientific knowledge into policy instruments.

- **Academic institutions** are highly specialised producers of fundamental and independent scientific knowledge. They also receive public and private funding to generate actionable knowledge, making them key partners for public policy institutions at local, national and international levels. Some members of the academic community also engage individually in knowledge brokering activities in various ways, as individual consultants or through focused collaborations with policy actors via research centres and programmes. Learned societies, and national academies of science, can also act as important intermediaries connecting their network with policymakers through specific science-policy platforms and providing knowledge translation and advisory services.

- **Non-governmental actors,** such as NGOs, think tanks or multistakeholder platforms play pivotal and varied roles as knowledge brokers in international policymaking. Research NGOs and think tanks produce specialised research and analysis related to the issue they work and advocate around those to influence policy decision-making. They often blend scientific knowledge with practitioner's knowledge. An increasing number of research NGOs function as scientific knowledge translation platforms, synthesising and communicating complex scientific data through actionable outputs for policymakers. Networks, platforms, and partnerships serve as collaborative spaces for sharing knowledge, good practices, and innovations across sectors, helping to shape international policy agendas and solutions. Operational NGOs that assist countries and communities with technical support and/or aid development assistance invest in research to further their action based on evidence and share research-backed recommendations to improve global policies within their sectors.

- **Governments** – especially in higher income countries – increasingly invest in in-house expert advice units or mechanisms, including within foreign ministries, such as science advisory councils and evidence units, that are tasked with providing evidence-based insights and facilitating collaboration between policymakers and the scientific community. They can also commission tailored knowledge from State research institutions based on national strategic priorities. While government-level scientific advice is mobilised in international policy fora, this study did not include actors from governments and diplomatic institutions because their science advisory mechanisms are often located outside the Geneva ecosystem.

- In addition to institutional mechanisms and actors, individuals and organisations often come together in both formal and informal **knowledge-based policy networks** – sometimes called epistemic communities, knowledge networks or transnational policy communities – around professional interactions, intellectual exchanges and shared values. They are made up of academics and professionals from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds with recognised competence in a particular policy domain who help decision-makers to define the problems they face, identify various policy solutions and assess the policy outcomes (Hass, 2016; Stone, 2020).

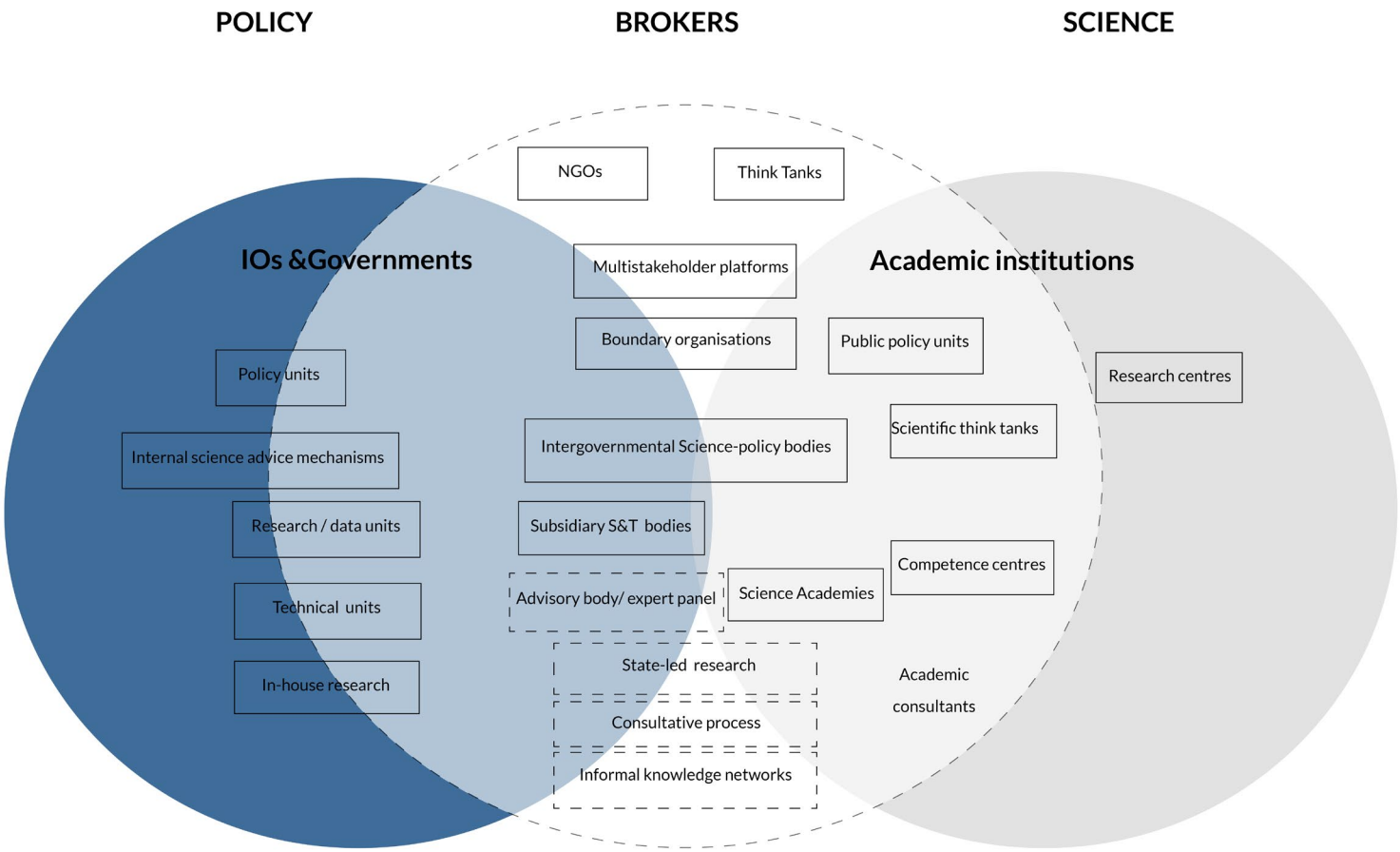



**Figure 1 – Main actors and mechanisms facilitating science-policy engagement in the multilateral ecosystem.** The grey areas include actors and mechanisms embedded in the policy sector, at the country level and at the inter-governmental level. The pink areas include actors and mechanisms embedded in the academic sector. The middle part includes intermediaries acting as brokers between science and policy communities. Boxes indicate permanent units or organisations, whereas dashed boxes indicate a lesser level of institutionalization. The absence of box indicates individuals.

## Typology of interface activities

In order to analyse systematically the data collected on the activities performed by actors in the Geneva ecosystem, we developed a typology of science-policy engagement activities, including five over-arching categories, with a list of non-exhaustive examples of specific activities for each, indicated in Table 1. This categorisation is based on a synthesis of commonly referenced activities across the literature on science-policy engagement and an initial observation of the science-policy activities carried out by relevant actors identified in the study.

**Table 1 – Synthesis of main science-policy activity domains**

| Activity domain | Examples of specific activities |
|---|---|
| **Production of policy-relevant knowledge** | • Identification and communication of knowledge gaps and policy needs for research<br>• Design or implementation of policy-relevant research projects<br>• Production of knowledge through science-policy collaboration<br>• Production of knowledge through commissioned studies or calls for research<br>• Production of knowledge in the policy setting with support of external scientists<br>• Provision of access to data for policy actors by scientists<br>• Provision of technical, financial, structural support for science-policy knowledge production processes |
| **Facilitation of access to knowledge** | • Synthesis, communication or dissemination of knowledge in accessible language or formats<br>• Facilitation of science-policy dialogue activities<br>• Advocacy of research uptake by policy actors<br>• Facilitation of science advice mechanisms<br>• Exchange of knowledge through informal networks<br>• Creation or use of directories or databases for access to scientific expertise |
| **Support for research uptake in policy work** | • Search for, provision or consideration of research for framing or prioritising policy issues<br>• Search for, provision or consideration of research for negotiating, drafting or designing agreements, policies or programmes<br>• Search for, provision or consideration of research for implementing agreements, policies or programmes<br>• Search for, provision or consideration of research for monitoring, evaluation or review processes<br>• Service on expert committees or as special rapporteurs or representatives |
| **Shaping sustained relations** | • Building relations or networks for exchange between policy actors and scientists<br>• Creation of platforms, posts or departments to facilitate science-policy engagement<br>• Provision of technical, financial or structural support to facilitate science-policy engagement<br>• Offer of rewards or incentives for science-policy engagement |
| **Building capacity for engagement** | • Creation, promotion or funding of training for policy actors on how to consider research in policy work<br>• Creation, promotion or funding of training for scientists on how to engage with policy processes<br>• Training to keep abreast of the latest research<br>• Training on how to engage across the science-policy interface |

This typology serves as an analytical tool designed to assess systematically the main tasks involved in science-policy engagement. This list of activities is not exhaustive and in reality varies according to the type of actor performing them – whether carried out by individuals or units, and whether occurring in a policy environment, academic setting or independent organisation. Additionally, the activities separated into categories in reality are often woven together and sometimes serve multiple purposes. This list of activities was adapted to specific categories of survey respondents.

## Overview of survey respondents

The survey was sent to more than 520 individuals – half of whom were in the academic sector and the other half working as policy practitioners – in either IOs or in NGOs. We received 116 valid responses (23% response rate). The sample of respondents offer a representative cross-section of the Geneva ecosystem in terms of types of organisation and thematic areas worked on.

**Table 2 – Respondents' types of organisation**

| Category of institution | No. respondents (%) | Type of organisation |
|---|---|---|
| International Organisations | 22 (18,5 %) | • United Nations (UN) entity<br>• Convention secretariat (non-UN) |
| NGO or think tank | 33 (27.5%) | • Operational NGO<br>• Think tank, research NGO or advocacy NGO<br>• Network, platform or partnership |
| Scientific institution | 61 (51%) | • University or polytechnic institute<br>• Vocational training institute<br>• National academy of sciences<br>• Intergovernmental research organisation |

Respondents were representative of most thematic areas that are covered by organisations working on international policy issues in Geneva. Virtually all actors work across multiple thematic areas, which reflects the evolution of the multilateral policy issues which have become more complex and span traditional sectors of activity.


Respondents in all three organisation types held relatively high-level positions, leading their organisations or units. Their positions focused on policy work and knowledge-related functions.

# 2. Science-policy engagement in the Geneva ecosystem – Main findings

This study collected basic information on the range of actors involved in science-policy work in support of multilateral policymaking within the Geneva ecosystem. It surveyed professionals working in intergovernmental organisations, academic institutions, NGOs, platforms and think tanks. The data collected reveal overall trends in the roles they each play, as well as pinpoint specific and shared challenges. It also offers insights into how actors can enhance complementarities and how science-policy work can be further professionalised. This section presents the overall findings of the study and offers recommendations for advancing science-policy knowledge and practices.

## Ambition meets reality: A strategic field with limited resources

While respondents view science-policy engagement work as strategic, they often lack the necessary financial and human resources to fully commit to it. This is especially evident in academia where, despite growing efforts to advance the contribution of science to societal challenges, both funding and formal institutional support systems are often lacking.

### Strategic field

The relatively high response rate (23%)[1] to the survey and the seniority of respondents indicate a strong interest among actors in International Geneva actors in science-policy engagement around international policy issues. The findings showed that most respondents have formally integrated science-policy engagement into their mandate. They invest core budgetary resources in fulfilling these functions and have dedicated positions to support them (further details follow). Senior leadership positions are also often directly involved in science-policy work.

Academic institutions also formally recognise the importance of science-policy engagement in their strategic mission, and academics who engage with policymakers consider these activities part of their professional duties. Academic respondents were mostly senior faculty (professors and senior researchers), often with roles as head of research centres. This reflects the role that universities and researchers increasingly aspire to play in addressing societal challenges in the 21st century. However, respondents shared several challenges (detailed below) that continue to hinder the full realisation that this strategic vision in a sustainable way.

1 The average response rate for similar online surveys is usually closer to 10-20%

## Direct impact on policy

Respondents reported that the work that professionals from IOs do to broker and use knowledge has a direct impact on policy and programmatic outcomes, Respondents working in IOs predominantly broker and use knowledge to: frame and prioritise policy issues (77%); to support the drafting and negotiation of policy documents (68%); and to implement policies and programmes (64%). They told us that their efforts influence policy agendas, improve governance practices, and contribute to the adoption of international and national policy instruments. Collectively, their science-policy work was seen to contribute to scientifically informed policies, programmes, actors or documents.

Respondents working in NGOs and think tanks mostly facilitate the use of knowledge to frame issues and influence the international agenda (74%), while scientific respondents working in academia are more involved in mobilising knowledge to monitor and assess policy implementation (59%). Very few of either categories reporting being involved in policy drafting, negotiations or implementation. Unsurprisingly, the survey findings indicate that both respondents working NGOs and academics are less engaged than IO-based professionals in policy decision-making processes. They did, however, note that they contribute to the prioritisation of policy issues on the international policy agendas and, in some instances, also influence the adoption or modification of laws.

Efforts to bridge knowledge and policy can generate a wider range of qualitative and relational outcomes, beyond direct impact on policy instruments and decisions. Respondents working in NGOs and think tanks are especially cognisant of the importance of their role in building networks and sustaining productive relationships, while academics emphasise their role in introducing ideas, concepts, methodologies, and tools in policy practice across the entire policy cycle.

The survey findings show that little is known about the influence of the mobilisation of scientific knowledge on international policy deliberations, due to the lack of impact evaluation and the inherent challenges of measuring policy impact. This inability to measure systematically the impact of science-policy work undermines efforts to advocate for better and more efficient science-policy practice and to secure appropriate resources.

## Insufficient funding

The survey indicates that actors involved in science-policy work struggle with insufficient financial resources, which impacts the quality and sustainability of their work. The lack of resources, combined with the lack of flexibility of available funding, results in knowledge mobilisation processes that tend to remain shallow, piecemeal and lacking strategic planning or inconsistent. This leads to missed opportunities to act in a timely manner and also makes it challenging for institutions and individuals to adopt a strategic and coherent approach.
Most funding for science-policy projects comes from government donors. Harnessing resources is reported to be a challenge because science-policy outcomes are uncertain and rather intangible, making it less attractive to potential funders. Respondents did not refer to specialised funding mechanisms to support this type of engagement activity (except for the GSPI annual call for project) and philanthropic funding did not appear to be a substantial source of funding either. Academics mostly use traditional research funds or obtain support from their university or partners. 25% of academic respondents choose to engage in policy work without any financial support, in their free time.

**Table 3 – Respondents' main sources of funding for science-policy work**

| | IOs | Academia | NGOs |
|---|---|---|---|
| Government donors | 10 | 20 | 16 |
| Core budget/ institutional funding | 9 | 14 | 8 |
| Research funding | | 24 | |
| No funding | 2 | 14 | 1 |
| Research funding | 3 | | 1 |
| Philanthropy | | 7 | 5 |
| IOs | | 8 | 2 |
| Academic institutions | | | 2 |
| Other | | 2 | 1 |

## Insufficient (specialised) human resources

The lack of expert support to carry out science-policy activities has been reported as a major challenge across all actor categories. This is a genuine issue since interface activities have been described as complex, time consuming and requiring an extensive skillset.

Survey responses indicate that many IOs and NGOs have dedicated specialist and manager positions focused on policy support and to knowledge management/production[1]. They often recruit knowledge specialists who either work in thematic, regional or policy programmes, or in specific departments related to research. Knowledge specialists work alongside policy professionals who contribute to the development of policy documents or deliberation activities. Some other specialised positions, such as strategists or data visualisation professionals, have also been shown to support knowledge integration with specific skills. Positions related to advocacy, outreach and stakeholder engagement – common among NGO and think tank respondents – are also directly involved in knowledge translation for policy engagement purposes. It is unclear to what extent staff positions dedicated to research and to policy work together in an integrated fashion to achieve impact. In two instances, policy and research departments have been institutionally brought together in one single unit. Overall, respondents considered that specialised staff were lacking, both in quantity and quality. Interestingly, very few of the respondents across all categories indicated having participated in capacity-building opportunities with the aim of increasing science-policy engagement skills. Respondents from academia indicate that academic institutions do not have many positions specialising in knowledge translation and policy engagement. Science-policy engagement is mostly done by researchers on their own initiative or through the research centres they run (which sometimes formally specialises

in science-policy knowledge brokering). Overall, most respondents from academia stated they could not dedicate more than 25% of their time to science-policy work. Most importantly, they indicated that they suffer from a lack of recognition for this work, which is not valued in traditional career advancement evaluations or among their peer community.

They are often on their own and do not receive support in their institution, such as administrative assistance or specific policy engagement expertise. Many said they lack the necessary skills to navigate the cultural and cognitive mismatch between their professional environment and the policy world. Additionally, they do not have financial means to recruit additional staff to support them in such efforts, such as communication

1 See the Overview of survey respondents section for a list of specific positions represented by respondents.

specialists, report editors and designers, data visualisation experts, stakeholder engagement staff, etc.

Some specialised units, such as those dealing with international relations, partnerships, corporate relations, and knowledge transfer do exist within traditional academic institutions, but they tend to be oriented towards the private sector or focus on institutional relationships. However, recent developments to strengthen institutional capacity for science-policy engagement are notable. The creation of the Science-Policy Interface unit at Federal Institute of Technology of Zürich (ETHZ) and the Geneva Science-Policy Interface at the University of Geneva are recent examples. The Swiss Academy of Sciences, through its various thematic platforms, plays an important connecting role in Switzerland; it offers a Science-Policy Platform with dedicated staff able to support expert engagement in policy advice and endeavours to fill the lack of institutional bridges within universities. Despite these worthwhile developments, academic respondents reported being widely unprepared and unsupported to engage in policy work.

# An ecosystem of complementary actors

A comparison of the science-policy activities performed by respondents working in International Organisations, scientific institutions and non-governmental organisations highlights distinct areas of focus, reflecting the unique set of strengths and constraints of each type of organisation. This section combines insights based on survey responses, the literature, and our observations of practice.

## International organisations

The survey respondents indicate that UN secretariats are natural knowledge brokers able to leverage their proximity to policymakers to produce and mobilise relevant knowledge in policy processes. Interestingly respondents from IOs identified themselves primarily as producers of knowledge. Indeed, IO secretariats act as multistakeholder platforms harnessing relevant expertise to inform and advance complex policy deliberations. They often possess dedicated mechanisms and professional know-how around knowledge brokering while also encountering limitations.

***Value added by international organisations :*** Being at the heart of multilateral policy deliberations, IOs have a definite advantage over NGOs, think tanks and academics through their direct and frequent contacts with Member States, which helps them identify policy needs for knowledge and initiate timely, policy-relevant research initiatives. Member States also often turn to IOs for technical expertise to support their work. IOs have some internal capacity to conduct research initiatives on their own, and, in many cases, they are uniquely positioned to gather certain types of data, thanks to their access to field and governmental institutions. They are sometimes the main or the only producers of information on certain topics. They also work extensively through collaboration with academics and external experts to complement their internal capacity, including by establishing networks of partner competence centres and coordinating extensive research consortia worldwide.

IO professionals are also well versed in the production of knowledge products that are tailored for specific policy audiences and benefit from wide distribution channels. They engage frequently in the organisation of science-policy dialogue activities and benefit from their proximity to policy fora and from their legitimate convening power for both high-level diplomatic fora and sustained multistakeholder dialogue. Finally, they are often responsible for creating, hosting and managing formal science advisory mechanisms, often in the form of temporary or permanent specialised subsidiary bodies, such as expert advisory committees or scientific review panels. IOs can also play a role in advancing science-policy advisory ecosystems at the national level.

***Constraints on international organisations :*** While proximity to policy decision-making processes positions IOs as key actors for brokering impactful scientific knowledge, it also generates specific constraints and tensions. The mission of IOs to facilitate consensus among Member-States means that they are sensitive to political dynamics and are not always well positioned to advocate formally or strongly for the consideration of specific knowledge that might antagonise some member-states. As one UN report (Dumitriu, 2018) has shown, this can also lead UN organisations to produce knowledge on rather conventional and recurrent research topics, following bureaucratic imperatives, without venturing into more disruptive research approaches.

Existing siloed approaches to global governance can hinder efforts to build interdisciplinary knowledge networks and effective science-policy mechanisms, although this concern has been widely recognised and efforts are being made to address it by many actors and platforms, including in International Geneva. Finally, the bureaucratic requirements of IOs sometimes create administrative challenges hampering both internal creativity and direct collaboration with scientists. Complex and lengthy procurement processes and high overhead costs incurred when contracting external organisations (whether academic organisations or NGOs) prompt organisations to rely more on internal research staff or consultancy contracts with individual researchers. As a result, IOs frequently limit their partnerships for knowledge production and advice to a smaller pool of experts.

## Academia

Academic respondents are, first and foremost, involved in the production of knowledge. Survey responses show that they engage at the science-policy interface primarily in two main ways. Firstly, they engage in knowledge transfer activities. Most of them (87%) commonly engage in “push strategies” that aim to synthesise and disseminate their research. They also widely take part in more “relational strategies” by participating in dialogue activities (84%) and advisory mechanisms (82%). Secondly, they seek to increase the relevance of their research through collaborations with international or national policymakers (79%) and by considering policy needs when designing their research projects (67%). Few are directly involved in activities related to the drafting, negotiations or implementation of policies, highlighting the distance between academia and decision-making spheres. Respondents most frequently work with policymakers in the area of monitoring and evaluation.

***Value added by academia :*** Academia could be leveraged for a more proactive contribution to international policy work. Academics ensure independence of research and provide out-of-the box thinking on current and new policy issues. They often bring a critical, long-term perspective and a spirit of innovation, and can design new methodologies, conceptual frameworks and technological solutions needed to address contemporary global challenges, which are radically new in nature, scale and complexity. Academia also has the potential to organise interdisciplinary knowledge integration and synthesis, with great access to international scientific networks and to the breadth of scientific literature. Secondly, academic institutions could provide a neutral space to convene forward-looking and honest science-policy discussion outside of political fora, provided they develop skills in designing effective multistakeholder dialogue formats beyond academic conference formats. Finally academic institutions could tailor their education know-how to provide specific training or briefing for policymakers as an impactful strategy to promote the uptake and integration of scientific knowledge.

***Constraints on academia:*** Academic respondents face two main constraints. Firstly, most are disconnected from the policy world and report lacking the skills and networks needed to establish quality and trusted relationships. Academics are also rather disconnected from IOs; only 13% reported receiving funding from them. Indeed, only a minority of IO respondents indicated that they delegate research or look for support

within the scientific community and fewer than 25% provide scientists with access to data. This disconnect means that most academics are unaware of policy needs and opportunities to contribute their expertise or adjust their research agendas. While collaborations between IOs and academics do exist, they are not yet common practice, and the entry costs related to partnership design can be disheartening. Secondly, academics who engage in policy work are pursuing competing goals. Respondents reported that engaging with policy requires agility and flexibility, contrasting with the rigour and time needed to publish results in academic journals, which often means compromising the main ground on which their career and reputation are evaluated. As long as the scientific community remains predominantly structured around academic publications as the gold standard for career advancement, the capacity of academics to engage in policy work will remain limited.

## Non-governmental organisations, platforms and think tanks

This study has shed light on the work of NGOs and think tanks as self-aware and skilled intermediaries between research and policy actors, with specific roles and capacities. Professionals in this category primarily consider themselves as facilitators of science-policy interaction (79%) but they also recognise playing a significant role in the production of knowledge (76%).

NGOs, platforms and think tanks were shown to be key connectors, playing a two-way science-policy function. On the one hand, they often proactively and purposefully raise awareness on knowledge gaps and policy needs and support the design of policy-relevant collaborative research projects. They frequently facilitate the production of robust, science-informed "boundary objects", such as policy papers, briefs, toolkits, online platforms, and white papers. On the other hand, they invest resources and skills to advocate for the integration of research knowledge into policy-making, prioritisation, and review processes. Overall, creating quality and dense relations around policy issues is integral to their core mission. They often foster new connections, networks, and coalitions, and broker collaborations and partnerships, leading to more sustained and productive relationships between policy actors and researchers.

***Value added by non-governmental organisations:*** The most successful NGOs, think tanks and platforms at the science-policy interface have developed specific high-level thematic expertise, often by integrating perspectives not only from the scientific community, but also from practitioners and other societal actors. This expertise is sought after by policymakers, as indicated by the high rate of NGO respondents (70%) who participate in expert advice mechanisms. In many instances, their mandate allows them to establish direct relations with policy professionals and sometimes gain access to decision-making spheres. Many NGO and think tanks staff are familiar with policy and diplomatic language and skilled in advocacy, stakeholder engagement and dialogue facilitation. They are cognisant of the importance of relationships and are experienced in leadership roles within specialised networks. They aim not only at influencing policy instruments but also focus on shaping relations, attitudes and mindsets over time, including through capacity-building activities.

***Constraints on non-governmental organisations:*** A major weakness for NGOs lies in their struggle to secure sustainable funding. Science-policy boundary-spanning requires proactivity and agility in tracking policy needs, providing relevant and timely support, and initiating strategic collaboration projects. This often translates into "do(ing) everything at once, everywhere and all the time", which is fundamentally at odds with the project-based approach most donors require. Additionally, NGOs and platforms must find the right balance to establish themselves as legitimate and honest knowledge holders, while staying true to their normative agenda, and respecting their accountability to specific issues and societal groups.

# Enhancing knowledge brokering: Practical insights

The survey revealed the commitment of a large community of knowledge brokers dedicated to research-policy interaction across the various types of participating institutions. However, the challenges identified also illustrate that systematic reflection and understanding of what works remain limited, resulting in strategies and initiatives that are sometimes ineffective or fragmented. In addition, many preconditions and tools for effective science-policy engagement are lacking. This section summarises the key findings and insights derived from the survey responses.

## Championing the value of science-policy work

One key precondition for the successful development of science-policy initiatives is a widespread and shared understanding of the value of science-policy collaboration, as well as a better appreciation of the nature and scope of this type of work. Respondents noted that policymakers and scientists pursue different professional objectives, use distinct methodological approaches, and have specific assumptions about each other. There is a natural tendency within each community to consider science-policy engagement as an ad hoc activity that adds complexity to already demanding responsibilities. Additionally, survey participants highlighted that actors often overlook the multidimensional nature of knowledge brokering and frequently underestimate the amount of work required to achieve meaningful results.

Fostering new science-policy mindsets, and providing appropriate incentives and support are key to convincing actors of the potential mutual benefits of collaboration and ensuring sustained commitment over time in a process that transcends their traditional professional cultures.

## Shaping collaborative processes

Science-policy interaction requires building collaborative skills and methodologies tailored to specific knowledge translation objectives. Respondents from academia reported they sometimes struggle to understand policy needs and identify what knowledge will be most useful. They wish to be integrated in policy planning more strategically, to contribute the right expertise at the right time. They observe that at times their input is not integrated in policy outputs, due to political dynamics or bureaucratic processes driving decision-making. Policymakers, on the other hand, may have unrealistic expectations about what scientists can deliver and underestimate the amount of time, work, and resources needed to gather data systematically and generate scientific knowledge. They may also resist engaging with scientific perspectives that do not serve their immediate, urgent needs even when they could facilitate addressing long-term or emerging societal challenges.

Building productive, collaborative relations requires aligning objectives and interests among science and policy actors, clarifying their expectations, developing a shared language and problem analysis, setting realistic timelines, making use of institutional synergies, and building integrated or iterative ways to generate and mobilise knowledge. It requires leadership, good facilitation and adaptive process management.

> “There is a “need for greater understanding by governments of the value of science and technology in the design, development and implementation of policies.”
>
> Respondent from WHO

## Facilitating connections

The second most reported challenge across the three categories of actors relates to stakeholder engagement. Respondents referenced the difficulty in identification and onboarding the right people at the right time, leading to missed opportunities for science to inform policy.
Engaging with policymakers, in particular decision-makers, was deemed the most difficult challenge across all categories of respondents, due to their lack of time, capacity or interest. In addition to raising awareness and building capacity among policymakers, many respondents called for creating dedicated networks, as well as specific engagement fora, such as briefings, trainings, fellowships and workshops to generate access to and exchange with policymakers.

Researchers stressed the lack of networking opportunities in their professional environment and reported feeling at a loss when trying to create connections proactively. They called for specific support to access contact repositories and networks, understand the specific policy institutional landscape and contexts, and proactively monitor windows of opportunity for science to inform policies. IO, as well as NGO and think tank respondents also reported challenges in accessing academic expertise and expressed a need for more into structured, policy-relevant scientific networks they could tap into.

While formal scientific advice mechanisms are an effective way to organise exchange between policymakers and scientific experts, promoting formal or informal goal-oriented networks and tools to facilitate regular exchange and quicker identification of stakeholders could be an important asset for more effective science-policy work in specific policy areas.

## Thinking strategically in terms of ecosystems

Respondents highlighted several common high-level strategic shortcomings related to the activities that support science-informed policymaking. IOs have reported a lack of internal capacity to conduct regular reviews of the latest science to support the work of policy units, resulting in a deficit in the anticipatory or adaptive capacity of policymakers. This is due to resource constraints, but also to restricted access to academic publications. Responses also indicate a lack of strategies for informing and mobilising the scientific community around policy needs for research, leading to a lack of in-depth, independent, timely and policy-relevant knowledge on certain issues and in certain local contexts.

Academics recognised an untapped potential in their community to apply their expertise and inter- and transdisciplinary approaches to produce actionable knowledge that can address concrete policy challenges. There is also a tendency to focus on communication and dissemination of knowledge, while

> “Many people see this (field) as a science-TO-policy direction when there is as much importance in having policy-TO-science and society-science-policy engagement.”
>
> Respondent from UNDRR

overlooking strategies that promote collaborative knowledge production, knowledge exchange, and science-policy dialogue formats. Finally, the importance and specificity of synthesis and translation work as a tailored knowledge brokering strategy to support research uptake seems to be underestimated.

Overall, scientists and policy professionals in IOs tend to look at science-policy work in a piecemeal manner. There is a need to think more strategically in order to develop specific science-policy ecosystems around key policy issues or processes. Mapping actors and roles and identifying gaps that hamper knowledge brokering would help to shape more effective approach to science-informed policymaking by mobilising relevant stakeholders in a more timely and effective manner.

## Unpacking the notion of impact

Three-quarters of respondents indicated that they do not evaluate their science-policy engagement activities. This is especially true for academics, with only 20% doing so. The metrics through which academics traditionally assess their work (impact factor related to citations) are inadequate and other forms of evaluation of policy impact usually only include quantitative metrics related to outputs and events.

Conducting evaluation is more common among professionals from IOs, NGOs, and think tanks, with half of them indicating that they conduct evaluation of their science-policy activities. Those with a strong scientific or research mandate often have institutionalised and tailored qualitative monitoring and evaluation systems for their science-policy activities. These are few, however, and others mostly follow traditional donor requirements focused on different types of indicators or use informal evaluation methods.

It is important to recognise the difficulty of monitoring, assessing and communicating science-policy outcomes, given that impact is often intangible, indirect, collective, and manifests over time. However, more needs to be done to expand the evidence base on what works and generate impact stories to showcase the benefits of scientific knowledge brokering and improve this field of practice overall. Building expert knowledge and suitable methodologies and tools, while creating opportunities for sharing best practices, would help practitioners address these challenges.

## Capacity building and learning

Respondents across all categories of institution have emphasised a dire need to build capacity for science-policy engagement. All mentioned the specific need to expand the capacity of policymakers to consider research in policy decisions, including building their scientific and technological literacy, as well as their skills in evidence-based decision-making. Respondents from academia were eager to learn new skills in communication, advocacy, public speaking, knowledge translation, policy analysis, and stakeholder engagement. NGOs and think tanks use and wish they could expand capacity-building activities as a knowledge uptake strategy. All three categories of actor stressed the critical importance of strengthening the capacity to build knowledge for policy and action in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), where knowledge gaps are most critical.

To build science-policy engagement capacity, it is essential to create more opportunities for scientists and policymakers not only to train formally in skills related to science-informed policymaking, but also to offer innovative programmes, such as residential fellowships, allowing direct exposure and experience outside one's professional community. Learning can also be promoted through exchange of experiences between practitioners to discuss common challenges and share best practices, as well as the production of case studies and toolkits, to share know-how and contribute to build knowledge brokering as a professional field of practice.

## Knowledge brokering as a professional field

While each institution type reviewed here plays a specific role in supporting the mobilisation of knowledge, each with strengths and limitations, some recommendations converge on the need for greater recognition of knowledge brokering as a professional field and the importance of specialised intermediaries, whether as in-house specialists or as independent and neutral third parties.

Advocating a knowledge brokering agenda requires acknowledgement of the complexity and time-intensive nature of science-policy work, as well as the skills it demands. It also involves fostering political leadership and institutional incentives to strengthen academic-policy engagement, investing in expert positions, teams, and platforms dedicated to facilitating collaborative knowledge production for policy support, as well as establishing practitioner and expert networks to enhance awareness and reflexivity among those working at the interface. Additionally, recognising individual and institutional intermediaries as critical catalysts for effective and tailored academic policy initiatives is essential, alongside raising donor awareness of the specificity of knowledge brokering and the need for dedicated, sustainable, and flexible funding.

Promoting science-informed policymaking thus requires legitimising and empowering a distinct set of actors who can strategically mobilise scientific expertise and relational resources in response to needs and opportunities. While such agency is built through trust and high-quality services, it remains difficult to sustain without systemic recognition and support for these roles.

> We would benefit from "mediation structure between administration, organisations and researchers on (…) policy issues in Geneva, allowing for innovative exchanges (between policy and research) and mutual learning in a structure which would be able to supersede for a while the local political games."
>
> Respondent from UNDRR
>
> I would like more resources to "hire policy experts for all focus areas to pay attention to public discourse and weigh in through op-eds and as speakers at events as this is relevant to shape public discourse."
>
> Respondent from UNIGE

# The Geneva ecosystem, a hub for science-policy engagement?

Respondents overwhelmingly find that International Geneva is a positive environment for science-policy engagement. Those from IOs and NGOs were largely enthusiastic (73% and 90% of them, respectively, provided positive evaluations) while academics were more uncertain about its value (only 50% saw an obvious benefit).

The main reason why respondents rate the Geneva ecosystem positively is the presence of a dense network of actors, gathering IOs, with a very strong UN presence, international NGOs, think tanks, and diplomatic missions. This ecosystem is seen as diverse, rich, and vibrant, creating exciting opportunities for multistakeholder discussions on major global issues, attracting regular visitors from around the world and generating strong pools of expertise. The practicalities of the city, such as the physical proximity of buildings, easy accessibility by plane and train, as well as many spaces available for meetings, contribute to the compact and dense nature of the ecosystem. These benefits are counterbalanced somewhat by the expensiveness of the city, which constitutes a barrier to the participation of some stakeholders, particularly those from the Global South.

The overall appraisal of the quality of interactions and opportunities was positive. For many respondents, the density of actors means that creating networks and accessing policymakers, including decision-makers in IOs or in capitals, is facilitated. Some respondents highlighted that international institutions were remarkably committed and open to engaging with civil society actors, including academia, and that the city offered plenty of opportunities to directly engage and create linkages between a multiplicity of stakeholders. For some, being based in Geneva meant benefiting from Switzerland's stance as a neutral state, which helps establish an identity as an honest broker or creating a safe space for facilitating conversations.

On the downside, respondents noticed that the proliferation of actors, events and initiatives also carries the risk of information overload. Without proper prioritisation and follow-up, dialogue does not automatically translate into concrete outcomes. Some respondents found that, despite the great opportunities for connections, the international policy sphere remains opaque and conservative, while requiring intense networking to collect tacit information. Others noticed that there was still some progress to be made in better integrating actors and addressing the enduring compartmentalisation that causes many issues to remain in silos. Other criticisms were directed at the perceived technocratic nature of Geneva-based international institutions and their disconnect from country-level realities.

Overall, the survey responses show that there is both established experience and further potential for holding meaningful science-policy dialogues in Geneva. Some respondents found that scientific knowledge was not consistently integrated into policy discussions and believed that more could be done to connect local academia with international actors. Raising awareness to fulfil this potential and collecting existing wisdom would enable establishment of science-policy engagement as a new field of expertise in the Geneva ecosystem.

# 3. Insights from international organisations

Strengthening the integration of science into policymaking is essential to address global challenges that require innovative, evidence-based solutions. IOs play a critical role in this process, utilising scientific research to guide decisions, inform programmes, and shape policies that address complex issues such as health, climate change, and sustainable development.

IOs are key players in the production and brokering of knowledge, which they use and leverage to guide policy and programme development around the world. The demand for data-driven, evidence-based policymaking has surged, emphasising the need for robust data collection, research and analysis, and accessible reporting. To meet these demands, organisations are increasingly leveraging scientific research, recognising the potential for both significant societal benefits, as well as for disruptive challenges triggered by innovation and requiring anticipatory policies.

## Snapshot of international organisation respondents and their organisations

A total of 22 survey respondents came from a wide range of intergovernmental organisations based in Geneva, including specialised UN agencies, research institutions, and operational agencies[2]. Notably, a large proportion of them were senior level professionals, reflecting the strategic importance of science-policy activities within these organisations. This sample represents approximately one-third of the UN organisations in Geneva, covering a broad spectrum of mandates, issue areas, and the integration of science in their work.

Organisations such as the World Meteorological Organization, World Health Organization, and United Nations Environment Programme are specialised agencies and programmes with strong normative mandates grounded in scientific evidence. In these organisations, scientific research plays a crucial role in their programmes, supported by rigorous standards and procedures to ensure the quality and credibility of the knowledge used in policymaking.

Some agencies, like the UN Institute for Disarmament Research and the UN Institute for Training and

Research, serve a dedicated policy research and training role. They connect policy leadership with academic and scientific knowledge. More operational agencies, such as the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, International Organization for Migration (IOM), and UN Development Programme, increasingly produce and utilise policy- and practice-oriented research. For instance, IOM has developed robust

2 Some respondents reported their organisations as belonging to multiple categories, including not only IOs, but also platforms, networks or scientific institutions, to which they have been recategorised.

research-based tools for global migration policies, as well as institutional strategies, by integrating its research and policy departments.

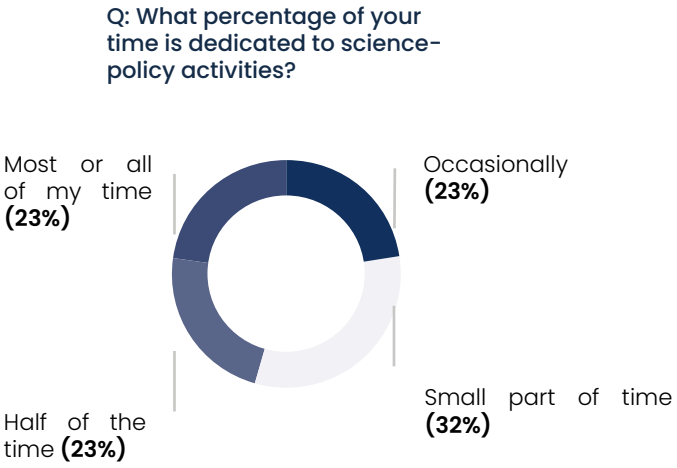
## List of Respondents' organisations

- World Health Organization (2)
- World Meteorological Organization (2)
- International Labour Organization (2)
- UN Environment Programme (2)
- UN Development Programme (2)
- UN-Habitat (1)
- UN Institute for Training and Research (2)
- UN Institute for Disarmament Research (2)
- UN Economic Commission for Europe (2)
- UN Commission on Science & Technology for Development (1)
- UN Conference on Trade & Development (1)
- UN Office at Geneva (1)
- UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (1)
- International Organization for Migration (1)
- Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (1)
-

***Professional positions in international organisations***: A large number of respondents were senior level professionals, reflecting the strategic importance of science-policy activities in their organisations.


***Institutionalisation in international organisations:*** A high level of institutionalisation of science-policy activities was observed, with most IOs having formal mandates for this type of work, and with many respondents focusing most of their time on this area.






***Funding in international organisations:*** Most IO respondents receive the majority of their funding for science-policy activities either from governments or regional organisations, or from the core budget of their organisation.

**Table 4 – Main sources of funding for science-policy work in IOs**

| Type of funding | No. respondents |
|---|---|
| Government or regional organisations | 10 |
| Core budget of their organisation | 9 |
| No funding or own funds | 2 |
| Private sector | 1 |

# Reported science-policy activities in international organisations

Respondents from IOs reported that they perform all three core functions across the science-policy interface, acting as knowledge producers, knowledge users, and facilitators of science-policy interactions with most of them combining several functions. These results illustrate that IOs are not only political arenas for multilateral deliberations but also act as proactive knowledge brokers in support of international policymaking, ensuring that research informs decision-making at various levels.


**Q: Do you consider yourself (mainly) a producer of knowledge, a user of knowledge, or a facilitator of science-policy interactions?**

*Respondents could select more than one science-policy function

### *IOs as knowledge producers*

- Contrary to common thinking that science exists on one side of the science-policy interface, and policy on the other, nearly all respondents working in IOs reported producing policy-relevant knowledge. Their proximity to policymakers enables them to shape policy-relevant research agendas and research projects.
- IO respondents develop and carry out their own research activities (77%), sometimes through science-policy collaborations (64%). Half of them reported engaging directly with policy actors to identify and communicate their needs for knowledge.
- However, IOs respondents do not frequently commission or delegate research activities to researchers in academic institutions (36%). This might be partly due to administrative constraints and overhead costs associated with engaging external scientists through traditional academic institutions. Addressing these inefficiencies could help IOs to connect with a broader range of relevant researchers and multistakeholder teams in academic institutions, enhancing their capacity to carry out their research work.

### *IOs as knowledge translators*

- The most widespread activity among IO respondents (91%) relates to the synthesis, translation and dissemination of research findings in accessible formats, with almost every respondent, irrespective of their position or department, engaged in such tasks. IO respondents also predominantly use science-policy dialogues – such as events, summits and conferences – as a key strategy for bridging science and policy.
- Respondents from IO secretariats indicated using knowledge for policy purposes first and foremost to frame and prioritise issues, as well as to support the design and negotiation of policies and

programmes. This highlights the critical role IOs play as knowledge brokers. Their closeness to policy processes provides them with a specific advantage in producing fit-for-purpose knowledge products and dialogue spaces to inform policy development.
- Some participants working in IOs called for open access to research resources, including open data and freely available research articles, to enhance knowledge uptake among policy actors and in policy circles. While steps have been taken in this direction, more progress is needed. Collaborations between IOs and academia enable this situation to be partially addressed.

### *IOs as relational actors*

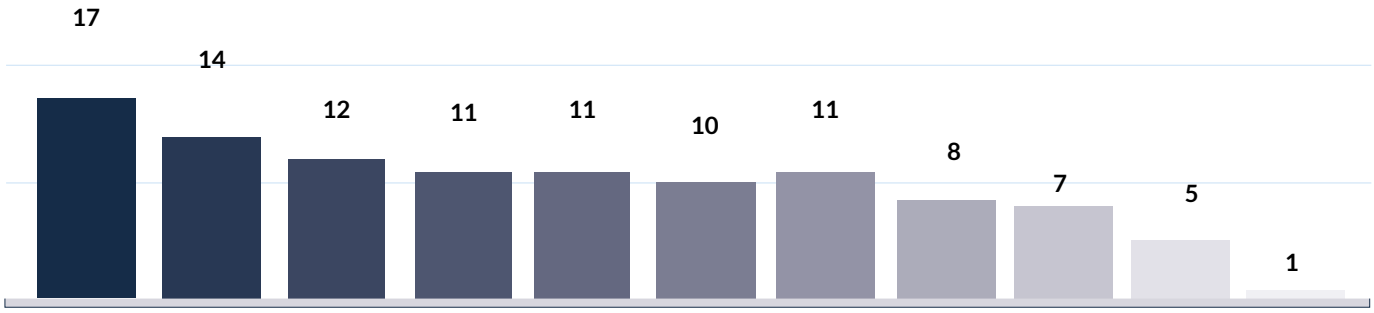
- Efforts to formalise science-policy objectives and mechanisms within IOs have notably enhanced the capacity of both policy and scientific communities to collaborate more effectively. However, the impact of institutional mechanisms is sometimes weakened by enduring structural challenges, such as sectoral or disciplinary silos. This underscores the need for multisectoral platforms that engage a broad spectrum of stakeholders.
- Building collaborations or networks for exchange is a common activity for respondents working in IOs. However, they recognise the need for increased awareness raising and advocacy efforts to help actors from different work cultures understand the value of collaboration and develop shared cognitive and methodological frameworks.
- Knowledge exchange platforms that facilitate direct interactions, along with digital tools such as expert networks and databases, are becoming increasingly important in the facilitation of effective knowledge exchange.

### *IOs as capacity-builders*

- The use of capacity-building activities to encourage science-policy engagement is less common among respondents working in IOs. Half of them actively build the capacity of policy actors to use research in their work through training, while fewer respondents focus on building the capacity of scientists to engage with policy processes.
- Several respondents stressed that mobilising and leveraging evidence and knowledge in low-income countries and conflict settings presents specific challenges, emphasising the need for local capacity building.

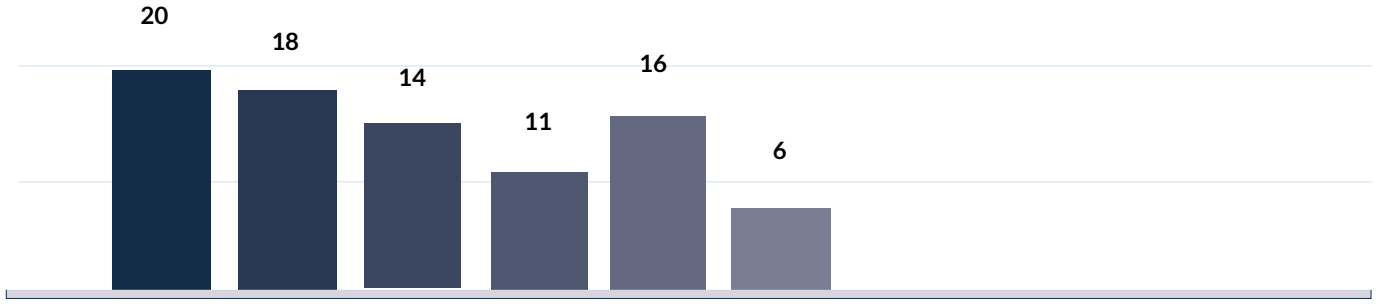
# Reported Activities - International Organisations

## Q: Do you engage in any of the following activities for producing policy-relevant knowledge?



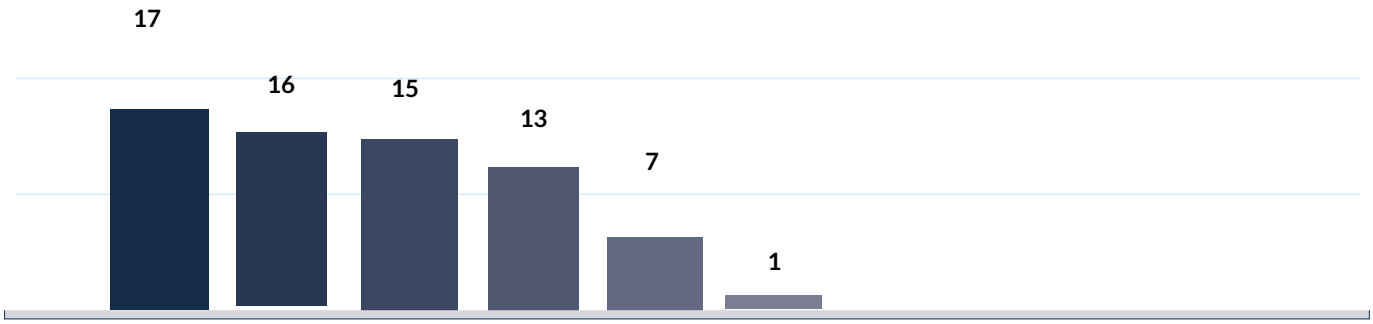

- develop policy-relevant research projects/agendas
- produce knowledge through science-policy collaborations
- Identify / communicate policy knowledge needs
- include policy actors as data sources
- provide support for science-policy processes
- respond to calls from policy actors for research commission independent studies from scientists
- provide support for science-policy processes
- conduct research activities internally with external scientists
- commission independent studies from scientists
- provide scientists with access to data
- I haven't engaged in producing policy-relevant knowledge

## Q: Do you engage in any of the following activities to facilitate access to knowledge?



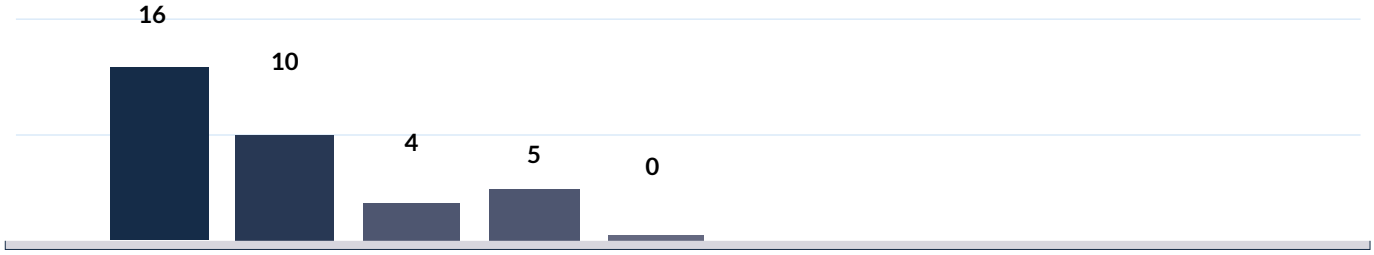

- synthesise & communicate knowledge in accessible formats
- organise, participate in, support science-policy dialogue activities
- create, support, or participate in science advice mechanisms
- seek / provide knowledge through personal contacts
- advocate for research uptake by policy actors
- make use of databases for access to scientific expertise

## Q: Do you support policy actors in this type of policy work?



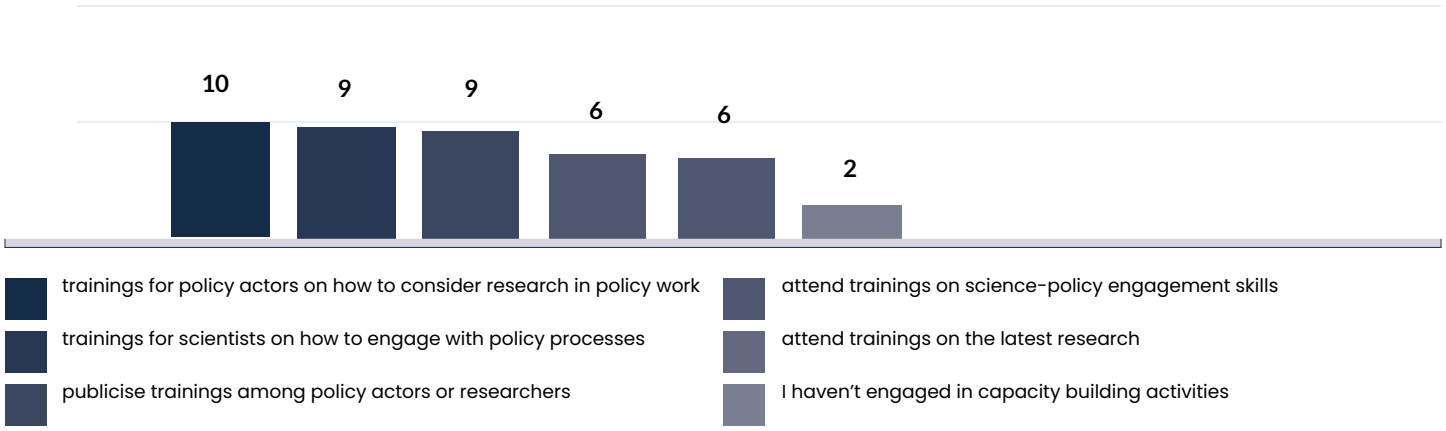

- for framing or prioritising policy issues
- for designing & negotiating policies or programmes
- for implementing policies or programmes
- for monitoring, evaluation or review processes
- serve on expert committees or as special rapporteurs
- I haven't engaged in using research in policy work

## Q: Do you engage in any of the following activities for shaping sustained science-policy relations?




- build collaborations or networks for exchange
- create platforms, posts or departments to facilitate engagement
- I haven't engaged in activities aimed at shaping sustained relations
- provide support for platforms, posts or departments to facilitate engagement
- offer rewards or incentives for science-policy engagement or impact

**Q: Do you engage in any of the following capacity-building activities for science-policy interactions?**




# Reported impact and evaluation practices in international organisations

While half of IO respondents evaluate their science-policy activities, many of their evaluation strategies are said to be ineffective or lacking, indicating a potential need for support. However, those who do evaluate their activities use a mix of qualitative and quantitative metrics, with some relying on feedback methods, such as surveys or interviews. Metrics include the number of engaged or impacted countries, policies adopted, societal outcomes, stakeholder engagement, participation in activities (e.g. website usage, report downloads, number of policy participants at an event), increased funding, and scientific publications.

## Main outcomes and policy impact

***Direct policy/programmatic outcomes*:** Respondents report direct policy impacts, including influencing policy agendas, improving governance practices, and contributing to international agreements such as the adoption of resolutions, recommendations, roadmaps, and other international and national policies.

***More informed policies, programmes and actors***: science-policy activities are thought to improve the uptake of research in policies, programmes, actors or products. Specific outcomes include the use of specific knowledge products or scientific terminology, indicators and methods, as well as the inclusion of the latest scientific research in policy processes, and in the design and delivery of programmes. Other outcomes include policy actors (diplomats, regulators, staff) gaining a better understanding of technical issues, often through training and quality information-sharing.

***Enhanced capacity for engagement***: Respondents highlighted improved collaboration between policy and scientific communities through formal mechanisms or better practices such as:

- The creation of new global interface mechanisms;
- Enhanced capacity for evidence-informed policymaking at the national level (eg. better utilisation of science and technology innovations in sustainability policies and improved sector-specific information systems);
- Stronger mutual interest and understanding between scientists and policymakers, evidenced by increased engagement requests, alignment between work programmes, and improved understanding of technical experts by policymakers.
- Improved organisational expertise, leading to greater recognition of the organisation as a knowledge producer and broker.

**Table 5 – Reported impact by IOs respondents**

| Direct policy or programmatic outcomes | No. respondents |
|---|---|
| Improved governance/policy practice | 6 |
| Influence on policy agenda | 3 |
| Adoption of international agreements | 3 |
| Adoption/update of national policies | 3 |
| **Impact on research uptake in policy** | **No. respondents** |
| Better informed programmes | 3 |
| Better informed policy actors | 3 |
| Uptake of knowledge in policy processes | 2 |
| Better informed policies | 2 |
| **Enhanced capacity for science-policy engagement** | **No. respondents** |
| Increased mutual interest/understanding | 3 |
| Improved national systems for evidence-informed policymaking | 2 |
| Creation of formal science-policy interface | 1 |
| IOs' capacity strengthened | 1 |

# Reported challenges and needs in international organisations

Respondents working in IOs presented a landscape of challenges they face in their science-policy work, which also present opportunities for improvement and growth. Key areas for action in the science-policy interface include effective resource allocation, improved stakeholder engagement, efficient communication strategies, increased support for research, and enhanced skills for knowledge translation.

## Lack of resources

The most frequently cited challenge was a lack of resources – funding, human resources, and time. This

underscores the need for sustainable and flexible funding mechanisms, and greater recognition that this science-policy work can be time consuming and resource intensive. Some suggested pooling resources through multistakeholder trust funds and joint partnerships, while others wished their organisation would dedicate more core resources to this type of work.

The difficulty of demonstrating the impact of science-policy work further complicates funding efforts, as unquantifiable outcomes are less appealing to funders.

Human resource limitations also pose a significant challenge, often forcing staff to split time across various tasks, which can result in lower quality outputs. Some respondents highlighted the need for skilled, professional and expert science-policy staff.

> "We have "limited resources, which means you need to split your time between different aspects of science-policy work, e.g. between design of tools (…), capacity-building and training (…), regular review of the latest science (…), organising workshops (…). This means only part of the activities can be done, or each of them can be done to a limited extent and with lower quality.
>
> Respondent from UNEP disaster

## Stakeholder engagement

Over half of the respondents face challenges in organising effective stakeholder engagement. Identifying and engaging the right people from both policy and scientific communities is difficult, leading to missed opportunities for science to inform policy. Policymakers, in particular, can be hard to reach due to time constraints and lack of understanding of the value of science in decision-making. Respondents called for increased awareness raising among policymakers to improve their understanding of the role of evidence in decision-making, and the value of science and technology in the design, development, and implementation of policies. Conceptual mismatch and communication hurdles, such as the lack of alignment in how issues are framed, differing professional cultures and a lack of mutual understanding between scientists and policymakers, complicate engagement efforts. Training for both scientists and policymakers is needed to bridge these gaps.

## Inefficient processes

Responses pointed to inefficiencies in establishing effective engagement processes. There is often a misunderstanding of the science-policy interface, with some viewing it as a one-way flow from science to policy. Structural challenges, such as siloed approaches to the integration of scientific data into policy, were also highlighted, underscoring the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration and knowledge sharing within and between organisations.

Respondents suggested documenting and sharing best practices on effective science-policy processes, as well as learning from other sectors that have made advances in the science-policy interface, such as meteorology and health, as ways to improve these processes.

## Improving knowledge exchange

More direct interactions and knowledge exchange platforms are needed to facilitate the uptake of research findings and the development of science-based policy recommendations. Building robust networks, including expert networks and databases, was seen as essential. Digital tools, digital communication products, platforms, and online meetings were also suggested to enhance knowledge exchange.

## Capacity-building

Respondents advocated more capacity-building activities to improve science-policy interactions and outcomes, including strengthening the technical capacity of diplomats and policymakers to use science-based tools effectively.

## Knowledge production and management

Participants called for more resources to produce independent, in-depth policy-relevant research, and for enhanced internal institutional capacity to conduct regular reviews of the latest science. They stressed the need for open access to research outputs and data, including lifting journal paywalls for IOs, governments and NGOs. Access to knowledge generated by multilateral organisations, improved knowledge management systems, and newsletters about new research were also mentioned as priorities for overcoming challenges.

## Challenges in low and middle-income countries

Respondents from the health and environment sectors highlighted specific challenges in low-resource countries, including data gaps and the reliance on research from developed countries. They emphasised the need to build the capacities of local scientists to generate quality, context-relevant evidence.

**Table 6 – Main reported challenges by IOs respondents**

| Main challenges | No. respondents |
|---|---|
| Lack of resources | 12 |
| Engaging actors across the interface | 12 |
| Lack of knowledge exchange mechanisms | 7 |
| Lack of capacity | 6 |
| Knowledge production and management | 5 |
| Inefficient science-policy processes | 4 |
| Low capacity in LMICs | 3 |

> A key challenge is “generating quality evidence in low resource settings/conflict settings to support evidence informed decision making.”
>
> Respondent from WHO-TDR

# Recommendations for international organisations

## Increase dedicated human and financial resources

Donor governments, UN member states and philanthropic organisations should increase funding to support science-policy activities, ensuring consistent and flexible funding for sustained efforts and to facilitate the development of long-term strategic approaches.

IOs, including UN agencies, could appoint science-policy experts to focus on science-policy engagement activities. This would enhance the effectiveness of these activities and reduce the time constraints of staff who have other full-time responsibilities.

## Enhance sustained engagement and access

Donors, as well the leaderships in organisation and programme can invest in activities and tools that foster engagement between research and policy professionals, including:

• building sustained inter- and transdisciplinary meetings, platforms and projects that facilitate more regular interactions between scientists and policymakers to ensure mutual understanding, collaboration, and complementarity of expertise and resources;

• addressing access barriers to research and data by providing funds for tailored knowledge production activities (including research, review, and synthesis) and efforts to ensure open access to data and publications, making knowledge resources freely available to all;

• creating and maintaining expert networks, databases, and digital platforms, including promoting them among policy actors and scientists, to facilitate outreach and stakeholder engagement;

• streamlining procurement processes to facilitate faster and easier engagement of external

## Advocate and raise awareness

Engagement between policy professionals and scientists could benefit from targeted awareness-raising and advocacy efforts to:

- enhance scientific literacy among policy actors;
- increase understanding among scientists of policy needs for evidence, data and knowledge;
- mainstream concepts and practices that are known to facilitate science-informed policymaking.

## Build capacity of policymakers

Training programmes for policymakers on how to integrate research into policy-making and for scientists on how to engage with policy processes should be encouraged, including tailored programmes for specific organisations' staff, and for addressing specific global challenges.

Recording experiential knowledge and promoting experience-sharing between science-policy practitioners across sectors and disciplines should be supported and encouraged as a practical way to accelerate capacity building and improve the effectiveness of science-policy processes.

- ## Create more inclusive policy processes

Resources should be invested to support research initiatives and build the capacity of scientists in resource-constrained environments, to generate quality evidence relevant to their specific contexts. It is also important to provide visa access to ensure the engagement of scientists from the Global South in policy processes, including at the international level or to make sure that sessions are streamed live for access to scientists around the world.

- ## Enhance the evaluation of science-policy activities

IOs could collaborate with evaluation experts to develop and implement mixed-method evaluation strategies, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative metrics and indicators, to better assess the impact of science-policy activities on outputs and outcomes. Demonstrating impact is crucial to supporting the sustainable financing of science-policy activities.

# 4. Insights from Academia

In recent years, the academic sector has increasingly recognised the importance of proactively engaging with societal challenges and generating policy and social impacts from scientific research. Funding agencies, such as the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF), have responded by prioritising grants that require evidence of policy relevance and societal contribution.

Concurrently, there has been a surge in collaborative initiatives between researchers, policymakers, and practitioners, fostering stronger links between science and policy. To support these collaborations, more and more universities are creating formal units or appointing dedicated posts aimed at facilitating science-policy engagement. Some also spearhead programmes to drive evidence-based solutions to "grand challenges", mobilising their academic communities around strategic public policy issues. These efforts continue the trend towards formally recognising and encouraging science-policy collaboration in scientific institutions, even though these types of incentives, when they exist, remain marginal on the scale of a typical academic career advancement plan.

These developments are also taking shape in Switzerland, where academic organisations are actively building their capacity to engage with policy actors at both national and international levels. The concentration of international governance organisations and forums in Geneva further drives this trend, with many researchers involved in sustained collaborations with multilateral organisations in a variety of ways. This strategic alignment between institutional and individual practices enables Swiss academia to offer specific expertise in the shaping of policy dialogues and transdisciplinary research initiatives aimed at addressing global challenges.

## Snapshot of respondents from academia

Just over half of the survey respondents (53%) work in scientific institutions, and are mainly based at the University of Geneva or the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies. These Geneva-based academic institutions enjoy proximity to IOs, and the latter focuses entirely on international cooperation and global policy issues. Nonetheless, some respondents stressed that physical proximity does not ensure effective science-policy engagement, as universities prioritise academic publications over policy engagement, necessitating support mechanisms and incentives to foster policy engagement. Eleven respondents work in other Swiss and European universities (e.g., Zürich, Lausanne, and Cambridge), the Swiss Academy of Sciences, and CERN.

**Table 7 – Type of academic institutions**

| Organisation type | Organisation name |
|---|---|
| University or post-graduate institution (59) | University of Geneva (35)<br>Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (15)<br>ETH Zürich (5)<br>University of Lausanne (2)<br>University of Cambridge (1)<br>Haute École de Travail Social (University of applied sciences for social work) (1) |
| National academy of sciences (1) | Swiss Academy of Sciences (1) |
| International research institute (1) | Centre Européen de Recherche Nucléaire [European Organization for Nuclear Research] CERN (1) |
| Total (61) | Total (61) |

The **University of Geneva** is a training and research-intensive institution that adheres to Swiss higher education policies that encompass *services à la cité* [community services]. That implies making knowledge accessible to private and public stakeholders, including IOs located in Geneva.
The **Geneva Graduate Institute** is an institute created in 1927 to train and support diplomatic professionals with research on international affairs. Its mission is also to serve as a forum for discussions with IOs, NGOs, states, and the private sector,
**ETH Zurich** is closely connected with Swiss federal agencies and committed to the translation of scientific research for societal audiences, positioning itself as a Swiss leader In science-based policy advice.

***Professional positions in academia:*** Most respondents from scientific institutions hold advanced academic positions. Many pursue policy engagement despite the limited academic incentives and career advancement challenges they seem to face (see section "Challenges and needs in academia" below). This highlights the dedication of many individual academics who find value in translating their work for the benefit of societal outcomes. It is worth noting that many respondents are running research centres, which can be a specific asset for developing sustained policy engagement.


Professors (full associate, assistant, honorary)

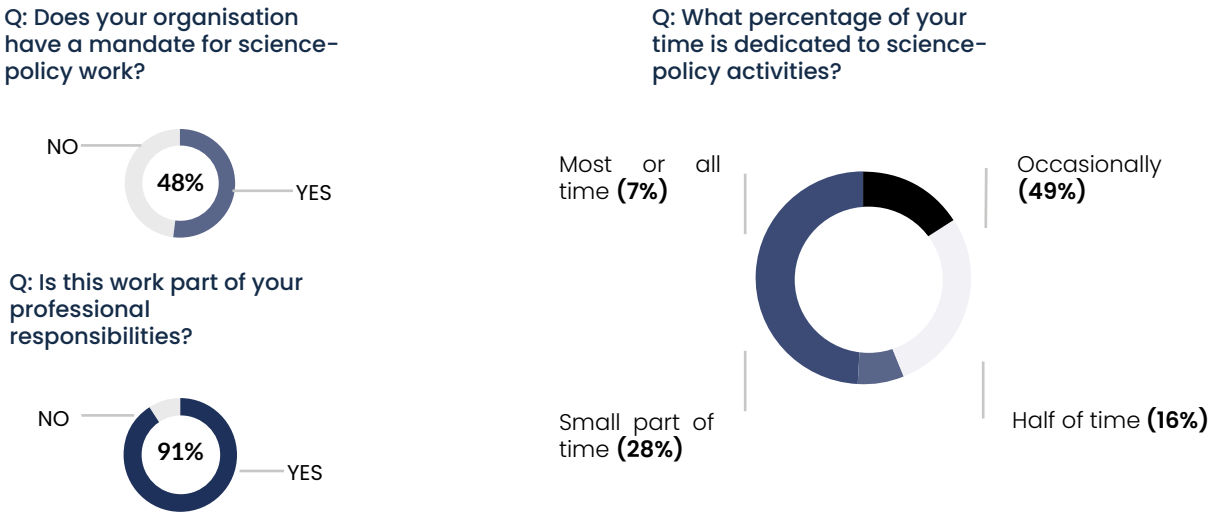

Lecturers or senior researchers


Simultaneously (co-) heads of research centres


Policy engagement or knowledge transfer unit

***Disciplinary background:*** The majority of academic respondents (64%) had a disciplinary background in social sciences either as their main field of study, or as an interdisciplinary complement. A third of them were working in the natural, medical or engineering sciences.


***Level of formalisation of science-policy activities:*** These results reveal a potential gap between the strategic objectives of academic institutions and the actual conditions in which academics engage with policy. While most respondents consider policy engagement as part of their duty, they devote little time to it and are not clear whether their institution formally promotes it. Participants noted a lack of professional and financial incentives, as well as a lack of infrastructure and tools for effective science-policy work (see section "Challenges and needs in academia" below), despite high project overheads applied in some institutions. Some academic respondents said they subsequently fundraise or use personal resources to leverage their work in policy circles.




***Funding in academia:*** Many respondents (28) reported no external funding, relying on personal resources or institutional support, which was often ad hoc and limited. The most commonly reported funding source was traditional research funding instruments, such as the SNSF, followed by European Union (EU) research programmes (Horizon Europe). Government funding was also significant. Respondents received support from Swiss public bodies at the cantonal and federal levels, including the Federal Office for the Environment, Federal Office for Public Health, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, and the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. One respondent mentioned EU humanitarian agency funding.

Eight respondents received funding from IOs, including UN agencies (6), the Inter-American Development Bank, and the Global Fund. One respondent stressed that university overheads exceeded IO funder limits, prompting collaboration with NGO partners and subcontracted consultancy work. Private funding was

minimal (6), primarily from philanthropic organisations like the Gates Foundation and Helmsley Charitable Trust, with one respondent receiving funding from business.

Two specific science-policy engagement grants were mentioned: the GSPI competitive grant and the International Growth Centre call for proposals, both providing funding and tailored support for project implementation.

**Table 8 – Main sources of funding for science-policy work in Academia**

| Type of funding | No. respondents |
|---|---|
| Traditional research funding Instrument (including Swiss National Science Foundation and EU Horizon) | 24 |
| Government or regional institution | 20 |
| Own institution | 14 |
| No funding or own funds | 14 |
| International organisation | 8 |
| Philanthropic institutions and business | 7 |
| Science policy calls for proposals | 2 |

The **Swiss National Foundation** offers funding streams focused on social technological and policy impact including:

- **Agora**: Fosters dialogue between scientists and society,
- **BRIDGE**: Supports research and science-based Innovation (with InnoSulsse),
- **SOR40**: Funds solution-oriented research for sustainable development.

**Horizon Europe**, the flagship research innovation programme of the EU, supports research, promotes collaboration, and strengthens research impact to advance EU policies and address global challenges, such as climate change and fulfilment of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

# Reported science-policy activities in academia

Unsurprisingly, virtually all respondents from academic institutions consider themselves as knowledge producers. In addition, almost half of them also play the role of facilitator. Those who do not consider themselves as knowledge producers work in support units and work as facilitators of science-policy interactions.


**Q: Do you consider yourself (mainly) a producer of knowledge, a user of knowledge, or a facilitator of science-policy interactions?**

*Respondents could select more than one science-policy function

### *Knowledge dissemination strategies*

- Academic respondents most commonly invest their efforts in translating and disseminating their research for non-academic audiences. Virtually all of them indicated being involved in synthesising and communicating knowledge in accessible formats and many provided various examples of briefs, websites and other tools, where research findings had been 'translated' into more policy accessible language and formats.
- Most academics also reported engaging in more direct, relational, knowledge exchange activities. Over 80% of them organise or take part in science-policy dialogue and science advisory mechanisms.
- Academics less commonly leverage personal relationships as a way to promote knowledge uptake and just half of them are involved in advocacy work, highlighting a need for complementary action from within academia or through intermediaries to amplify efforts promoting research uptake in policy.

### *Increasing the policy relevance of knowledge*

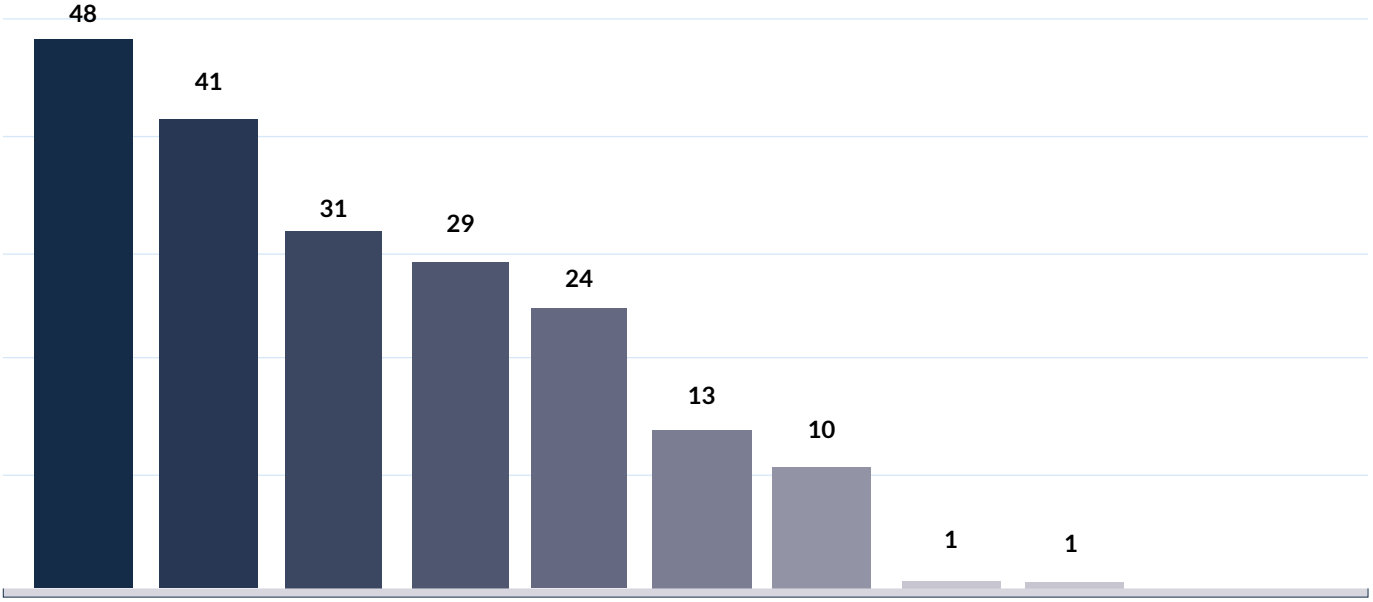
- Another widespread strategy among academic respondents is to engage with policy actors when producing knowledge to improve research relevance. Almost 80% of them do so through science-policy collaborations and 67% consider policy needs when designing research projects or when setting the research agenda.
- Just half of them use policy actors as data sources or directly answer calls for evidence from them. This is consistent with the value attributed to academic curiosity and independence as the main driver of research, as well as well-cited barriers in accessing policymaking circles (Oliver et al. , 2014).

### *Limited direct engagement in policy work*

- While most academic respondents indicated that they do not support deliberations aimed at design, adoption or implementation of policies, 60% of them contribute to the monitoring and evaluation of policy work and a significant number serve on expert committees or as special rapporteurs.
- Academics did not report much capacity to create posts, infrastructure or incentives to ensure relations with policy actors or science-policy processes that can be sustained over time. Few of them have developed training opportunities for policy actors.

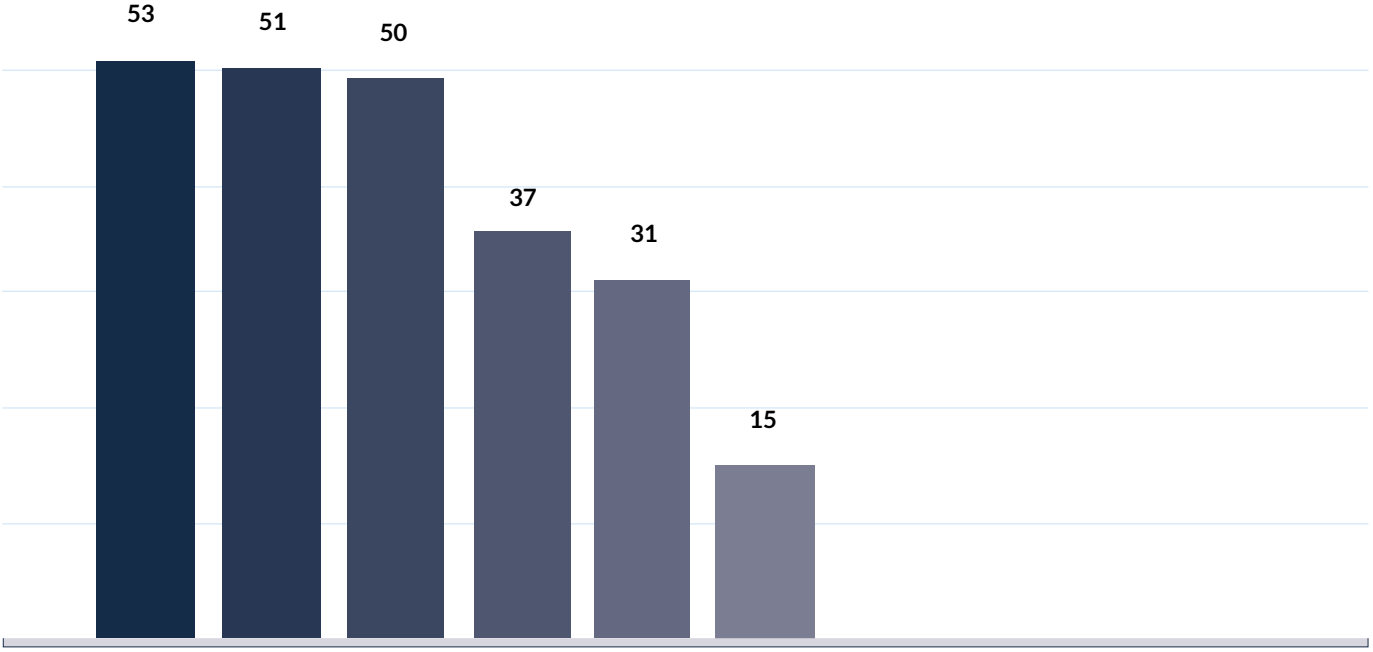
# Reported Activities- Academia

## Q: Do you engage in any of the following activities for producing policy-relevant knowledge?



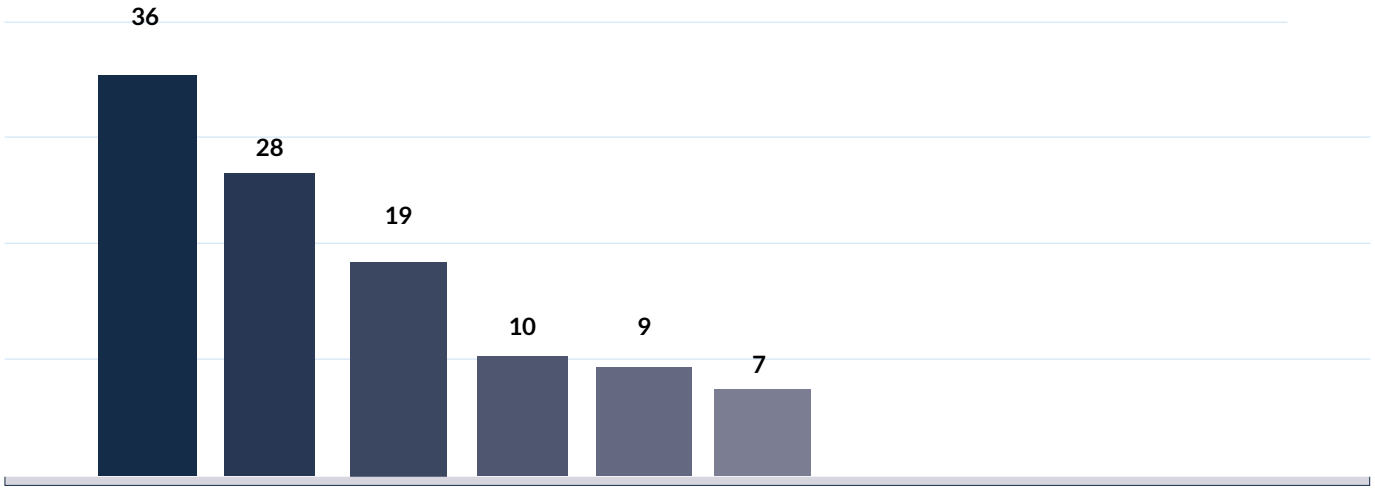

- engage in science-policy collaborations to produce knowledge
- consider policy needs when designing research projects/setting research agenda
- include policy actors as data sources when collecting data
- respond to calls from policy/other actors for research
- identify/communicate policy knowledge gaps, policy needs &/or policy actor calls for research
- provide technical, financial, structural support for science-policy knowledge production processes
- offer incentives forscientists to engage in policy-relevant research
- provide scientists with access to data
- conduct research activities internally with the support of external scientists

## Q: Do you engage in any of the following activities to facilitate access to knowledge?

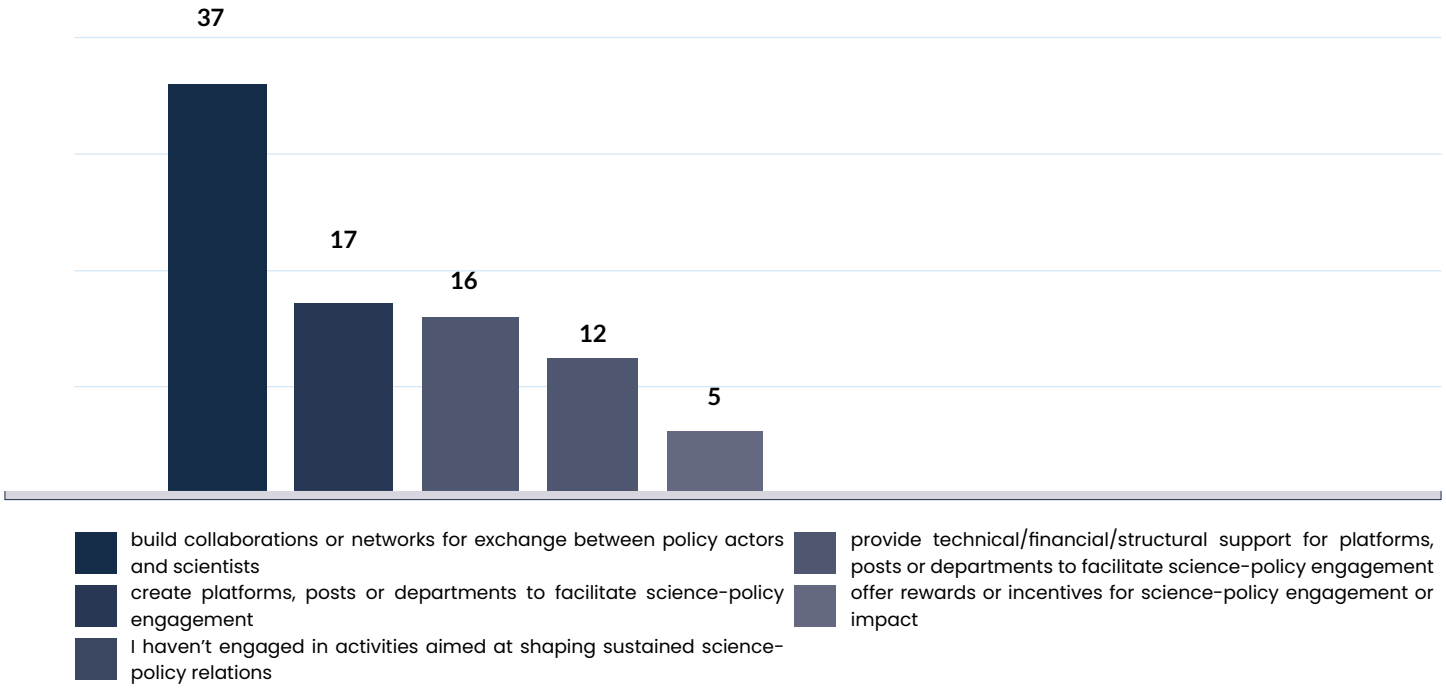



- synthesise, communicate or disseminate knowledge in accessible language or formats
- organise, participate in, support, or fund science-policy dialogue activities
- create, support, publicise or participate in science advice mechanisms
- seek, provide or consider knowledge through personal contacts
- advocate for research uptake by policy actors
- create, be included in, publicise directories/databases for access to scientific expertise

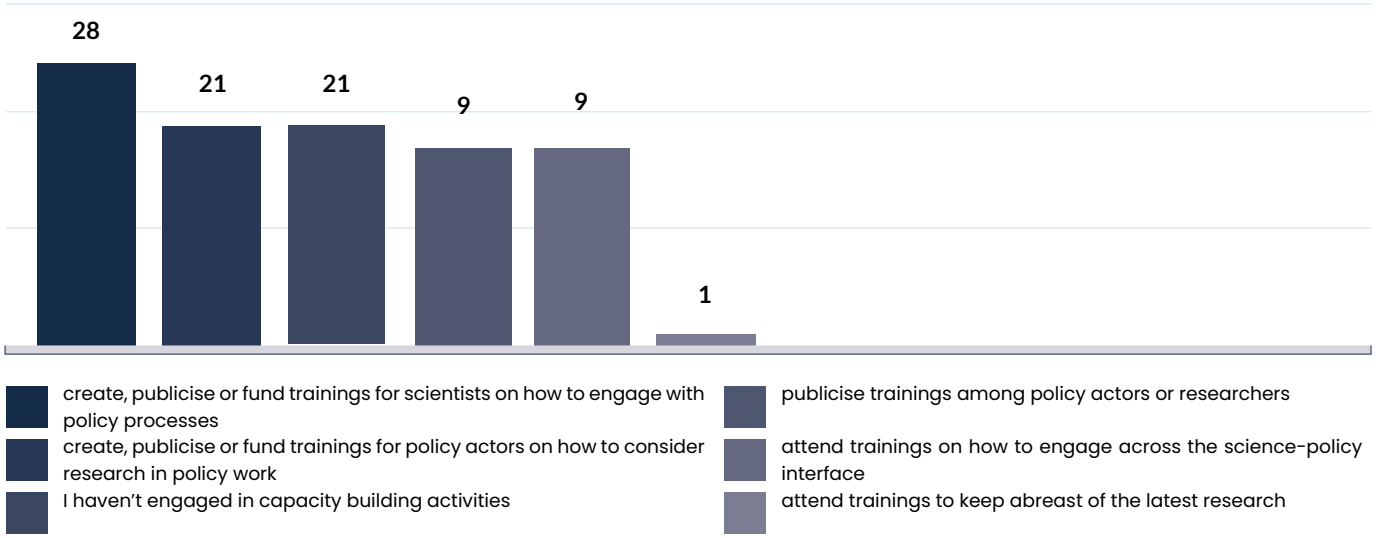
## Q: Do you support policy actors in this type of policy work?




## Q: Do you engage in any of the following activities for shaping sustained science-policy relations?



**Q: Do you engage in any of the following capacity-building activities for science-policy interactions?**




# Reported impact and evaluation practices in academia

Evaluating science-policy impact remains challenging for scientific actors, with nearly 80% of respondents reporting no formal assessment due to a lack of standards, expertise, and incentives, as funders and institutions often prioritise traditional academic outputs. Measuring impact was challenging also given the long-term and systematic nature of impact in this field, while engagement is often focused on a limited number of individuals.

Those who do assess impact generally rely on informal methods, such as anecdotal evidence of perceived influence or basic engagement metrics (such as brief distribution, webinar attendance, conference participation or high-impact journal publications).

Despite these limitations, respondents noted varied observed outcomes from their work, including shifts in policy discussions, contributions to policy formulation, research uptake, and enhanced collaborations. This section examines these diverse impacts, from direct policy influence to broader contributions to science-policy engagement.

## Main reported outcomes and policy impact

***Uptake of concepts and tools in policy practice:*** The most reported type of impact relates to the spread of academic concepts and tools within policy practices. Respondents mentioned that their conceptual

frameworks had been "internalised," "recognised," "taken up" or "mainstreamed" among policymakers, with some influencing speeches by UN leaders, public discourse or institutional websites.
Additionally, they cited examples of their data, metrics, methods, and technologies being "adopted," "used," or "scaled" by policy practitioners. These contributions have supported improvements in policy areas like disease surveillance, health and education interventions, public transport planning, reproductive health metrics, ecological infrastructure, statistics, and environmental monitoring. The tools were applied in issue measurements, policy planning and implementation and policy monitoring and evaluation.

***Direct impact on policy formulation*:** Respondents mentioned various types of direct impact on policymaking activities, including:

- impacts on agenda setting, such as fostering urgency around key issues or increasing recognition of new agendas such as the "One Health" approach;
- impact on issue framing, the definition of policy objectives, and streamlining policy orientations through the communication of research;
- impacts on policy deliberations and decision-making processes through different mechanisms, such as participating in regional or national commissions, responding to policymaker queries or active lobbying in parliamentary discussions. These inputs sometimes resulted in small, yet visible outcomes such as incremental shifts in negotiation positions and overall better decisions.
- impacts in the adoption or improvement of policy instruments, mostly at the national level, for instance legislative changes, with new laws introduced or adopted based on their recommendations;
- impacts on international policy instruments, including financial products, a UN resolution, and an EU directive.

Impacts on other stakeholders indirectly shaping policy, including funding institutions as well as the private sector, were also mentioned. Respondents reported having influenced decisions about resource investment, as well we internal practices, with positive outcomes mentioned in the global health sector.

***Mutual understanding and collaborative dynamics*:** Some respondents described generating a virtuous cycle of impact that fosters ongoing relationships and collaborations. Their work improved mutual understanding and contributed to a series of positive outcomes such as network expansion, new mandates, joint projects, and collaborations with policymakers. In a few cases, efforts to connect with policymakers led to the creation of new engagement mechanisms, including a fellowship programme for policymakers and a knowledge platform on non-communicable diseases.

Additionally, respondents noted impacts on scientists themselves. Activities enable them to expand their knowledge basis by engaging in practical and reflexive application of their knowledge and to gain insights for the development of research projects that are relevant to policy needs.

**Table 9 – Reported impact by respondents from Academia**

| Reported Impact | No. respondents |
|---|---|
| No, little or unclear impact | 17 |
| Uptake of concepts or tools in policy practices | 15 |
| Impact on policy instruments | 13 |
| Influence on agenda-setting and framing | 10 |
| Impact on policy negotiations or decisions | 8 |
| New collaborations and engagement mechanisms | 6 |
| Indirect impact through other stakeholders | 5 |
| Mutual understanding | 4 |

# Reported challenges and needs in academia

Major challenges raised by respondents include a lack of time, funding and institutional support. Academics also struggle with engagement-related issues, such as differences in language, professional culture, and limited opportunities to connect, calling for intermediaries and support structures.

## Time, funding and institutional support

Respondents suffer from insufficient funding for science-policy activities, calling for seed money, help in identifying funding opportunities, dedicated allocations in academic grants, and specific collaboration support. Many also have time constraints and ask for more administrative and outreach support, including help identifying opportunities to engage with policy processes.

The lack of professional recognition for science-policy work is also a widespread challenge. Academics often do this work on personal time and resources, with limited career advancement incentives. They also struggle sometimes to get support for publishing scientific outputs out of their policy engagement processes, making it challenging to align their scientific and policy objectives.

> “Universities (…) do not support this kind of work at all, and actually disincentive, disregard and belittle it. Those who do it face major career hurdles and are on unstable, poorly paid contracts. We do it because we see it as important to make a positive change and it is usually in our free time.”
>
> Science-policy work “cannot always lead to high-level scientific publications (which is what I’m mainly evaluated on).”
>
> Respondent from the Graduate Institute

## Access and networks

Many respondents reported challenges in accessing and building trusted relationships with policy actors, emphasising the need for quality connections, which require time and specific skills. They would benefit from tools like contact repositories, networking events, and greater capacity for networking to identify collaborators, understand policy landscapes and contexts, and recognise windows of opportunity for science-policy engagement. These resources could also enhance the agility of researchers in conducting policy-relevant research and facilitating multistakeholder dialogues and initiatives.

## Aligning timeframes

Academics face challenges aligning scientific rigor with policy deadlines, and feel they are often being engaged too late for thorough assessments. Some call for earlier involvement in policy design and improved monitoring of opportunities. Institutional inertia and slow policy absorption of scientific input further hinder collaboration.

> "Scientists (are) most of the time called too late to provide a robust policy assessment".
>
> "Research outcomes cannot be applied directly most of the time, adoption (by policymakers) requires additional steps that are not usually allocated within research funds"
>
> Respondent from UNIGE

## Expectations and mutual understanding

Academics face challenges in collaborating with policy actors due to unclear expectations and a lack of shared language. They struggle to understand the needs of policy actors, identify shared interests, align perspective and reach mutual understanding, in the absence of shared vocabulary. Scientists were frustrated with the difficulty of shifting the views of policy actors, because of differing disciplinary backgrounds, political priorities often overshadowing scientific considerations and a lack of commitment from policy actors. Those in technological fields face obstacles in conveying the practical implications of technologies and advocated for new policy practices involving demonstrations to test and explore potential solutions. Maintaining research standards and autonomy while engaging with policy is also viewed as a constant challenge.

> "It is difficult to explain the related issues and challenges to the actors, who have an operational point of view and cannot see the implications in the paradigm change that is about to happen.."
>
> Respondent from the Geneva Water Hub

## Relevance of science

Scientific methods do not always align with practical policy requirements. Respondents stressed the importance of adopting interdisciplinary approaches, translating abstract knowledge into practical applications, operationalising science, and enhancing skills for applying academic expertise to concrete policy challenges.

## Knowledge translation

Respondents highlighted the need to improve the translation of research into policy-relevant outputs. They called for resources such as funding for skilled communicators, editors, and platforms to make research accessible to policymakers. Support for crafting clear messaging, policy briefs and recommendations, videos, and social media content was also emphasised. One respondent suggested showcasing exemplary research-to-policy applications to bridge the know-do gap.

## Lack of skills

Respondents identified a lack of skills in science-policy work among scientists, including communication, advocacy, public speaking, translating complex research for non-expert audiences, and identifying, understanding and approaching relevant policy actors. They stressed the need for training, particularly for younger researchers, and the sharing of best practices and experiences to develop these skills.

## Call for interface mechanisms

Respondents stressed the importance of creating more interaction opportunities through collaborative processes, institutionalised mechanisms, and support from skilled intermediaries to address challenges of access, alignment, and understanding.

Regular, sustained engagement with policymakers through formats like dialogue seminars, workshops or informal “world cafe” meetings to build trust and discuss key issues were advocated by 23 respondents. Nine highlighted the value of cross-sectoral collaboration and co-designing research, policy projects and policy solutions, recommending multistakeholder and transdisciplinary approaches. Structural mechanisms were suggested to formalise exchanges and ensure sustainability beyond issue-specific briefings.
Seven respondents called for skilled intermediaries to facilitate scientist-policymaker exchanges. Others highlighted the need for independent platforms, with adequate funding, to mediate discussions and foster innovation, citing beneficial platforms like the GSPI.

**Table 10 – Main reported challenges by respondents from Academia**

| Main challenges – Academia | No. respondents |
|---|---|
| Access and networks | 21 |
| Knowledge translation | 21 |
| Funding | 20 |
| Time constraints | 15 |
| Human resources | 11 |
| Skills | 11 |
| Aligning timeframes | 10 |
| Lack of professional recognition | 8 |
| Divergent perspectives | 8 |
| Relevance of science | 8 |
| Aligning expectations | 6 |
| Language barriers | 5 |
| Matching and opportunity | 4 |
| Commitment | 2 |

# Recommendations for academia

## • Increase funding opportunities for sustainable science-policy support

Donors such as national science foundations, governmental agencies, philanthropic organisations, and research institutions can all increase sustainable funding for science-policy activities through more dedicated funding streams and grant programmes. This would ensure consistent support, long-term sustainability, and fair remuneration for the efforts of scientists to translate research into policy impact.

## • Enhance institutional support

Universities and research institutions can boost science-policy engagement by dedicating staff, reducing administrative burdens, supporting fundraising, and hiring experts to facilitate collaborations and outreach, enabling more knowledge to drive evidence-based policy solutions.

Academic institutions, funding bodies and research policymakers can encourage policy engagement by introducing career advancement opportunities, awards, and recognition programmes for scientists conducting policy-relevant research and activities, as part of their academic achievements.

## • Enhance engagement opportunities

- ***Creation of formal science-policy intermediaries:*** Research institutions, intermediary organisations and policy actors can create or support formal science-policy intermediaries, platforms or departments,

either in-house or through specialised external partners. This can foster efficient exchanges, sustained interactions, and mutual understanding between scientists and policy actors.

- ***Strengthening collaborative capacities:*** Academic institutions, policymakers and intermediaries can enhance engagement by recognising cultural and knowledge differences, leveraging their complementary strengths, and building formal bridges through purposeful collaboration. They can also encourage existing partners to take on a more proactive role in linking policy networks with scientific expertise.
- ***Investment in dialogue and relationship building:*** Organising regular science-policy workshops and networking events can foster sustained relationships and mutual understanding between scientists and policymakers. Success requires skilled facilitators, clear objectives and reflective practices.
- ***Develop digital knowledge exchange tools***: Research institutions and knowledge management experts can collaborate with tech specialists to create digital platforms, databases, and online expert networks, facilitating knowledge sharing and collaboration between scientists and policymakers.

## Enhance policy relevance of academia

Academic institutions, together with science-policy interface bodies, and intermediary organisations can strengthen the ability of scientists to align research with policy needs, translate findings into accessible and actionable formats, and build strategic capacity and partnerships effectively to advocate research uptake and influence policy outcomes.

## Build capacity for science-policy engagement, including in resource-limited settings

Academic and scientific institutions, think tanks, training institutes, and intermediary organisations can develop practical resources to help shape effective engagement strategies and offer regular training programmes for scientists on policy engagement, including fellowships placement in policy institutions to encourage experiential learning.

Donors, governments and IOs can strengthen science-policy capacity in lower-income and fragile states by supporting local research initiatives, providing tailored training, building the skills of local scientists, and subsidising participation in policy fora.

## Strengthen evaluation of policy engagement activities

Research institutions and evaluation experts can collaborate to develop tailored evaluation metrics, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to assess the output and outcomes (and where possible, the impact) of science-policy activities effectively.

# 5. Insights from non-governmental and other organisation types

International Geneva hosts a diverse ecosystem of non-governmental actors drawn by its proximity to UN agencies, thematic policy networks, and expertise in fields such as humanitarian action, human rights, migration, the environment, health, education, security and more. Survey respondents from these types of organisations numbered 33, representing a good sample of the diversity of not-for-profit organisations based in Geneva. They showcase various sizes and setups, including large operational bodies like the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Save the Children; think tanks and specialised research NGOs that produce evidence and collaborate closely with academia; as well as public-private partnerships and multistakeholder initiatives, platforms and networks. Together, they offer various models of engagement that blend research, advocacy, and policy engagement.

In the health sector, public-private partnerships launched in the 1990s focus on expanding access to new products, bringing together academia, industry, and governments, often deriving their mandate from the World Health Organisation. These partnerships such as the Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics, Drugs for Neglected Diseases Initiative, and the Global Antibiotic Research & Development Partnership bring together actors from the pharmaceutical industry, academia, service providers, healthcare providers, and governments. Humanitarian actors increasingly embrace evidence-based approaches, as seen in the Centre for Operational Research and Experience (established in 2018 by the ICRC) to embed ethical, data-driven insights into operations. Sector-wide networks like the International Council of Voluntary Agencies and the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies include the strengthening of data and evidence ecosystems in their strategies, while newer NGOs such as Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre and ACAPS deliver targeted evidence-based analysis for crisis responders, based on methodological rigour and respect for humanitarian principles. Security-focused multistakeholder platforms such as the International Crisis Group, DCAF, the Global Commission on Drug Policy, and the Geneva Water Hub present different models of boundary organisations brokering credible knowledge and diplomatic dialogue, while environmental NGOs, like Biovision and the Group on Earth Observations, bridge data, scientific findings, practical applications, and advocacy. The field of human rights also benefits from science-policy platforms, such as the Human Rights Platform, which mobilises interdisciplinary knowledge to inform human rights policies.

A new generation of organisations, including the Geneva Science and Diplomacy Anticipator, the Geneva Science-Policy Interface, the PoliSync - Centre for International Policy Engagement, and the Simon Institute for Long-term Governance, further cements Geneva's role as a global hub for science-informed policymaking. Their work focuses on supporting multilateral diplomacy with evidence and scientific innovations and spans research, convening policy discussions and multistakeholder dialogues, advising on research and technological developments, and building capacities among policy actors, scientists and other stakeholders.

Collectively, these different types of non-state actors and initiatives highlight how NGOs, platforms and partnerships in Geneva are strengthening boundary functions, adopting more proactive methods to

integrate knowledge into policy, and reinforcing the city's position as a leading centre of evidence-informed international governance.

# Snapshot of respondents from NGOs, think tanks and platforms

The 33 survey respondents who work for long-established and next-generation NGOs highlighted diverse NGO engagement in science-policy activities. They fall into three broad categories: 1) operational or technical NGOs providing direct assistance and technical support to specific populations; 2) think tank or research NGOs focused on knowledge production, technical solutions, and advocacy; and 3) networks or partnerships driving multistakeholder collaboration around shared objectives.

**Table 11 – Types of organisations of respondents from NGOs, think tanks and platforms**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Operational NGO** | **2** |
| **Think tank, research or advocacy NGO** | **20** |
| Advocacy NGO | 2 |
| Health R&D NGO | 4 |
| Think tank or research NGO | 14 |
| **Network, platform or partnership** | **11** |
| Network | 4 |
| Partnership | 3 |
| Platform | 4 |
| **TOTAL** | **33** |

Several collaborative platforms have been created and are hosted by academic institutions, such as the Geneva Water Hub, the Geneva Health Forum and the Geneva Science-Policy Interface at the University of Geneva.

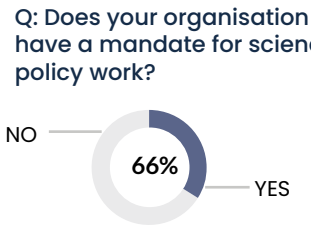
## List of organisations' names

- ACAPS (initially known as the Assessment Capacities Project)
- Biovision – Foundation for Ecological Development
- Child Rights Connect
- DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance
- Drugs for Neglected Diseases Initiative (DNDi)
- Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics (FIND)
- Geneva Academy (of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights)
- Geneva Environment Network (GEN)
- Geneva Health Forum (GHF)
- Geneva Science and Diplomacy Anticipator (GESDA)
- Geneva Science-Policy Interface (GSPI)
- Geneva Water Hub
- Global Antibiotic Research & Development Partnership (GARDP)
- Global Commission on Drug Policy
- Group on Earth Observations (GEO)
- Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE)
- Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC)
- International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)
- International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA)
- International Crisis Group (ICG)
- International Environment Forum (IEF)
- Kofi Annan Foundation
- Ouranos
- PoliSync Centre for International Policy Engagement
- Save the Children
- Simon Institute (SI) for Longterm Governance
- Women at the Table

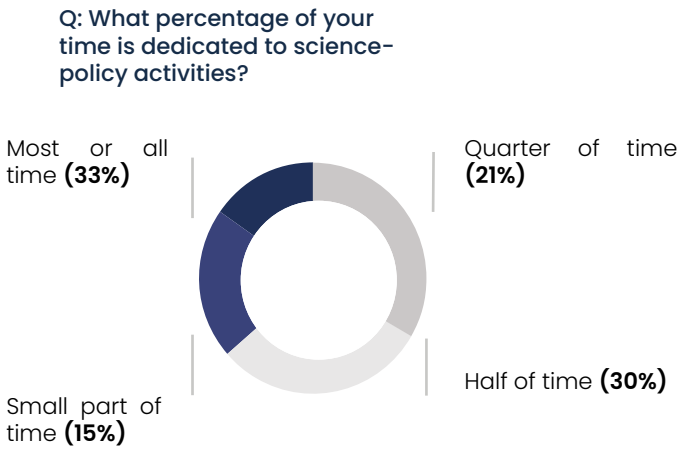
NGO respondents represent sectors such as health, humanitarian aid, security, the environment, human rights, and more. Many focus on niche or nexus issues such as water diplomacy, displaced populations, children's rights, education in conflict, security sector governance or drug policy. An increasing number of organisations focus on science and technology, either as a cross-cutting issue or a stand-alone issue requiring oversight, including in relation to sustainable development, human rights, risk management and governance.

***Professional positions in non-governmental organisations:*** Respondents primarily hold executive, leadership or specialist positions within their organisations, in relation to research, policy, advocacy or engagement. This suggests a high level of expertise and leadership involvement in science-policy activities.


***Institutionalisation in non-governmental organisations:*** Most NGOs exhibit a high level of institutionalisation, with formal mandates and mechanisms for engagement. Virtually all respondents consider engagement in science-policy activities a central component of their professional duties. Two-thirds of NGO respondents spend 50% or more of their time on science-policy activities.








***Funding in non-governmental organisations:*** Most NGO respondents receive funding for science-policy activities from bilateral and multilateral institutions, or core organisational budgets while a small number are supported by philanthropic foundations or academic institutions.

**Table 12 – Main sources of funding for science-policy work in NGOs, think tanks and platforms**

| Type of funding | No. respondents |
|---|---|
| Government institution | 16 |
| Institutional funding | 18 |
| Philanthropic organisation | 5 |
| International organisation | 2 |
| Academic institution | 2 |
| Public or private trust, funders group | 1 |
| Private sector | 1 |
| No funding | 1 |

Swiss government agencies, including the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, currently support the science-policy activities of almost 25% of survey respondents.

Other sources of support include the governments of the Netherlands, the United States of America, Australia, Norway, Germany, Sweden, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

The EU and the Aslan Development Bank also provide funding for some science-policy activities.

25% of respondents utilize core funding from their own organisations to support their science-policy endeavours.

# Reported science-policy activities in non-governmental organisations

NGO respondents view themselves as both facilitators of science-policy interaction (79%) and producers of knowledge (76%), playing a vital role in bridging gaps in support of knowledge exchange.


**Q: Do you consider yourself (mainly) a producer of knowledge, a user of knowledge, or a facilitator of science-policy interactions?**

*Respondents could select more than one science-policy function

***Non-governmental organisations as strategic advocates for research uptake***

- Over 80% of NGO respondents synthesise and communicate knowledge in accessible formats. Almost the same proportion also advocate research uptake by policy actors (73%), a much higher percentage than within academia, highlighting a more proactive and strategic engagement in promoting science-informed policies.
- Furthermore, nearly all respondents (90%) indicate they organise, support or participate in science-policy dialogue, thereby promoting direct knowledge exchange through interpersonal, deliberative formats. A remarkable percentage of NGO professionals (79%) are also directly involved in science advice mechanisms, which demonstrates the recognition of their specific expertise by policy professionals.

- NGO respondents indicated they are not very involved in activities supporting the use of research in decision-making. When they do, they contribute to the use of research for framing and prioritising issues on the policy agenda.
- Advocacy and interactive exchange are usually recognised as critical facilitators of research uptake in policy, pointing to NGOs as strategic actors in fostering access to policy-relevant knowledge.

***NGOs as promoters of policy-relevant knowledge***

- NGOs engage in a bi-directional role, connecting expertise with policy needs. 70% said they actively identify and communicate policy knowledge gaps, a much higher rate than among IO respondents, demonstrating their potential role in translating policy needs into research agendas and informing scientists of existing areas of interest and need. An equal proportion produces tailored knowledge through science-policy collaborations.
- Nonetheless, very few NGO respondents indicated that they work directly with scientists in academia, potentially revealing a preference for using more policy- and practice-oriented research skills outside formal academic circles.

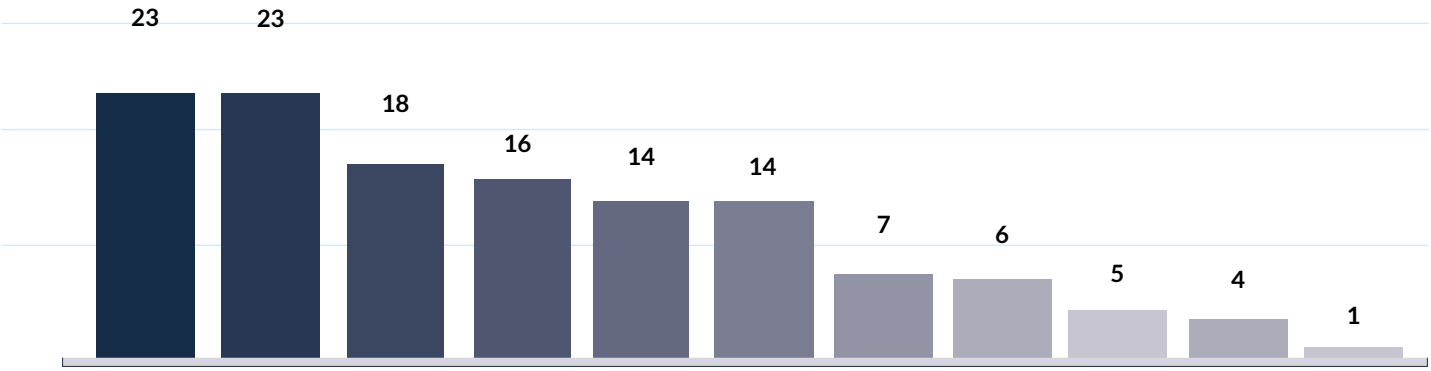
***NGOs as promoters of sustained science-policy relationships***

- To sustain science-policy relationships, 63% of NGO respondents actively build collaborations or networks and half of them provide technical or structural support for science-policy processes.
- A notable number (42%) also indicated creating specific platforms, posts or departments to facilitate engagement, but very few offer rewards or incentives for science-policy engagement or impact.

> We need "more time to involve stakeholders from the beginning of research to inform policy with a robust engagement plan that would include several touch points throughout the process, including national stakeholders at a high level (…) as well as end-users of the intended policy (…)". It helps create a "stronger ecosystem to identify the policy needs, design research that fills those needs and leads to sustainable policy change (…) in concert with associated financial mechanisms (…) instead of leaving it a nice piece of writing that cannot be implemented."
>
> Respondent from FIND

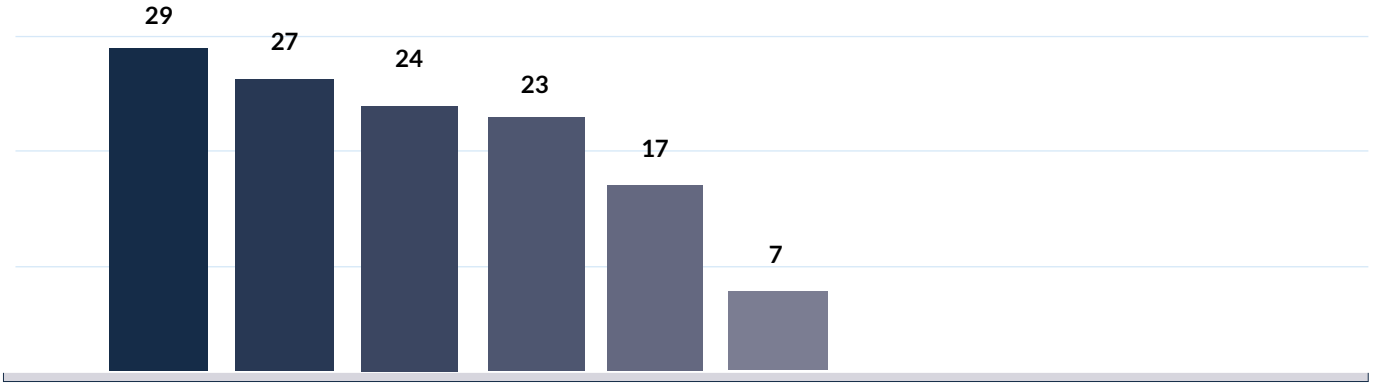
# Reported Activities- NGOs

### Q: Do you engage in any of the following activities for producing policy-relevant knowledge?



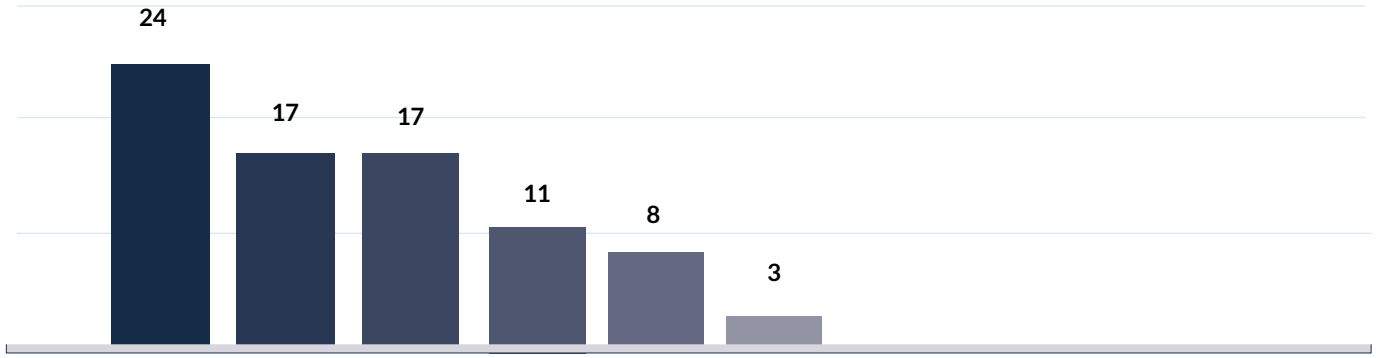

- Identify/communicate policy knowledge gaps, policy needs &/or policy actor calls for research
- engage in science-policy collaborations to produce knowledge
- consider policy needs when designing research projects/setting research agenda
- provide technical, financial, structural support for science-policy knowledge production processes
- include policy actors as data sources when collecting data
- respond to calls from policy / other actors for research
- offer incentives for scientists to engage in policy-relevant research
- conduct research activities internally with the support of external scientists
- commission independent studies from scientists provide scientists with access to data
- I haven't engaged in activities for producing policy-relevant knowledge

### Q: Do you engage in any of the following activities to facilitate access to knowledge?



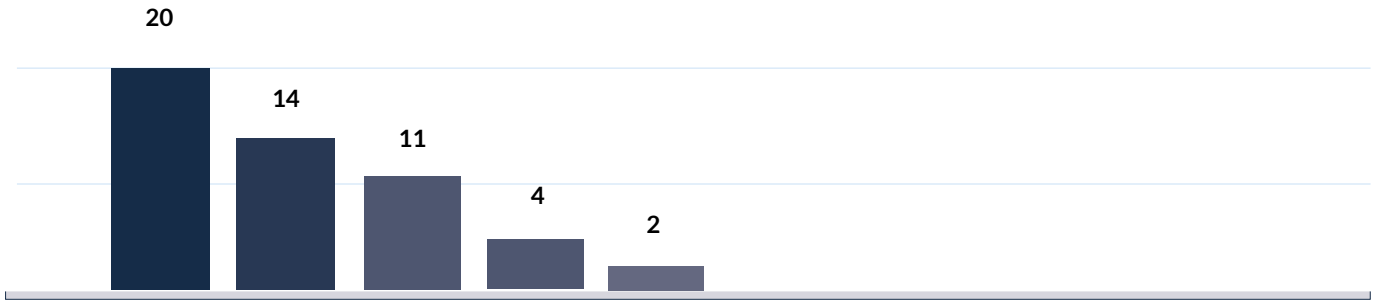

- organise, participate in, support, or fund science-policy dialogue activities
- synthesise, communicate or disseminate knowledge in accessible language or formats
- advocate for research uptake by policy actors
- create, support, publicise or participate in science advice mechanisms
- seek, provide or consider knowledge through personal contacts
- create, be included in, publicise directories/databases for access to scientific expertise

**Q: Do you support policy actors in this type of policy work?**



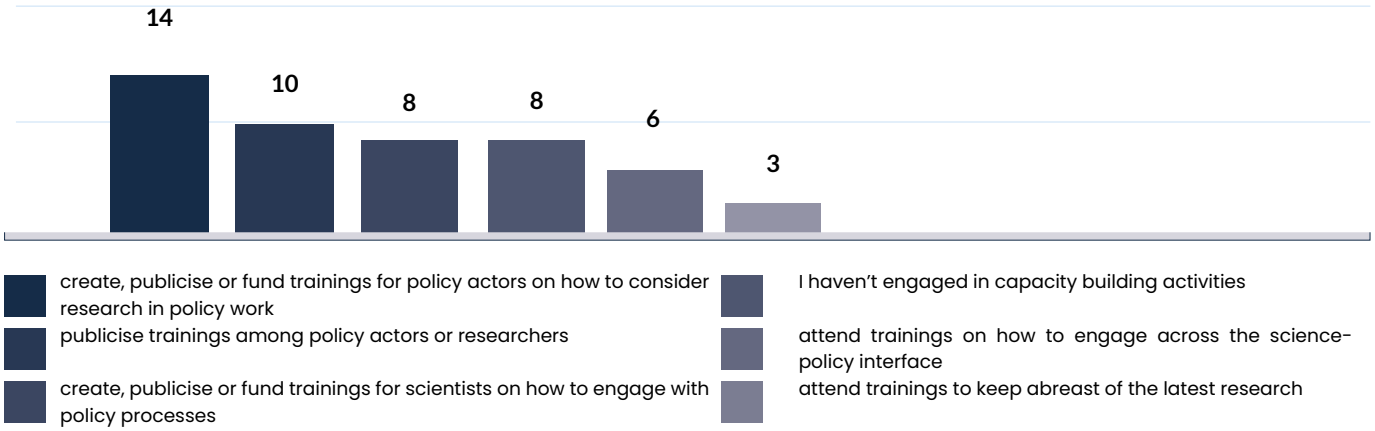

- seek, provide or consider research for framing or prioritising policy issues
- seek, provide or consider research for monitoring, evaluation or review processes
- seek, provide or consider research for negotiating, drafting or designing agreements, policies or programmes
- seek, provide or consider research for implementing agreements, policies or programmes
- serve on expert committees or as special rapporteurs/ representatives
- I haven't engaged in using research in policy work

**Q: Do you engage in any of the following activities for shaping sustained science-policy relations?**




- build collaborations or networks for exchange between policy actors and scientists
- provide technical/financial/structural support for platforms, posts or departments to facilitate science-policy engagement
- create platforms, posts or departments to facilitate science-policy engagement
- offer rewards or incentives for science-policy engagement or impact
- I haven't engaged in activities aimed at shaping sustained science-policy relations

**Q: Do you engage in any of the following capacity-building activities for science-policy interactions?**




# Reported impact and evaluation practices of non-governmental organisations

Half of NGO respondents (17) indicated that their organisations evaluated their science-policy activities, citing specific indicators or methods. Many specified that their methods were neither robust nor consistent, and some (5) explicitly stated they did not assess their activities at all.

## Evaluation methods: indicators, challenges and approaches

NGOs primarily relied on feedback from knowledge users and stakeholders as a key source of evaluation data. For most respondents, evaluation was confounded with regular donor reporting and internal monitoring systems such as monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL), results-based management or logical framework approach aligned with strategic plans and grant deliverables.

Qualitative indicators mentioned included:

- shifts in policymaker attitudes towards certain topics, e.g., increased recognition or better understanding of a specific issue as reported in policy documents;
- changes in policy frameworks, strategies, and funding allocations;
- launch of concrete initiatives.

Quantitative indicators included number of:

- policies influenced at national, regional, or global levels;
- new connections established;
- policy briefs submitted;
- workshop participants;
- publications, citations, and high-level reuse of content.

Seven respondents noted difficulties in assessing and communicating the impact of science-policy engagement work, related to the fact that impact often manifests over time, and results from collective action. One network organisation mentioned using a methodology based on "collective impact theory" to track outcomes within the context of its members' collaborative efforts. The very definition of impact would also benefit from a better understanding of the needs of target audiences.

Survey responses highlighted the need for more resources, including dedicated staff and improved methodologies, to address these challenges and strengthen evaluation practices. One organisation provided a notable example of a tailored, comprehensive results matrix tracking the integration of knowledge into policies, uptake of good practices, and enhanced skills among oversight actors.

> "We produce a lot of outputs, but outcomes are more challenging to evaluate. We need to better understand the impact of our work, but also the needs of our audience(s)."
>
> Respondent from Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre - IDMC

## Notable policy outcomes and impacts

Most respondents (20) reported significant impacts from their science-policy work, spanning agenda-setting, issue-framing, policy deliberations, instrument design, shifts in attitudes and practices, and funding.

***Direct policy/programmatic outcomes*:** NGOs reported having an influence on

- political agendas, e.g. contributing to the inclusion of specific topics in UN Secretary-General reports, UN agency political agendas, and convincing funders to support UN policy processes.
- the design of hard and soft policy instruments, such as WHO recommendations, humanitarian guidelines, public health policies, and UN declarations.
- the implementation of policies and in governance practices including improved implementation of drug policies; adoption of ecological agriculture principles and better infrastructure design, the use of new tools to advance child rights and international standards; changes in working methods within UN human rights treaty bodies and evidence-based decision-making by humanitarian actors.

***More informed deliberations, programmes and actors*:** The science-policy work of some NGOs informed policy discussions, with impacts including shaping discourse and priorities, promoting accurate conceptual definitions in official UN documents, achieving application of research in legal and policy processes, increasing awareness of risk-related issues among UN staff and diplomats, integrating science-based

arguments in deliberations and bettering the access to research for policymakers.
***Strengthened engagement between science and policy communities*:** Fostering stronger relationships between scientific and policy actors was reported and resulted in increased exchanges and discussions, new connections; and formation of formal and informal coalitions, networks, and partnerships. Impacts also related to the capacity for engagement by actors, including improved skills and mutual awareness through joint learning, and improved researcher capacity to present findings effectively.

***Enhancing knowledge production and communication*:** Respondents contributed to the creation of knowledge products tailored to policy needs, including better-designed research studies and implementation roadmaps in the public health sector, the prioritisation of research questions by funders, and the production of scientifically robust outputs like toolkits, online platforms, briefs, and white papers, including UN output.

**Table 13 – Reported impact by respondents from NGOs and other types of organisations**

| Impact on policy | No. respondents |
|---|---|
| Informed policy instrument design | 7 |
| Change in attitudes/practices or methods | 7 |
| Influence on the policy agenda or issue framing | 4 |
| Informed policy discussion | 4 |
| Influence on funding | 1 |
| **Impact on engagement dynamics** | **No. respondents** |
| More exchange or contact | 4 |
| New networks, relations, partnerships | 4 |
| Enhanced mutual awareness and skills | 2 |
| Eased access to research | 1 |
| **Impact on knowledge production or communication** | **No. respondents** |
| Increased relevance of research | 2 |
| Increased scientific robustness of policy-oriented knowledge products | 2 |
| Increased capacity of researchers to communicate | 2 |
| **Unsure, not tangible or too early** | **No. respondents** |
| Unsure, not tangible or too early | 5 |

# Challenges and needs in non governmental organisations

The complex nature of science-policy engagement work presents numerous challenges. These include navigating intricate dynamics, securing resources, and fostering effective collaboration. Respondents emphasised the need for more flexible funding, expertise, tools, and mechanisms to support their role as knowledge brokers.

## Resource constraints

NGO respondents face limited financial and human resources, hindering agility, strategic networking, and long-term collaborations. Respondents emphasised the need for multi-year, flexible funding to support sustained partnerships and allow for adaptive management of processes. They also need to attract specialised skills essential for navigating complex science-policy dynamics. Finding expert "boundary spanners" capable of bridging substance and relationships is thought to be difficult due to limited training opportunities and the specialised nature of the work.

> "Working at the interface takes an unusual skillset. People are too specialized. Or too comfortable with doing mainstream work, instead of spanning boundaries."
>
> Respondent from the Simon Institute

## Balancing agility and strategic engagement

Designing and implementing effective science-policy initiatives was a common challenge. Some respondents highlighted difficulties in:

- tracking policy needs proactively;
- prioritising key issues;
- developing fit-for-purpose knowledge products;
- offering timely and relevant support;
- initiating strategic collaboration projects.

Balancing agility with strategic vision was sometimes experienced as frustrating, with one respondent describing their efforts as a "scattergun approach" and another highlighting the strain of trying to do "everything, everywhere, all at once". This dual demand requires unique skillsets, as well as appropriate time and resources.

## Challenges in knowledge translation

Respondents identified significant hurdles in their role as knowledge translators, which implies acting as a cognitive bridge across disciplinary and professional divides. Building common language across communities is hindered by low scientific or data literacy in some sectors. Furthermore, crafting messages for multiple audiences simultaneously is a delicate task, as adjustments for one group risk alienating another.

Some solutions were put forward by respondents. Some believe they could enhance their ability to synthesise and translate knowledge by adopting specific methodological frameworks, building responsive research teams, hiring highly specialised communicators, and generating communication tools like videos, platforms, and e-tools to make information accessible and user-friendly.

Respondents called for additional resources to conduct consultations with their diverse audience – spanning

member states, civil society, and academia – to enhance their advocacy strategies based on a deeper grasp of politically effective framing and evidence use. They thought that knowledge exchange could be improved by efforts to "produce boundary-spanners" in both communities – diplomats who understand research and researchers skilled in policy communication and engagement.

## Barriers to knowledge uptake by policymakers and practitioners

Respondents identified multiple challenges in ensuring evidence informs policy agendas, decisions, and actions. They stressed that the limited absorptive capacity of policymakers, combined with contextual political dynamics, means that scientific evidence is just one of many factors shaping policy. Ideologies, political priorities, polarising narratives, short-termism, and geopolitical tensions often take precedence over evidence in policy discussions.

Respondents also highlighted structural challenges in governance systems, including siloed approaches to complex systems and insufficient cross-sector collaboration. To address this, they proposed creating platforms and dialogue fora to promote science-policy work across sectors, e.g. around global frameworks like the SDGs or the Sendai Framework.

A persistent knowledge-to-action gap was also reported in three sectors – health, where scientific recommendations are slow to translate into practice; technology, where policymakers struggle to maintain agency and keep pace with rapid, industry-driven advancements; and the environment, where disregard for technological considerations in policy discussions sometimes hampers the implementation of solutions.

Finally, discrepancies between global policy frameworks and country-specific needs were also noted, with respondents calling for efforts to "bridge policy with ground realities". These gaps are often reflected in funding priorities misaligned with local needs.

## Addressing gaps in knowledge production

NGO respondents also pointed to systemic issues within academia that hinder science-policy dynamics. Some respondents expressed frustration with the slowness of academic engagement in addressing policy research needs while recognising that the lack of consolidated research requests from policymakers does not facilitate targeted responses.

Respondents cited an imbalance in regional academic capacity and insufficient opportunities for transdisciplinary collaboration between academia, practitioners, and grassroots civil society. They advocated funding to support scholars and NGOs from the Global South in conferences and workshops. Limited access to academic publications remains a challenge, despite efforts like open-access initiatives tied to SNSF and EU funding. Respondents called for further collaboration with global academic journals to enhance accessibility.

Respondents highlighted significant gaps in policy-relevant research in their respective sectors and wished they could do more to address them but reported facing barriers, including difficulty accessing local data critical for informed policy-making.

## Strengthening formal mechanisms

Several respondents advocated formal mechanisms to support science-policy engagement within or around their organisations. That included establishing science-policy interface mechanisms within organisations,

creating expert pools dedicated to science-policy work, or formally partnering with academic institutions for regular support. Some commended the work of existing international boundary organisations tasked with producing pertinent science for policymaking, such as IPCC and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) reports, as well as the Group on Earth Observations (GEO). They praised them for conveniently providing inputs for their science-policy activities and expressed a need to enhance their communication capacity to amplify advocacy efforts around their findings.

## Barriers to stakeholder engagement

Some respondents highlighted that onboarding stakeholders at an early stage of a science-policy initiative and maintaining engagement over time required a lot of effort because of the lack of incentives and a limited understanding of the importance and scope of that type of work.

Other challenges included limited accessibility and openness from policymakers and insufficient networks and connections both with decision-makers and scientists. Proposed solutions involved dedicated workshops and briefings to foster engagement, building stable, diverse networks and partnership with academic communities.

## Leadership for science-policy engagement

Respondents called for stronger leadership to promote science-policy collaboration. They saw themselves as well positioned to act as such advocates, but needed to expand the evidence base, craft impact stories, and run campaigns to showcase the benefits of science-policy engagement. Yet, they called for more political and institutional support to strengthen actors and processes at the science-policy interface, including leveraging platforms like the GSPI to enhance awareness, coordination, and stakeholder responsiveness.

## Expanding capacity-building initiatives and access

Organisations emphasised the need to scale their capacity-building efforts as an effective form of science-policy engagement, including developing toolkits and offering accessible online training. The critical importance of capacity-building initiatives was particularly emphasised in LMICs, where resources and expertise are limited. Respondents thought scholarships could be provided to support researchers in attending workshops to engage in policy processes and to policymakers to learn how to effectively integrate research into their work.

> “We need to intensify advocacy around science-informed policy outputs.”
>
> Respondent from ICG
>
> “We “need to communicate to so many audiences at once, with the risk of making too big adjustments for one audience, which can be detrimental to our com with other audiences.”
>
> Respondent from the Simon Institute.

**Table 14 – Main reported challenges by respondents from NGOs and other types of organisations**

| Main challenges | No. respondents |
|---|---|
| Barriers to knowledge uptake by policymakers & practitioners | 13 |
| Resource constraints | 12 |
| Gaps in knowledge production | 9 |
| Expanding capacity-building opportunities | 9 |
| Stakeholders' engagement | 6 |
| Monitoring, assessing and communicating impact | 6 |
| Lack of formal science-policy mechanisms | 5 |
| Knowledge translation | 5 |
| Leadership for science-policy work | 2 |
| Agility in science-policy engagement | 2 |

# Recommendations for non-governmental organisations

## • Asserting the intermediary role of NGOs

NGOs, platforms and partnership focused on brokering scientific evidence for policymakers should strengthen their role as intermediary knowledge brokers by professionalising their services, creating networks of practitioners, and advocating their specific contribution as a bridge between research and policy, as well as promoters of cross-sectoral fora, multi stakeholder collaborations and interdisciplinary approaches. These efforts can help address complex policy challenges and support sustained science-policy interactions.

Governments and IOs should provide high-level political leadership and championing to endow high-quality, independent knowledge brokering organisations with credibility and legitimacy within formal multilateral processes.

Academic institutions should consider strengthening their partnerships with non-governmental intermediary organisations to increase the relevance of their research and translate their expertise in advocacy or policy work. Policymakers should consider strengthening their partnerships with non-governmental intermediary organisations to improve their access to independent, specialised, tailored, transdisciplinary knowledge.

## • Securing funding and dedicated human resources

Donor governments and private donors should establish sustainable funding streams to facilitate NGOs' unique role as knowledge brokers in international policymaking. Multi-year, flexible funding programmes can ensure consistent support for long-term collaborations and impactful science-policy initiatives.

NGOs and think tanks should enhance their human resource capacities by investing in specialised communicators, knowledge translators with sectoral political expertise, strong advocates with advanced scientific literacy, and professionals skilled in the socio-cognitive dynamics of decision-making. Dedicated broker positions can help organisations build focused networks, strengthen science-policy strategies and sustained partnerships.

## • Strengthening evaluation

NGOs and think tanks should collaborate with evaluation experts to develop standardised frameworks and methodologies that assess the impact of science-policy activities. Sharing experiences, identifying best practices, and harnessing impact stories can further demonstrate their value as intermediaries and secure broader recognition and support.

## • Enhancing access to knowledge

Academic publishers, research institutions, and funding bodies should enable open access to research outputs, removing paywalls to ensure NGOs and not-for-profit actors can access critical data.

Knowledge management experts, research institutions, and tech specialists should collaborate to create and maintain digital knowledge platforms and databases that facilitate the exchange of policy-relevant data, information, knowledge, and the identification of experts.

## • Building capacity

Training institutions, academic bodies, and NGOs should deliver capacity-building programmes for intermediary knowledge brokering organisations to strengthen their reflexivity, skills and connections.
NGOs acting as intermediaries should develop their training activities tailored to scientists and policymakers to address the skills of scientists to navigate policy processes and those of policymakers to leverage scientific research in decision-making, thereby contributing to improve science-policy ecosystems in support of policy work.
Governments, NGOs, and IOs should invest in local capacity building in LMICs. This includes funding local research, enhancing the capacity of scientists to produce relevant evidence, and support mechanisms to better include that research in global policy processes. Advocacy for online streaming of policy meetings can increase participation from Global South actors.

> “If we had access to more funding, we would dedicate it to “producing boundary-spanners: diplomats who can appreciate and use research, and researchers who can influence diplomatic circles”.
>
> Respondent from GWH

# 6. Concluding remarks

This study has sought to map and illuminate the diverse ecosystem of science-policy engagement in International Geneva, revealing a committed community of actors, a growing recognition of knowledge brokering as a field of practice, and valuable insights into its potential and constraints.

In closing, it is essential to acknowledge the areas this report did not cover and to widen the lens toward broader systemic trends shaping the future of knowledge brokering in international policy-making. One such area is the increasing role of the private sector in shaping science, data ecosystems, and policy discourse. Technology companies, global consultancies, and private foundations have become critical knowledge holders and agenda-setters, particularly in domains such as digital health, AI governance, and climate innovation. Their growing influence in multilateral processes and knowledge production presents both opportunities and risks. It calls for new forms of engagement, ethical safeguards, and an expanded understanding of what constitutes legitimate expertise and whose knowledge informs decisions at the international level.

Funders, too, play a pivotal but underexplored role in determining the scope and sustainability of knowledge brokering efforts. While this study highlights the chronic lack of flexible and long-term funding for interface activities, it did not delve into the logics, incentives, or influence of donors, foundations, and institutional funders. There is a need to engage more strategically with funders—making the case for knowledge brokering as a long-term investment in the quality and legitimacy of international policymaking.

At the same time, the world is changing in ways that fundamentally affect the landscape of science-policy relations. The erosion of multilateralism and geopolitical polarisation, coupled with the rise of populism and a growing distrust of expertise, present serious challenges to the integration of science in multilateral decision-making. Recent political shifts have undermined the authority of international institutions and questioned the value of scientific consensus. In this context, the work of knowledge brokers may become more normative: defending the space for deliberative, evidence-informed policymaking in an increasingly fractured world.

Yet, crises also create opportunities for renewal. The tightening of funding for international organisations may open space for new, more agile collaborations—especially between academia and policy actors. Universities and research centres could step into more prominent boundary roles, provided they are supported, incentivised, and equipped to do so. Emerging hybrid models—where academic credibility meets policy responsiveness—can help mitigate institutional inertia and enrich international policy processes with innovative, critical, and diverse forms of knowledge.

This study shows there is a wealth of practical experience in knowledge brokering within the Geneva ecosystem. What is lacking is systemic recognition, connectivity, and support. Geneva is uniquely positioned to lead in this domain—not just because of its institutional density, but because of its recognised role in convening global actors to advance cooperation on shared public goods. To realise this potential, science-policy engagement must to the centre of how we imagine and conduct multilateral cooperation in the 21st century.

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