

# PERFORM

Performing and Responsive Social Sciences

## Collaboration of Social Scientists and Policy Makers –

## An Evidence-Informed Approach to Policy Making

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## 1. Current Practice in Evidence-Based Policy Making in Serbia

Improving the policy drafting process in Serbia has been a priority of the Serbian Government for the past several years. In support of this effort, the Government established the Public Policy Secretariat (PPS) in 2014 as a special organisation of the Government of the Republic of Serbia. PPS provides the Government and state administration bodies with expert support in the process of planning, development, adoption and coordination of public policies and implementation of regulatory reforms. However, structured linkages between policy makers and the research community (research institutes, faculties and think-tanks) are still missing. Research priorities are not being determined jointly. Results of social science research, expertise and knowledge of the research community remain underused in the policy making processes.

Within the framework of EU Accession Negotiations Process, Serbia is rapidly adopting new laws in line with the EU acquis. As an illustration, according to the report produced by the Open Parliament Initiative<sup>1</sup>, 64% of legislation in a period of one year 2014-2015 is being adopted through emergency procedures (124 laws were adopted by urgent procedure out of a total of 193 laws adopted in that period), leaving no space for scientific evidence from the research community or public debate. This impacts quality of new legislation, not providing an effective response to pertaining problems (e.g. social protection policy). The same report pointed out that **every eighth law adopted by urgent procedure** needed to get additionally modified. "In the last 9 months, the laws were returned 3 times to be corrected immediately after their adoption." (An interview, a male MP of the NARS, February 2015)

### Cooperation of Social Science Researchers and Policy Makers

Research of RRPP<sup>2</sup> in 2016 showed that there is a low level of trust among researchers and policy makers. Researchers are often convinced that policy makers are not interested to use research findings in the policy making process. On the other hand, policy makers do not trust capacities of research institutions, nor do they trust their motivation to utilise their scientific work for policy making. This lack of mutual trust has a negative impact on the cooperation of these two communities/groups and that has consequently a negative effect on the quality of public policies in Serbia. Incentives in the system do not promote policy relevant research nor encourage links with policy makers, decision makers, civil sector and the media.

Current research programmes and priorities do not match with the priorities of decision makers. Researchers do not focus on the issues that are of relevance to the wider society in Serbia. Research findings, that could be used in policy making and should enter public debates, are not visible enough or available to policy makers. There is a worry among researchers that they may lose their academic independence if they take up "policy relevant" research. A pragmatic shift in social sciences is needed, not to be only USEFUL, but USEABLE.<sup>3</sup> Producing scientific data with the purpose of explaining social phenomena could be considered as usefulness that has academic value and is motivating for researchers as it gives them credits for promotion. On the other hand, producing research results that can be used as evidence to support public policies gives an aspect of usability, which does not necessarily give any academic value *per se*. That's why this move towards pragmatic orientation of researches could be perceived as a factor that diminishes academic importance of these "policy oriented" and applied researches.

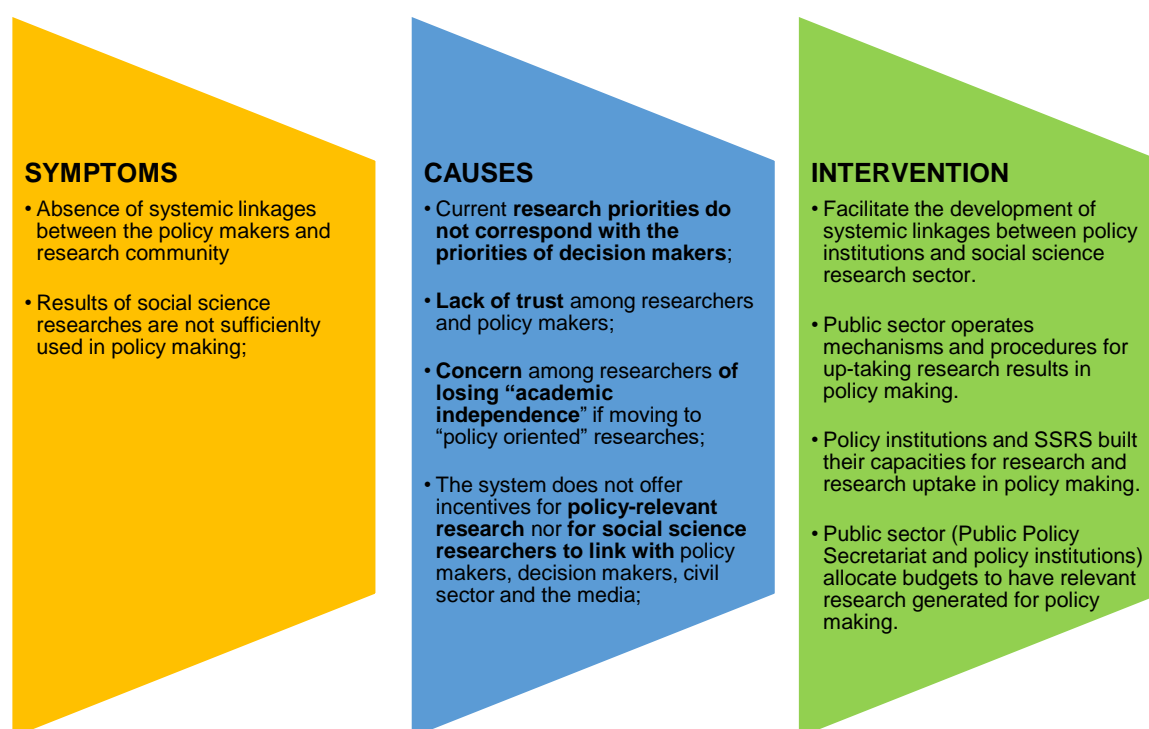
<sup>1</sup> <http://www.otvoreniparlament.rs/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Making-Better-Law-Report.pdf>; Within the Open Parliament initiative and supported by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and British Embassy in Belgrade, the Centre for Research, Transparency and Accountability (CRTA) conducted a survey titled "Making Better Law - Improving the Legislative Process by Better Defined Urgent Procedure".

<sup>2</sup> Jelena Žarković Rakić, Dejan Stanković, Igor Bandović, Mihajlo Đukić: RRPP Istraživanje "Implementacija naučnih rezultata u oblasti društvenih nauka u procesima kreiranja javnih politika u Srbiji", IEN, Beograd 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Aiming to enhance the relevance of social science research, PERFORM decided to support the Public Policy Secretariat in their efforts to develop and establish structures and mechanisms for enabling evidence-informed policy making (EIPM) in Serbia, as well as in building capacities of all stakeholders involved in this process: primarily researchers and decision-makers. The graph below (Figure 1) shows the main features of the situation in Serbia in regards to evidence-based policy making and the goals of the PERFORM's intervention with the Secretariat.

**Figure 1 Symptoms and root causes of problems in evidence-based policy making in Serbia**



## 2. The Main Features of the Intervention

- **The objective** of this intervention was to contribute to the evolvement and institutionalisation of structures and mechanisms through which social science research and policy institutions collaborate for creating and feeding evidence into policy making.
- **Facilitator's role of PERFORM:** PERFORM had a facilitator's role in this process and did not offer ready-made solutions, but responds to problems articulated by partners supporting them to find and develop their solutions. The intervention provided a space for the Secretariat, state institutions and social science researchers to develop mechanisms and structures for cooperation based on lessons learned from the pilots.
- **Building capacity of all participants in the process:** PERFORM provided backstopping and capacity building support to the Secretariat's staff, as well as capacity building of the staff of state institutions and social science researchers involved in implementation of pilots, on issues related to evidence based policy making. Different educational workshops, study visits and info sessions were organised for the participating actors. PERFORM also provided funds for research institutions to conduct policy relevant research.
- **Facilitating trust through an ongoing process of interaction and consultations among all participants:** The pilots were seen as a joint project between the Secretariat,

groups of policy-makers and research groups. With the process facilitation by PERFORM the participating actors jointly prepared, planned and conducted the pilot interventions, generating good quality results and outputs. This contributed to increased trust on all sides.

- **Reflection and Learning:** PERFORM facilitated a process of learning, reflection and exchange of knowledge among all actors involved in the pilots (the staff of the Secretariat, state institutions and researchers involved) through regular and on-going communication among all, regular meetings and evaluation. All participants took part in this process, looking at the learnings from the pilots and analysing success and failure. Different evaluation and reporting tools were developed and used throughout the process. The pilots contributed greatly by pointing out practical aspects such as possible cooperation models with researchers. Documentation was ensured after each reflection and learning cycle.
- **Regular monitoring:** When designing and implementing the pilots, particular attention was being paid to continuously monitor and analyse progress, so as to adjust the process when required. Several mechanisms were used: formation of a Board consisting of the top positioned representatives from all four ministries involved, as well as four working groups consisting of the representatives of each ministry as beneficiary of research and selected research teams. The Board and the working groups helped to analyse the progress of the pilots and develop strategies and guidelines in support of a future establishment of practices in the system.

### Concrete Steps of the Intervention

1. The **Public Policy Secretariat expressed an interest** and commitment to establishing a system through which relevant scientific evidence is generated and fed into the policy cycle. After a dialogue with PERFORM, the Secretariat proposed to design and implement pilot initiatives through which the Secretariat will support the collaboration of social science research groups with policy makers in specific policy projects. PPS requested the support from PERFORM for running these pilots.
2. A member of PERFORM staff spent 3-4 days per week at the Secretariat and worked with PPS staff on pilot implementation.
3. In this first phase, PERFORM supported the Secretariat **to select** four state institutions<sup>4</sup> and jointly with them **developed a framework for research** (defining specific research topics and research questions, developing Terms of Reference for research, as well as defining selection criteria for social science research institutions). The selection process prioritised policy areas where there was both an urgent need and the capacity and competence to support the evidence-informed approach to policy making.
4. PERFORM supported PPS in announcing the **Public Call** for accredited research institutions and **selection**<sup>5</sup> of four institutes which would conduct the research on nominated topics.
5. Once research institutions had been selected, PERFORM supported the Secretariat to **involve state institutions in the research process** by **facilitating regular meetings** and exchange between the actors involved. State institutions were actively involved in monitoring the progress of research process. In that regard, two mechanisms were established - a management board and pilots' working groups.
6. PERFORM organised several **capacity building workshops** for the staff of the Secretariat and the state institutions on EIPM, and planned and supported a **study visit** to

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<sup>4</sup> Selected state institutions are: Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Culture and Information, Ministry of Youth and Sports, and the Commission for Protection of Competition.

<sup>5</sup> Selected research institutions are: Faculty of Economy, Belgrade University; Institute of Economic Sciences (IEN), Economic Institute, and Academy of Arts.

the Netherlands, exposing people involved in the pilots to a well-established system of collaboration between social science research and policy makers.

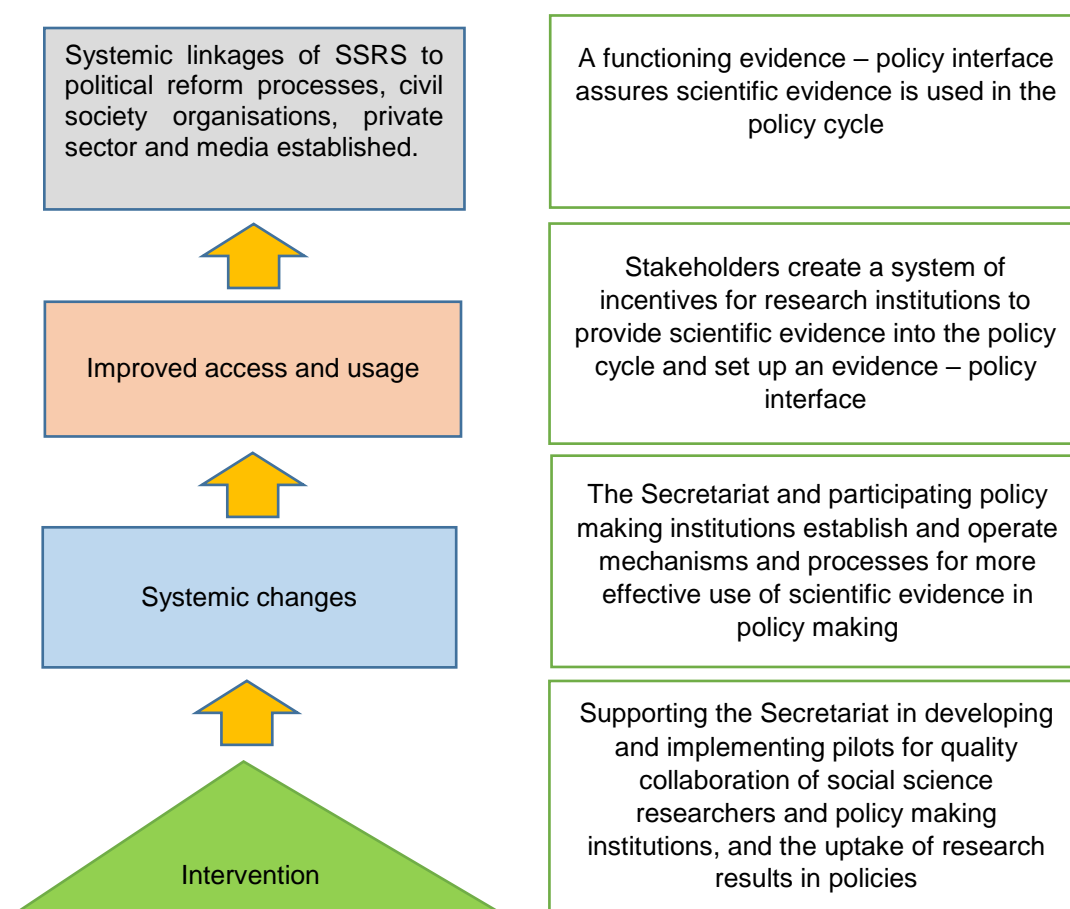
7. **Dissemination of research results, and sharing the lessons learned** - research projects have been completed and reports accepted by the ministries. Please see summary of one of the pilots on p.8 of this document.
8. Procedures and mechanisms for communication and cooperation between state institutions and social science research groups, as well as their communication and relation with the Secretariat developed through pilots, will in a later phase serve as groundwork for the Secretariat to work on the **establishment of institutionalised mechanisms for collaboration** among different state institutions and social science research institutions and the use of research results in policy making.



**Fig. 2:** Process of evidence-informed approach to policy making followed<sup>6</sup> (adopted from DEFRA 2006)

<sup>6</sup> Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (2006): Our approach to evidence and innovation.

**Fig. 3 Impact logic of the PPS Intervention**



### 3. First Results

- A common understanding of the main impediments to the cooperation of social science research institutes / groups that were involved in the pilots and decision makers / policy making institutions, has evolved;
- The process of cooperation in four pilots has provided opportunity to both sides – social science research and policy makers – to strengthen mutual trust and better understanding of needs and capacities of the other side;
- In the course of implementing the pilots, good practices of communication and collaboration have been established, which can serve to build future procedures and mechanisms;
- Relevant scientific evidence has been generated and delivered to policy makers; uptake in policy development is currently taking place;
- Based on the impediments identified earlier and the experience from the pilots, mechanisms and systems will be proposed by PPS to facilitate and support the collaboration between social science research and policy makers in the future.

#### 4. Beyond the Intervention: Strategies for Broader Systemic Change

What are the next steps in order to consolidate early achievements and facilitate a broader systemic change that will facilitate evidence-informed policy making?

- It is important at this point that public administration recognises the value and importance of EIPM. Their awareness on the benefits of EIPM has to increase.
- Communicating and showcasing the results from the pilots will be a first step.
- Public administration (ministries) will have to budget resources for research that will feed evidence into policy and decision making.
- Awareness in the research community has to increase about their role in contributing scientific evidence to influence public policy and decision making, and contribute to their quality. How can an incentive system be created and operated to support more policy-oriented research?
- Exploring different models of collaboration: The pilots with the Secretariat focused on a pull model – policy makers requesting researchers to provide scientific evidence while being coordinated by the Secretariat. Interactive models are considered good practices in other countries where researchers and policy-makers regularly meet in commissions / on platforms to dialogue and identify areas where science should contribute to public debate and policy making.
- The public procurement process is seen as an impediment to policy makers contracting researchers. PERFORM will request experts to assess feasible alternatives to public procurement which can be proposed to the Administration.
- Once the final research outputs have been delivered to the ministries involved, the Secretariat will develop a strategy for upscaling and mainstreaming good practices developed during the pilots. PERFORM will assess how to support the strategy and how to involve other key stakeholders in implementing the strategy.
- It is expected that the Secretariat will have capacities developed to run similar pilots for evidence-informed policy making in future, with significantly less support from PERFORM.
- A longer-term research agenda established by policy makers and researchers will allow for primary research to complement existing knowledge.



## **Case Summary: Analysis of Regulatory Framework of Entrepreneurship in Three Most Perspective Areas with Proposed Simplification of Business for Young Entrepreneurs**

Commissioned by: **Ministry of Youth and Sports**

Conducted by: **Economics Institute**

Purpose of Research: Analyse the conditions in which young entrepreneurs do business in Serbia and provide an evidence base for creating new public policies and regulatory interventions, which will lead to improved conditions for development of youth entrepreneurship and a decrease in youth unemployment. Special emphasis to be put on three fields with significant growth potential: IT sector, creative industries and services in agriculture.

Research Findings: The study revealed the main issues that young entrepreneurs face, such as lack of a supportive environment, lack of entrepreneurial knowledge and skills, underdeveloped financial support, and high tax burden, and it proposed concrete measures for overcoming them, such as introducing a regulatory framework for venture capital investments, passing the Law on Microfinancing, tax incentives, and amendments to the Law on Foreign Exchange Transactions that would enable using PayPal for both effecting and receiving payments in foreign currency.

### Selected Recommendations:

- Some general measures were defined that can contribute to growing youth entrepreneurship in Serbia, such as: more effective science and innovation system, in particular a more effective interface between research and enterprises; increased relevance of scientific research for economic development; development of financial incentive measures and institutional framework for linking research and enterprises; developing entrepreneurship education etc.
- Some specific measures that are recommended include: further development of non-formal entrepreneurship education through the model of “Youth Companies” in secondary schools. This model is based on development of student companies designed by the students themselves, and its transformation through all phases of life of one company, while students gain practical knowledge and skills throughout the process.
- Adoption of a special law on risk funds is proposed, which will ensure normative regulation of investments through venture capital, “investment angels”, etc. Adoption of the law on microfinance is pointed out, as well as other measures like tax exemption for investments in technological start-ups and innovative firms, introduction of tax loans for investments in research and development, tax incentives in form of non-tax on profit directed to risk investments, etc.
- Amendments to the Law on Foreign Currency Transfers in order to enable practical application of contemporary and globally accepted system of electronic money transfers (such as *PayPal*).

### Research Benefits:

- Ministry of Youth and Sports believes that findings of this research will help in the creation of an enabling environment for young people wishing to start their own business, and will use this study as an advocacy tool with relevant state bodies and institutions who are in charge of creating new laws and improvement of existing policies for youth entrepreneurship, that will positively influence general economic climate in Serbia.
- MOS team will present the study recommendations to the Youth Council formed by the Serbian Government.
- MOS stressed the importance of this study considering the Strategy on Youth 2015-2020 that covers areas of several institutions.