

## The Role of Evidence-Based Public Policy in the European Integration Process: Georgia’s Experience and Challenges

მტკიცებულებებზე დაფუძნებული საჯარო პოლიტიკის როლი ევროპული  
ინტეგრაციის პროცესში: საქართველოს გამოცდილება და გამოწვევები

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** European integration requires candidate countries not only to align national legislation with the European Union *acquis* but also to strengthen public administration systems capable of systematically incorporating data, research findings, evaluation results, and stakeholder knowledge into policymaking. In this context, evidence-based policymaking is an important component of effective, transparent, and accountable governance. This study examines the role of evidence-based policymaking in Georgia’s European integration process and assesses the extent to which existing public policy mechanisms correspond to EU and OECD/SIGMA principles. **Methods:** The study employed a qualitative research design based on document analysis. The analysis covered official documents of the European Commission, OECD, OECD/SIGMA, and the Government of Georgia, including the European Commission’s *Georgia Report 2025*, the OECD/SIGMA *Principles of Public Administration*, Georgia’s *Public Administration Reform Strategy 2023–2026*, relevant regulatory and methodological documents, and academic literature on evidence-based policymaking. The documents were examined using thematic analysis across six predefined dimensions: policy planning and inter-agency coordination, monitoring and evaluation, use of data and research evidence, institutional and analytical capacity, stakeholder participation, and transparency and accountability. **Results:** The findings indicate that Georgia has established important legal and institutional foundations for evidence-based policymaking, including unified mechanisms for policy planning, monitoring and evaluation, programme budgeting, and Regulatory Impact Assessment. These mechanisms are broadly consistent with EU and OECD/SIGMA approaches. However, their implementation remains uneven across public institutions. Major challenges include fragmented and insufficiently integrated data, unequal analytical capacity, weaknesses in inter-agency coordination, limited use of evaluation findings in subsequent decision-making, and insufficient incorporation of stakeholder input into final policy decisions. Evidence use appears to be more developed at the policy planning stage than in monitoring and, particularly, policy evaluation. **Conclusion:** Evidence-based policymaking is an important foundation not only for improving the effectiveness of public administration but also for strengthening Georgia’s institutional resilience, transparency, accountability, and alignment with EU governance standards. The principal challenge is no longer the absence of a formal institutional framework, but ensuring its consistent and effective implementation in practice. Further progress requires stronger results-oriented monitoring and evaluation, integrated data management, enhanced analytical capacity, improved inter-agency cooperation, closer collaboration between public institutions and academia, and more meaningful stakeholder participation.

**Keywords:** evidence-based policymaking; European integration; Georgia; public administration reform; OECD/SIGMA; policy evaluation.

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## აბსტრაქტი

**შესავალი:** ევროპული ინტეგრაცია კანდიდატი ქვეყნებისგან მოითხოვს არა მხოლოდ ევროპული კანონმდებლობის ევროკავშირის კანონმდებლობასთან (acquis) ჰარმონიზაციას, არამედ ისეთი საჯარო ადმინისტრირების სისტემების გაძლიერებასაც, რომლებიც პოლიტიკის შემუშავების პროცესში სისტემატურად იყენებენ მონაცემებს, კვლევის შედეგებს, შეფასების მიგნებებსა და დაინტერესებული მხარეების ცოდნას. ამ კონტექსტში, მტკიცებულებებზე დაფუძნებული პოლიტიკის შემუშავება ეფექტიანი, გამჭვირვალე და ანგარიშვალდებული მმართველობის მნიშვნელოვანი კომპონენტია. კვლევა შეისწავლის მტკიცებულებებზე დაფუძნებული პოლიტიკის როლს საქართველოს ევროპული ინტეგრაციის პროცესში და აფასებს, რამდენად შეესაბამება საჯარო პოლიტიკის არსებული მექანიზმები ევროკავშირისა და OECD/SIGMA-ს პრინციპებს. **მეთოდები:** კვლევაში გამოყენებულია თვისებრივი კვლევის დიზაინი, რომლის ძირითად მეთოდს დოკუმენტების ანალიზი წარმოადგენს. გაანალიზდა ევროკომისიის, OECD-ის, OECD/SIGMA-სა და საქართველოს მთავრობის ოფიციალური დოკუმენტები, მათ შორის ევროკომისიის Georgia Report 2025, OECD/SIGMA-ს Principles of Public Administration, საქართველოს საჯარო მმართველობის რეფორმის სტრატეგია 2023–2026, შესაბამისი მარეგულირებელი და მეთოდოლოგიური დოკუმენტები და მტკიცებულებებზე დაფუძნებული პოლიტიკის შესახებ აკადემიური ლიტერატურა. დოკუმენტები თემატური ანალიზის გამოყენებით შეფასდა ექვსი წინასწარ განსაზღვრული მიმართულებით: პოლიტიკის დაგეგმვა და უწყებათაშორისი კოორდინაცია; მონიტორინგი და შეფასება; მონაცემებისა და კვლევითი მტკიცებულებების გამოყენება; ინსტიტუციური და ანალიტიკური შესაძლებლობები; დაინტერესებული მხარეების მონაწილეობა; გამჭვირვალობა და ანგარიშვალდებულება. **შედეგები:** კვლევის შედეგები აჩვენებს, რომ საქართველოში შექმნილია მტკიცებულებებზე დაფუძნებული პოლიტიკის შემუშავების მნიშვნელოვანი სამართლებრივი და ინსტიტუციური საფუძვლები, მათ შორის პოლიტიკის დაგეგმვის, მონიტორინგისა და შეფასების ერთიანი მექანიზმები, პროგრამული ბიუჯეტირება და რეგულირების ზეგავლენის შეფასება (RIA). აღნიშნული მექანიზმები ფართოდ შეესაბამება ევროკავშირისა და OECD/SIGMA-ს მიდგომებს. თუმცა, მათი პრაქტიკული განხორციელება საჯარო დაწესებულებებს შორის არათანაბარია. ძირითად გამოწვევებს წარმოადგენს ფრაგმენტირებული და არასაკმარისად ინტეგრირებული მონაცემები, ანალიტიკური შესაძლებლობების არათანაბარი დონე, უწყებათაშორისი კოორდინაციის სისუსტეები, შეფასების შედეგების შეზღუდული გამოყენება შემდგომ გადაწყვეტილებებში და დაინტერესებული მხარეების მოსაზრებების არასაკმარისი ასახვა საბოლოო პოლიტიკურ გადაწყვეტილებებში. მტკიცებულებების გამოყენება შედარებით უკეთ არის განვითარებული პოლიტიკის დაგეგმვის ეტაპზე, ვიდრე მონიტორინგისა და განსაკუთრებით პოლიტიკის შეფასების ეტაპებზე. **დასკვნა:** მტკიცებულებებზე დაფუძნებული პოლიტიკის შემუშავება მნიშვნელოვანი საფუძველია არა მხოლოდ საჯარო ადმინისტრირების ეფექტიანობის გასაუმჯობესებლად, არამედ საქართველოს ინსტიტუციური მდგრადობის, გამჭვირვალობის, ანგარიშვალდებულებისა და ევროკავშირის მმართველობის სტანდარტებთან დაახლოების გასაძლიერებლად. მთავარი გამოწვევა უკვე აღარ არის ფორმალური ინსტიტუციური ჩარჩოს არარსებობა, არამედ მისი თანმიმდევრული და ეფექტიანი განხორციელების უზრუნველყოფა პრაქტიკაში. შემდგომი პროგრესისთვის საჭიროა შედეგებზე ორიენტირებული მონიტორინგისა და შეფასების გაძლიერება, მონაცემთა ინტეგრირებული მართვა, ანალიტიკური შესაძლებლობების განვითარება, უწყებათაშორისი თანამშრომლობის გაუმჯობესება, საჯარო ინსტიტუტებსა და აკადემიურ სექტორს შორის უფრო მჭიდრო თანამშრომლობა და დაინტერესებული მხარეების უფრო შინაარსიანი მონაწილეობა.

**საკვანძო სიტყვები:** მტკიცებულებებზე დაფუძნებული პოლიტიკის შემუშავება; ევროპული ინტეგრაცია; საქართველო; საჯარო მმართველობის რეფორმა; OECD/SIGMA; პოლიტიკის შეფასება.

## 1. Introduction

European integration is no longer understood merely as a technical process of aligning national legislation with the European Union *acquis (acquis communautaire)*. It also requires the development of a public administration system capable of designing, implementing, monitoring, evaluating, and, where necessary, revising public policies on the basis of reliable evidence and measurable results. Accordingly, the EU’s contemporary enlargement methodology places particular emphasis on the “Fundamentals”, within which the quality of public administration and institutional capacity are regarded as essential prerequisites for preparedness for EU membership (European Commission, 2023; OECD/SIGMA, 2023).

For Georgia, this issue has acquired particular importance in the context of its European integration process. The granting of EU candidate status in 2023 increased expectations regarding the quality of public administration, strategic planning, inter-agency coordination, transparency, and accountability. Evidence-based policymaking has therefore become relevant not only as an instrument for improving policy effectiveness but also as an indicator of the country’s institutional and administrative preparedness for closer integration with the European Union.

In recent years, Georgia has undertaken a number of reforms aimed at strengthening its public administration system. These include the adoption of the *Public Administration Reform Strategy 2023–2026*, the introduction of unified procedures for policy planning, monitoring, and evaluation under Government Ordinance No. 629, stronger links between strategic planning and programme budgeting, and the gradual incorporation of Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) into the legislative process.

Despite this progress, international assessments indicate that the formal institutional framework has not yet ensured the systematic and consistent use of evidence in practice (European Commission, 2025; OECD/SIGMA, 2023). The European Commission’s *Georgia Report 2025* identifies limited progress in public administration reform and stresses the need to strengthen open, participatory, and evidence-informed processes for policy development, monitoring, and evaluation (European Commission, 2025). These findings suggest that the effective use of evidence is increasingly linked to Georgia’s broader prospects for European integration.

## 1. Theoretical Framework of Evidence-Based Policymaking and European Integration

### 1.1. The Concept and Development of Evidence-Based Policymaking

Evidence-Based Policymaking (EBPM) is founded on the principle that public policy decisions should be informed not only by political priorities and administrative experience but also by reliable data, research findings, programme evaluations, and other relevant forms of evidence. The approach gained prominence toward the end of the twentieth century as public administration increasingly shifted its focus from measuring activities and outputs to assessing outcomes and wider societal impacts. Policymaking consequently became more concerned with identifying what works, under what conditions, and with what consequences (Sanderson, 2002).

In the field of public policy, the concept of evidence is broad. It encompasses official statistics, administrative data, academic research, analyses of social and economic conditions, programme monitoring and evaluation findings, financial assessments, expert knowledge, and the practical experience of stakeholders. Evidence-based policymaking should therefore not be understood as the simple application of academic research to policy decisions. Rather, it involves drawing on multiple sources of information, assessing their quality and relevance, and applying them within a specific institutional and political context.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines evidence-informed policymaking as a process in which data, research findings, evaluations, and other relevant information are deliberately incorporated into the design, implementation, and review of public policies (OECD, 2020). The effectiveness of this approach depends not only on the availability of high-quality evidence but also on the capacity of public institutions to identify, assess, synthesise, interpret, and apply it. Strengthening evidence

use therefore requires appropriate professional skills, organisational procedures, analytical resources, and an institutional culture that values evidence in decision-making (OECD, 2020).

From this perspective, policymaking is a continuous cycle comprising problem identification, objective setting, assessment of policy alternatives, decision-making, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and subsequent policy revision. Evidence has a role at every stage of this cycle: it helps define policy problems accurately, compare alternative interventions, allocate resources, monitor implementation, and assess outcomes and impacts.

Policy evaluation is particularly important within this process. Its purpose extends beyond documenting whether planned activities have been implemented. Evaluation also seeks to explain why a particular policy has or has not achieved its intended outcomes. It therefore serves as an important mechanism for organisational learning by generating knowledge that can inform the revision of existing policies, support future decision-making, and promote more effective allocation of public resources (Sanderson, 2002).

### ***1.2. Evidence-Based and Evidence-Informed Policymaking: A Conceptual Perspective***

Although the term “evidence-based policymaking” is widely used, it has also been subject to criticism. The term may imply that public policy can be formulated primarily or exclusively on the basis of objective evidence and that decision-makers simply select the technically optimal policy option. In practice, however, policymaking is considerably more complex. Policy choices are shaped by political values, institutional interests, public expectations, resource constraints, time pressures, and the influence of multiple actors.

Evidence is therefore an important foundation for policymaking, but it cannot be regarded as its sole determinant. The concept of “evidence-informed policymaking” reflects this complexity more accurately because it recognises the interaction between empirical evidence, political judgement, professional expertise, institutional constraints, and societal values. From this perspective, evidence strengthens the rationale and quality of policy decisions without replacing political choice or the responsibility of decision-makers (Head, 2016).

The application of evidence in public policy cannot simply replicate the model developed in clinical medicine, because policymaking takes place in a dynamic, complex, and politically contested environment. Policy problems may be framed in different ways, and the consequences of particular interventions cannot always be predicted with certainty. Researchers and policymakers also operate according to different professional incentives and timeframes. Researchers tend to emphasise methodological rigour, uncertainty, and the limitations of findings, whereas policymakers often require information that is timely, accessible, and directly applicable to practical decisions. This divergence affects the extent to which research evidence is translated into policy (Cairney & Oliver, 2017).

Consequently, the availability of high-quality research does not automatically ensure its use in policymaking. Evidence may be methodologically robust but reach decision-makers too late, be difficult to interpret, or fail to address the immediate policy problem. Strengthening the relationship between evidence and policymaking therefore requires sustained communication and interaction among researchers, public institutions, professional communities, stakeholders, and decision-makers.

Evidence-informed policymaking thus provides a more realistic conceptual framework than the notion that public policy can be driven by evidence alone. It recognises that research and data are considered alongside economic, social, legal, institutional, and political factors. Its purpose is not to replace the political process but to provide a stronger foundation for policy decisions, improve understanding of their likely consequences, and support the responsible use of public resources.

### ***1.3. Institutional and Analytical Preconditions for Evidence Use***

The effective use of evidence does not depend solely on the willingness or competence of individual public officials. It requires an institutional environment in which data collection, research, analysis, monitoring, and evaluation are embedded within routine policymaking processes.

The OECD conceptualises capacity for evidence-informed policymaking at three levels: individual, organisational, and systemic. At the individual level, public officials require the ability to interpret data, assess the quality of research, compare evidence from different sources, and relate findings to specific policy problems. At the organisational level, effective evidence use requires analytical units, appropriate procedures, accessible data systems, adequate resources, and leadership support. At the systemic level, cooperation among

ministries, statistical authorities, research organisations, universities, and civil society is essential (OECD, 2020).

Access to high-quality data is one of the central prerequisites for evidence-informed policymaking. Incomplete, outdated, fragmented, or incompatible data can undermine both the accurate diagnosis of policy problems and the assessment of policy outcomes. Public institutions frequently collect administrative data in accordance with their own functions and reporting requirements; however, when such data are not integrated across institutions, they may provide only a partial understanding of the overall effects of public policy.

A clear distinction between monitoring and evaluation is equally important. Monitoring systematically tracks the implementation of activities, timelines, expenditures, and immediate outputs. Evaluation, by contrast, examines whether a policy has been relevant, effective, efficient, impactful, and sustainable. When evaluation is reduced to reporting completed activities or quantitative indicators, public institutions are unable to address the more fundamental question of whether policy interventions have produced the intended changes in society.

Policy evaluation is therefore central to evidence-informed governance because it connects policy implementation with subsequent decision-making. It generates policy-relevant knowledge and contributes to understanding why certain policies achieve their objectives while others produce less satisfactory results (OECD, 2020).

Effective inter-agency coordination is another essential precondition. Contemporary public policy challenges often cut across the responsibilities of several institutions. Issues relating to employment, education, social protection, healthcare, and regional development, for example, require both the integration of information from multiple sources and coordinated institutional action. Weak coordination can contribute to fragmented data, duplication of responsibilities, and inconsistent policy decisions.

Stakeholder participation also represents an important source of evidence. Citizens, service users, businesses, professional groups, academic institutions, and civil society organisations can provide information and perspectives that administrative data alone may not capture. However, consultation contributes meaningfully to evidence-informed policymaking only when stakeholder input is systematically analysed and when there is transparency regarding how such input has influenced final policy decisions.

#### ***1.4. Evidence-Based Policymaking in the Context of EU Enlargement***

The EU accession process requires candidate countries not only to transpose EU legislation into national law but also to develop the administrative capacity necessary for its effective implementation. Formal legal compliance is insufficient when public institutions lack the capacity to plan, coordinate, implement, monitor, and evaluate policies effectively.

Public administration reform is therefore a central component of the EU enlargement process. The quality of public administration directly affects a country's ability to implement membership-related reforms, manage EU financial assistance, enforce legislation, and sustain reform outcomes. The EU enlargement framework consequently places particular emphasis on the rule of law, economic governance, and public administration reform as essential components of the accession process (European Commission, 2023).

The OECD/SIGMA *Principles of Public Administration* set out the core characteristics of a modern and effective public administration (OECD/SIGMA, 2023). These include strategic management of public administration reform, policy development and coordination, a professional public service, accountability, effective service delivery, and sound public financial management. In the area of policy development and coordination, particular emphasis is placed on rigorous problem analysis, assessment of policy alternatives, financial costing, inter-agency coordination, public consultation, and monitoring of results.

The EU's Better Regulation approach similarly emphasises the systematic use of evidence throughout the policy cycle. Before a decision is adopted, the policy problem should be clearly defined, the need for intervention assessed, and alternative policy options and their potential economic, social, and environmental effects examined. Following implementation, evaluation should determine whether the policy has achieved its intended objectives and whether it should be continued, modified, or discontinued.

Within the EU enlargement process, evidence-informed policymaking therefore performs several interrelated functions. It supports the accurate definition of policy problems and reform objectives, facilitates comparison of alternative policy options and their likely consequences, promotes justified allocation of limited financial and human resources, strengthens monitoring and evaluation of reform implementation, and

enhances transparency and accountability. Importantly, it also contributes to substantive administrative preparedness rather than merely formal legal alignment.

Evidence-based policymaking in the context of European integration should therefore not be viewed solely as a technical or analytical instrument. It is also a dimension of good governance and an important indicator of a state's institutional and administrative capacity.

### ***1.5. Development of Public Policy Planning and Evidence Use in Georgia***

The development of Georgia's public policy planning system has been closely associated with both public administration reform and the country's European integration agenda. Over the past decade, common requirements have been introduced for the preparation, monitoring, reporting, and evaluation of strategies and action plans. Policy documents have also become more standardised, with increasing emphasis on clearly defined objectives, measurable indicators, implementation responsibilities, and expected results.

By 2018, Georgia had already established formal mechanisms for policy planning and coordination. Nevertheless, significant challenges remained in areas such as policy quality control, inter-agency coordination, Regulatory Impact Assessment, public consultation, and monitoring (OECD/SIGMA, 2018). Since this assessment focused specifically on policy development and coordination, its findings should not automatically be generalised to all areas of Georgia's public administration.

Subsequent reforms have further strengthened common rules and procedures for policy planning, monitoring, and coordination. However, the existence of formal procedures does not in itself ensure the consistent use of evidence. Effective implementation depends substantially on the capacity of individual public institutions, including the availability of qualified personnel, access to relevant and timely data, and adequate analytical expertise. A gap may therefore persist between formally established requirements and their implementation in practice.

International assessments indicate that this implementation gap remains an important challenge. Greater attention is required to strengthen policy coherence, the systematic use of evidence, inter-agency coordination, stakeholder participation, and the institutional capacity of public bodies. The quality of public policy therefore depends not only on the existence of formal standards but also on whether these standards are applied consistently and effectively (OECD/SIGMA, 2018).

A particularly important challenge concerns the use of monitoring and evaluation findings in subsequent decision-making. Strategic documents frequently contain performance indicators and reporting requirements, yet the collection of implementation data does not necessarily result in policy adjustment. Monitoring may therefore remain primarily an administrative reporting function, while evaluation is used less consistently as a mechanism for organisational learning and future policy development.

Data quality and interoperability constitute another important challenge. Public institutions hold substantial amounts of administrative information, but these data may be stored in different formats, remain disconnected across agencies, or fail to be updated in a timely manner. This fragmentation makes it more difficult to identify target groups accurately, assess cross-sectoral policy effects, and evaluate the combined outcomes of programmes implemented by multiple institutions.

Uneven analytical capacity across public bodies further compounds these challenges. Expertise in policy analysis, economic appraisal, research methods, data processing, and evaluation is not equally distributed across institutions. As a result, a policy document may formally comply with established procedural requirements while providing only limited analysis of the underlying problem, feasible policy alternatives, expected outcomes, or potential risks.

Stakeholder participation is another important dimension of policy quality. The existence of formal consultation mechanisms does not necessarily result in meaningful participation. Effective participation requires stakeholders to be involved at an appropriate stage of the policy process, their contributions to be systematically assessed, and feedback to be provided on which proposals were accepted or rejected and why.

These issues have become particularly significant in the context of Georgia's European integration. The European Commission's *Georgia Report 2025* identifies backsliding in public administration reform and stresses the need to strengthen alignment with European principles, including the more systematic use of evidence in policy development, monitoring, and evaluation. It also emphasises openness and meaningful stakeholder participation (European Commission, 2025).

The implications extend beyond the internal efficiency of public administration. In Georgia's case, the use of evidence is increasingly linked to administrative preparedness for European integration, the credibility of public policy, democratic accountability, and the sustainability of reforms.

Taken together, existing research and international assessments suggest that Georgia’s principal challenge is no longer the absence of a formal policy framework. The country has established important methodological and institutional foundations for policy planning, monitoring, and reporting. The central challenge is ensuring their consistent implementation. Key weaknesses include variation in the quality of evidence use across institutions, fragmented and insufficiently interoperable data, uneven analytical capacity, weaknesses in inter-agency coordination, limited integration of evaluation findings into subsequent decisions, formalistic participatory processes, and an insufficiently developed link between policy planning and budgetary decision-making.

### ***1.6. Theoretical and Analytical Framework of the Study***

The international literature suggests that evidence-based policymaking should not be understood as a purely technical or automatic model of decision-making. The concept of evidence-informed policymaking provides a more nuanced framework because it recognises the importance of data, research, evaluation, professional expertise, and stakeholder knowledge while also acknowledging the influence of political, institutional, economic, and social contexts.

Based on this literature, the present study identifies several conditions necessary for the effective use of evidence in public policymaking. These include access to high-quality, timely, and reliable data; adequate analytical and research capacity within public institutions; effective monitoring and evaluation systems; and the systematic incorporation of evaluation findings into subsequent decisions. Inter-agency coordination, data sharing, and cooperation with academic and research institutions are also essential. At the organisational level, leadership support and an institutional culture that values evidence can further strengthen these processes. Meaningful stakeholder participation, transparency, and accountability contribute to both the quality and legitimacy of evidence-informed policymaking.

Existing research and international assessments indicate that Georgia has established important legal, methodological, and institutional foundations for public policy planning and public administration reform. Nevertheless, a significant gap persists between formal requirements and their practical implementation. Against this background, the present study examines how these mechanisms operate in practice.

The analytical framework is organised around six interrelated dimensions: (1) policy planning and inter-agency coordination; (2) monitoring and evaluation; (3) the use of data and research evidence; (4) institutional and analytical capacity; (5) stakeholder participation; and (6) transparency and accountability. Particular attention is also given to the extent to which monitoring and evaluation findings are incorporated into subsequent policy decisions.

This framework enables the study to assess both the legal and methodological instruments established in Georgia and the quality of their practical implementation. It therefore provides a basis for evaluating the extent to which Georgia’s current public policy system supports evidence-informed governance and meets the administrative requirements associated with the country’s European integration process.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

### ***2.1. Research Design***

This study employed a qualitative research design, with document analysis used as the primary method of inquiry. This approach was selected because the study sought to examine the development and implementation of evidence-based policymaking in Georgia within the context of European integration through the systematic analysis of official policy documents, institutional assessments, and relevant academic literature.

The study focused on both the formal institutional framework for evidence-based policymaking and its practical implementation. Particular attention was given to the extent to which evidence is incorporated into public policy planning, monitoring, evaluation, coordination, and decision-making processes.

### ***2.2. Research Materials***

The analysis drew primarily on official documents published by the European Commission, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), OECD/SIGMA, and the Government of Georgia. Key sources included the European Commission’s *Georgia Report 2025*, the OECD/SIGMA

*Principles of Public Administration*, Georgia's *Public Administration Reform Strategy 2023–2026*, and regulatory and methodological documents governing public policy planning, monitoring, and evaluation.

Relevant academic literature on evidence-based and evidence-informed policymaking was also reviewed to provide the theoretical and conceptual basis for the analysis.

Documents were selected purposively on the basis of their relevance to the research objectives, institutional authority, reliability, and direct relevance to public administration reform, evidence use, and Georgia's European integration process.

### **2.3. Data Analysis**

The selected documents were analysed using a qualitative thematic analysis approach. The analysis examined the legal, institutional, strategic, and administrative dimensions of evidence use in public policymaking in Georgia.

A predefined analytical framework, derived from the study objectives and the relevant literature on evidence-informed policymaking and public administration, was applied. The analysis focused on six interrelated dimensions:

- policy planning and inter-agency coordination;
- monitoring and evaluation systems;
- the use of data and research evidence;
- institutional and analytical capacity;
- stakeholder participation;
- transparency and accountability.

Within each dimension, the analysis assessed both the existence of formal institutional arrangements and the extent to which these mechanisms are implemented in practice. Particular attention was given to identifying gaps between formal requirements and actual administrative practice, as well as to assessing the consistency of Georgia's policy processes with the principles and standards promoted by the European Union, the OECD, and OECD/SIGMA.

### **2.4. Research Questions**

The study addressed the following research questions:

- What role does evidence-based policymaking play in Georgia's European integration process?
- To what extent is evidence incorporated into public policy planning, monitoring, evaluation, and decision-making in Georgia?
- What institutional, analytical, and administrative challenges hinder the effective implementation of evidence-based policymaking in Georgia?
- To what extent do Georgia's current public policy practices align with the principles and standards promoted by the European Union and OECD/SIGMA?

## **3. Results**

### **3.1. Institutional Framework for Evidence-Based Policymaking in Georgia**

The findings show that Georgia has made substantial progress in establishing the institutional foundations for evidence-based policymaking. As part of broader public administration reform, a range of legal, strategic, and methodological instruments has been introduced to support the use of data, analytical evidence, and evaluation findings in policy development and decision-making (Government of Georgia, 2023; OECD/SIGMA, 2023).

A central component of this framework is the *Public Administration Reform Strategy 2023–2026*, which sets priorities for strengthening public administration and improving policy planning and coordination (Government of Georgia, 2023). In parallel, the unified framework for policy planning, monitoring, and evaluation establishes common requirements for the preparation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policy documents (Government of Georgia, 2019). Together, these mechanisms provide a formal basis for policy development grounded in problem analysis, clearly defined objectives, measurable indicators, and the assessment of policy results.

The introduction of Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) and the development of programme budgeting have further strengthened the policy planning framework by promoting the assessment of

alternative policy options, expected outcomes, and resource implications before decisions are adopted (OECD, 2020; OECD/SIGMA, 2023).

Assessments by the European Commission and OECD/SIGMA suggest that Georgia’s institutional framework is broadly consistent with the public administration principles promoted by the European Union. A unified system for policy planning and coordination has been established, and the principal institutional mechanisms required for evidence-based policymaking are formally in place. However, the quality and consistency of implementation vary across public institutions (European Commission, 2025; OECD/SIGMA, 2023).

Overall, the findings suggest that the main challenge has shifted from establishing formal institutional mechanisms to ensuring their consistent and effective implementation. Particular weaknesses remain in analytical capacity, integrated data use, policy evaluation, and the systematic application of evidence in decision-making (European Commission, 2025).

### ***3.2. Use of Evidence Across the Stages of the Public Policy Cycle***

The findings indicate that evidence is not used consistently across all stages of the public policy cycle in Georgia. Although the existing methodological framework formally requires evidence to inform policy development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, its practical application differs considerably across these stages (Government of Georgia, 2023; OECD/SIGMA, 2023).

Evidence use appears to be most developed at the policy planning stage. The national framework for policy planning, monitoring, and evaluation requires the analysis of policy problems, the formulation of objectives, the definition of indicators, and the use of relevant information in policy design (Government of Georgia, 2019). The *Public Administration Reform Strategy 2023–2026* further emphasises improvements in the quality of policy planning and coordination (Government of Georgia, 2023). Regulatory Impact Assessment also provides a formal mechanism for comparing policy alternatives and assessing their expected effects before decisions are taken.

During policy implementation, greater emphasis is placed on monitoring activities, performance indicators, and programme budgeting. Public institutions collect substantial information on the implementation of planned activities; however, this information is used more frequently to track outputs than to assess broader outcomes or longer-term impacts (European Commission, 2025).

Policy evaluation remains comparatively less developed. International assessments indicate that evaluation findings are not consistently incorporated into the revision of existing policies or the design of new ones. As a result, the feedback loop between implementation, evaluation, and subsequent decision-making remains incomplete (European Commission, 2025; OECD/SIGMA, 2023).

Taken together, these findings show that evidence use in Georgia is more firmly institutionalised at the planning and monitoring stages than at the evaluation and policy-learning stages. Strengthening the use of evaluation findings is therefore essential to ensure that evidence informs the entire policy cycle rather than only its initial stages.

### ***3.3. Institutional and Analytical Challenges***

The findings identify several interrelated institutional and analytical barriers that constrain the effective implementation of evidence-based policymaking in Georgia.

One of the most significant challenges is uneven analytical capacity across public institutions. Ministries and other public bodies differ in their access to qualified personnel, analytical resources, and expertise in areas such as data analysis, policy appraisal, research methods, and evaluation. These differences affect the quality and consistency of evidence use across the public sector (OECD/SIGMA, 2023).

Data fragmentation represents a second major constraint. Although public institutions generate increasing volumes of administrative data, these data are often stored in separate systems and are not sufficiently integrated across institutions. Limited interoperability and information sharing restrict the ability of policymakers to develop a comprehensive understanding of complex policy problems and to assess cross-sectoral outcomes (European Commission, 2025).

Inter-agency coordination also remains an important challenge. Many policy issues require the involvement of several institutions, yet existing coordination mechanisms do not always ensure the timely exchange of information, evidence, and analytical resources. Weak coordination can therefore reduce policy

coherence and limit the effective use of evidence in addressing complex or cross-sectoral problems (OECD/SIGMA, 2023).

Stakeholder participation constitutes another area of concern. Although mechanisms for public consultation exist, stakeholder contributions are not always systematically reflected in final policy decisions. Consequently, the knowledge and practical experience of citizens, experts, civil society organisations, professional groups, and other stakeholders remain underused as potential sources of policy-relevant evidence (European Commission, 2025).

Overall, the findings suggest that effective evidence-based policymaking in Georgia requires improvements not only in formal procedures but also in analytical capacity, data integration, inter-agency cooperation, and the substantive use of stakeholder input.

### **3.4. Alignment of Georgia's Practices with EU Requirements**

The findings indicate that Georgia's public policy planning and management system has progressively moved toward greater alignment with governance principles promoted by the European Union. In the context of the country's European integration process, increased emphasis has been placed on public administration reform, strategic planning, evidence use, accountability, and results-oriented governance (European Commission, 2025).

Georgia's *Public Administration Reform Strategy*, the unified framework for policy planning, monitoring, and evaluation, programme budgeting, and the Regulatory Impact Assessment mechanism are broadly consistent with the institutional approaches promoted by the EU and OECD/SIGMA (Government of Georgia, 2023; OECD/SIGMA, 2023). These instruments provide a formal basis for more transparent, coherent, and evidence-informed policymaking.

However, alignment at the institutional and procedural level has not yet resulted in equally strong implementation in practice. The European Commission's *Georgia Report 2025* highlights several continuing weaknesses, including uneven analytical capacity, limited use of policy evaluation, insufficient integration of evidence into decision-making, and shortcomings in participatory policymaking processes (European Commission, 2025).

OECD/SIGMA assessments similarly indicate that further progress is required in policy evaluation, integrated data use, inter-agency coordination, and the effective implementation of existing policy-planning mechanisms. These areas are particularly important because EU alignment depends not only on the formal adoption of institutional frameworks but also on their consistent application and demonstrated effectiveness.

Overall, the findings suggest that Georgia has established many of the formal institutional foundations associated with evidence-based policymaking and EU-compatible public administration. The central challenge in the context of European integration is therefore to narrow the gap between formal institutional alignment and actual administrative practice by ensuring that evidence is used systematically, consistently, and effectively throughout the policymaking process.

## **4. Discussion**

The findings of this study indicate that Georgia has made substantial progress in establishing the institutional foundations for evidence-based policymaking. Public administration reforms have introduced legal, procedural, and organisational mechanisms that support the use of data, analysis, monitoring, and evaluation in policy development. This represents an important shift toward a more structured and results-oriented model of governance. However, the existence of formal mechanisms does not in itself ensure that evidence is systematically incorporated into policy decisions. As Head (2016) argues, effective evidence-informed policymaking depends not only on the availability of relevant information but also on institutional capacity, organisational culture, political context, and the ability of decision-makers to interpret and apply evidence in practice.

A key finding of the study is the uneven use of evidence across different stages of the public policy cycle. Evidence use appears to be more firmly institutionalised in policy planning and monitoring, whereas evaluation plays a more limited role in informing subsequent decisions. This imbalance is significant because the value of evidence-based policymaking lies not only in improving initial policy design but also in enabling continuous learning and adaptation. When evaluation findings are not systematically incorporated into the revision of existing policies or the development of new ones, the feedback loop between implementation, learning, and decision-making remains incomplete.

This finding is consistent with the broader literature on evidence-informed policymaking, which emphasises that the availability of evidence does not automatically result in its use. Cairney (2016) highlights that policy decisions are shaped by institutional arrangements, political priorities, organisational incentives, time pressures, and competing interpretations of policy problems. From this perspective, the Georgian case illustrates an important distinction between the formal institutionalisation of evidence-based procedures and their substantive use in policymaking practice.

The study also identifies several interrelated factors that constrain the effective implementation of evidence-based policymaking. Uneven analytical capacity across public institutions limits the ability of some organisations to assess policy problems, compare alternatives, interpret data, and evaluate outcomes. At the same time, fragmented data systems and limited interoperability reduce the potential for integrated analysis, particularly in policy areas that require coordination across multiple institutions. Weaknesses in inter-agency coordination further restrict the exchange of information, expertise, and analytical resources.

These findings suggest that the central challenge is not simply technical. Improving evidence use requires institutional and organisational changes that strengthen analytical capacity, facilitate data sharing, promote cooperation across agencies, and create incentives for decision-makers to use monitoring and evaluation findings. International assessments reach similar conclusions, indicating that improvements in public administration depend not only on adopting formal rules and procedures but also on ensuring their consistent implementation and effective use in practice (European Commission, 2025; OECD/SIGMA, 2023).

Stakeholder participation is another important dimension of evidence-informed policymaking. Although formal consultation mechanisms exist, the study suggests that stakeholder input is not always systematically reflected in final policy decisions. This is significant because evidence in public policymaking extends beyond administrative data and academic research. The knowledge and experience of citizens, service users, civil society organisations, professional groups, and experts can provide important contextual information that may not be captured by quantitative indicators alone. Meaningful participation therefore requires not only consultation but also transparent mechanisms for demonstrating how stakeholder contributions have influenced policy choices.

The findings are particularly important in the context of Georgia’s European integration process. EU accession requires more than the formal transposition of European rules and standards. It also requires administrative capacity to design, implement, monitor, evaluate, and revise public policies effectively. Evidence-informed policymaking is therefore closely linked to the broader concept of administrative preparedness. The EU’s emphasis on public administration reform, Regulatory Impact Assessment, stakeholder participation, monitoring, evaluation, and results-oriented governance indicates that the quality of evidence use increasingly forms part of the assessment of candidate countries’ institutional readiness.

For Georgia, this implies that future progress in European integration will depend not only on the existence of formal policy-planning mechanisms but also on their demonstrated effectiveness in practice. The principal challenge is therefore to narrow the gap between institutional compliance and substantive implementation. This requires moving from a system in which evidence is primarily used to justify or document policy decisions toward one in which it becomes an integral component of problem definition, option appraisal, implementation, evaluation, and policy revision.

The study also has theoretical implications. It supports the distinction between evidence-based and evidence-informed policymaking by demonstrating that policy decisions cannot be understood as the mechanical application of research findings. Evidence operates within political, institutional, and organisational contexts and interacts with professional judgement, stakeholder interests, and administrative capacity. The Georgian case therefore illustrates how evidence-informed policymaking can serve as a useful analytical framework for understanding the relationship between public administration reform and European integration.

From a practical perspective, the findings point to several priority areas for institutional development. These include strengthening analytical capacity across public institutions, improving the interoperability and integrated use of administrative data, reinforcing monitoring and evaluation systems, and ensuring that evaluation findings are systematically incorporated into subsequent policy decisions. Enhanced inter-agency coordination and closer cooperation between public institutions, academic organisations, and other knowledge-producing actors could further strengthen the evidence base for policymaking. Greater attention should also be given to ensuring that stakeholder participation is substantive rather than procedural.

This study has several limitations. First, it relies exclusively on document analysis and therefore reflects the evidence contained in official documents, institutional assessments, and relevant academic literature. It does not capture directly the perspectives or day-to-day practices of public officials, policymakers, analysts, or other stakeholders. Second, the study assesses formal institutional arrangements and documented implementation challenges but cannot determine the extent to which evidence influences individual policy decisions in specific sectors. Third, because the analysis is focused on Georgia, the findings should be interpreted within the country's particular institutional and political context.

Future research could address these limitations by incorporating interviews with policymakers, civil servants, analysts, academic experts, and civil society representatives. Sector-specific case studies could also examine how evidence is used in particular policy domains and at different stages of the policy cycle. Comparative research involving other EU candidate or Eastern Partnership countries could further clarify which institutional factors facilitate the transition from formal evidence-based procedures to sustained evidence-informed policymaking in practice.

## 5. Conclusions

This study examined the role of evidence-based policymaking in Georgia's European integration process by assessing the country's institutional framework, current practices, and key implementation challenges. The findings show that Georgia has made substantial progress in establishing the formal foundations of evidence-informed governance. Public administration reforms, including strategic planning, policy monitoring and evaluation, programme budgeting, and Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA), have created an important legal and institutional framework for more structured and evidence-oriented decision-making.

However, the existence of these formal mechanisms has not yet resulted in the consistent and systematic use of evidence across the entire public policy cycle. Important weaknesses remain in the evaluation of policy outcomes and impacts, the integration and interoperability of administrative data, inter-agency coordination, analytical capacity across public institutions, and the substantive use of stakeholder input. The central finding is therefore the persistence of a gap between formal institutional requirements and their effective implementation in practice.

This gap is particularly significant in the context of European integration. Evidence-informed policymaking is not merely a technical instrument for improving administrative efficiency; it is also closely linked to institutional resilience, transparency, accountability, and administrative preparedness for EU membership. Accordingly, the quality of public policy depends not only on the existence of appropriate legal and procedural frameworks but also on whether data, analysis, evaluation findings, and stakeholder knowledge are systematically incorporated into policy decisions.

Further progress requires stronger results-oriented monitoring and evaluation systems, more integrated use of data, and greater analytical capacity across the public sector. It also requires more effective inter-agency cooperation, closer collaboration between public institutions and academic and research organisations, and mechanisms that ensure meaningful rather than purely formal stakeholder participation.

Overall, the principal challenge for Georgia is no longer the creation of a formal institutional framework for evidence-based policymaking, but its consistent and effective application in practice. Narrowing the gap between formal compliance and actual administrative performance will be essential both for improving the quality of public governance and for strengthening the credibility, sustainability, and effectiveness of Georgia's European integration process.

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