

5.5 UN-system entities' use of evidence synthesis in their work

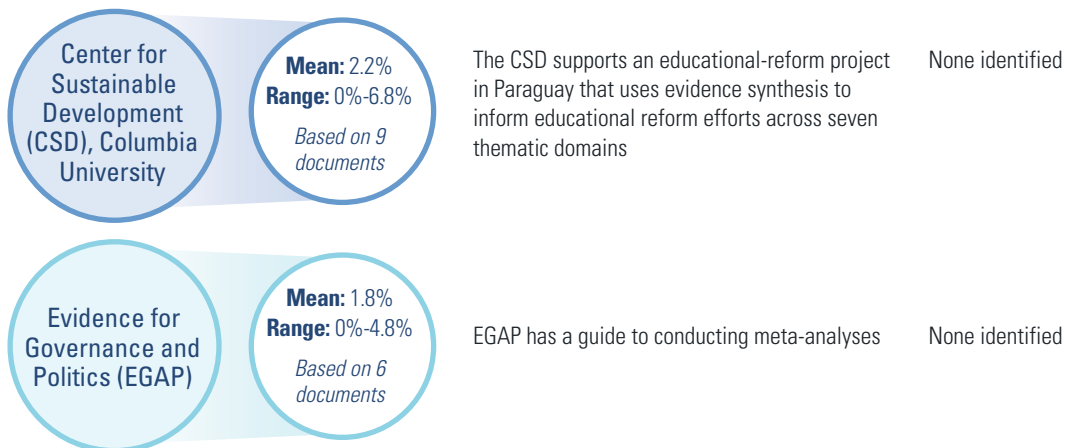
The UN system comprises a number of entities and works with a number of affiliated entities. These entities are key evidence intermediaries that are relied upon both by member states and other parts of the UN system to support evidence-informed decision-making. For the reasons outlined in **section 4.4**, syntheses of the best evidence globally (i.e., evidence syntheses) are the logical place to start in understanding what's known and not known, and can then be combined with local evidence (e.g., national or sub-national data analytics) by member states.

A 2021 report analyzed three UN entities (UNICEF Innocenti, World Bank Group, and UN DESA) and three UN-affiliated entities, including an international NGO (SDSN), a research centre (CSD) and a research network (EGAP). The analysis found significant opportunities for improvement in how UN-system entities use evidence syntheses in their technical work:(4)

- evidence syntheses constitute a low percentage (0.5% to 17.0%) of citations in key documents, with 27 of 78 documents not citing any evidence synthesis
- capacity-building efforts rarely focused on evidence synthesis
- few guidelines or policies exist to support evidence synthesis or robust guideline-development processes
- UNICEF Innocenti was often the only positive outlier among these Sustainable Development Goal-supporting entities.

Intermediary	Evidence syntheses as a percentage of all citations in key documents	Evidence synthesis-related capacity-building efforts	Evidence synthesis-related guidelines or policies for making recommendations and justifying decisions
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Similar analyses have been undertaken before.

A 2007 study of one UN entity – the World Health Organization (WHO) – found that evidence syntheses and robust guideline-development processes were rarely used in developing recommendations despite WHO’s own 2003 guidelines that supported a shift away from its reliance on expert opinion and informal group processes.(5) WHO responded immediately by establishing a guidelines review committee to support staff in developing evidence-based guidelines and a broader, institution-wide change in culture and behaviour.(6)

A 2009 study of two UN entities – WHO and the World Bank – found that: 1) only two of eight publications cited evidence syntheses; 2) only five of 14 WHO recommendations and two of seven World Bank recommendations were consistent with both the direction and nature of effect claims from evidence syntheses; and 3) ten of 14 WHO recommendations and five of seven World Bank recommendations were consistent with the direction of effect claims only.(7)