



The University of Latvia

**The use of research-based evidence in the Latvian parliament
The case of demography and migration policies**

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Executive summary

26 years since its restoration in 1993, the Saeima of the Republic of Latvia remains a parliament with a very limited analytical capacity. The Saeima's role of keeping the government accountable often gives way to parliamentarians' dependency on the expertise of the executive. Instead of being active lawmakers, occasionally Members of Parliament (MPs) limit themselves to being arbiters between argumentation and evidence presented by civil servants, lobbyists, outside experts and other members of the public.

This study assesses the supply of and demand for research-based and policy-relevant evidence in parliamentary proceedings concerning one of the most challenging policy areas in present-day Latvia – demography (particularly support for families and migration). The study reviews the supply of research-based evidence from within and without the parliament. Then the inquiry proceeds to review the demand and attention of parliamentarians to such evidence in deliberations and decision making on demography-related matters. Signs of research uptake and forms of interaction between MPs and researched are mapped.

The review of Latvian research publications on demography-related issues shows the availability of extensive descriptive data. All publications pay some attention to policies and almost all of them contain policy recommendations. There is a shared recognition by researchers, research institutions and funding bodies that research should contribute to policies. Meanwhile several kinds of analysis are still relatively scarce such as rigorous assessments of the effectiveness of policy interventions, microdemographic research, elaboration of alternative policy scenarios, etc. In terms of material resources, the overall research capacity in Latvia is fragmented and unstable.

The non-legal analytical capacity of the Saeima is below the minimum level, which could be expected in an active parliament. The advisors and analysts of the Saeima are not expected to carry out analysis upon their own initiative. Thus, there is no regular practice for alerting MPs on prospective challenges and potential policy opportunities.

MPs generally appreciate the significance of research-based evidence in decision making. However, they do not have a particular preference for data obtained by scientific methods and appear equally willing to consider all evidence of some apparent reliability. MPs committed to developing certain policies are keen to draw upon presentations, particular calculations, graphs, effectively presented messages, which are *prima facie* credible especially when they confirm views espoused by the respective politicians. Thus research-based evidence is always seen in the context of all other kinds of evidence.

The study identifies several correspondences between recommendations of published research and adopted decisions. Since many policy proposals stem from the government, the executive is where the research uptake often takes place. While a typical policy-related research output covers whole policy sectors or major clusters of elements of policies, many decisions affect selected mechanisms or rules. Within an adversary political process, parties and politicians compete and strike compromises on specific, well-defined measures. The political preferences and the narrowed focus strengthen an impression that decision makers use research findings in a cherry-picking manner.

The Saeima, its committees and groups of MPs have virtually all means to engage any willing experts in their work. Interactions between MPs and researchers tend to be situational depending on political needs, the availability of relevant research findings, *ad hoc* activity of particular individuals. A presentation in the

form of PowerPoint or otherwise is the main vehicle for conveying research findings. The interactions rest on a fairly high degree of informality. A committee may invite researchers while researchers who have a good working relation with the committee leadership may themselves suggest that they would be willing to attend. The practice of the interactions shows an easily accessible parliament.

The recommendations of this study address the parliament, research commissioning bodies and researchers/ research institutions.

Selected key recommendations for the parliament are:

- Increase the capacity of the Analytical Service (AS) to ensure that at least one analyst is assigned for supporting each legislative committee;
- Once the resources of the AS are up to an adequate level, set transparent standards for the quantity, speed and quality of its services so that each MP and each committee would know what support it can expect;
- Establish the elaboration of scenarios and projections with a view on alternative policies as a permanent type of work of the AS;
- Consider setting up a network of outside experts who can be engaged in the review of specific matters on request when the internal expertise of the AS is insufficient;
- In the longer-term perspective, introduce analysis upon own initiative as one of the forms of work of the AS.

Selected key recommendations for the executive are:

- Consider innovative activities in order to facilitate communicating policy-relevant conclusions from inquiries and analyses carried out within state research programmes;
- Strengthen the activity of think tanks through open calls to apply for public funding for research-based advocacy activities for several years;
- Create training opportunities on advocacy and lobbying for researchers especially in the beginning of their careers.

Selected key recommendations for researchers/ research institutions are:

- Develop the routine of preparing policy briefs and data visualizations in addition to research publications and reports;
- When proposing recommendations, specify what particular challenges their implementation would address, who should implement the recommendations and, if appropriate, what regulations or institutions should change;
- Strengthen microdemographic research with a focus on individuals, families, communities or towns.

Contents

Abbreviations	4
1 Introduction	5
2 Evidence-based policy making and its challenges	7
3 Supply of research	10
3.1 Publications	10
3.2 Research capacity	21
3.3 Analytical capacity of the Saeima	24
3.4 Parliamentary research services – international experience	28
3.4.1 Estonia	30
3.4.2 Lithuania	32
3.4.3 Germany	32
3.4.4 United Kingdom	33
3.4.5 European Parliament	35
4 Demand	36
4.1 Demand as expressed by MPs	37
4.2 Demand as perceived by researchers	41
5 Research uptake and interaction	44
5.1 Selected policy decisions	44
5.2 Forms of interaction	50
6 Recommendations	55
References	60
Annexes	70
Annex 1: List of interviews	70
Annex 2: Participation of scientists and researchers at committee meetings	71

Abbreviations

AS – Analytical Service

EPRS – European Parliamentary Research Service

LB – Legal Bureau

MEP – Member of the European Parliament

MFA – Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MP – Member of Parliament

POST – Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology

PRS – parliamentary research service

1 Introduction

Evidence-based and (more modest) evidence-informed policy making are widely regarded as desired even if somewhat different standards. This study focuses on the use of scientific and other research findings in parliamentary proceedings in Latvia. For the empirical inquiry, the policy fields of demography and migration were chosen. These policies earn a high degree of public interest and they are exemplary in terms of the way different worldviews and ideologies compete and adjust in complicated parliamentary decision making. The role of evidence in the context of various political factors is a subject of continuous academic debate internationally. This study aims to contribute to better understanding of this issue in Latvia's parliament – the Saeima.

The study assesses both the supply of and demand for research-based and policy-relevant evidence and inquires whether significant imbalances between the two are found. This is achieved by reviewing separately the supply side and the demand side as well as signs of research uptake and interaction between researchers and Members of Parliament (MPs). The time period of the study is 2013-2018. During the inception of the study, the initial intention was to cover the whole of the 12th parliamentary period (4 November 2014 – 6 November 2018). However, the starting point was moved back to 2013 in order to consider certain key research publications and policy decisions, which have had a major impact on demography-related policies in the following years. In selected aspects the study also covers developments in 2019, for example, the developing role of the Analytical Service of the Saeima.

The main empirical research questions are:

- What is the supply of research-based and policy-relevant evidence for parliamentary decision making?
- What is the internal parliamentary capacity for generating policy-relevant evidence?
- What are perceived needs of and requests for research-based evidence by MPs?
- Are there gaps in the supply of research-based evidence relative to the needs and demand?
- What evidence is available regarding research uptake in parliamentary decision making?
- How do researchers and MPs interact?

The empirical findings serve as basis for recommendations in order to strengthen both the supply of and demand for research-based evidence. The recommendations are based on the premise that the increased use of such evidence in policy making is a desirable end. There are no proposals to change any practices radically because another premise of the recommendations is that policy makers already make sure that they have support, which they perceive as essential. On the other hand, the community of researchers has accumulated a fair amount of experience with policy-relevant research and there is no need to break with the existing practice fundamentally. Therefore, the recommended changes are mostly of incremental character.

The policy fields of demography and migration are broad and overlap with many policies on matters such as family support, healthcare, education, labour market, diaspora, asylum, investors' residence permits, etc. Since this study was tightly limited in terms of time and resources, the selected policy area is defined more narrowly than should be the case ideally in discussions of demography and migration policies. Research and decisions selected for the study are those that rather directly aim to affect the birth rate or influence immigration and/or emigration.

The study uses several data sources and assesses the situation based on a combination of evidence. The main sources are:

- literature on evidence-based and evidence-informed policy making,
- qualitative interviews with researchers,
- qualitative interviews with MPs of the 12th and 13th parliamentary periods,
- Latvian research publications on the subjects of demography and migration,
- international literature and on-line resources on parliamentary analytical services,
- legislation adopted by the Saeima,
- agendas and minutes of parliamentary committees, other information published by the Saeima,
- presentations and discussions at the conference “Demographic Challenges: From Knowledge to Action!” on 11 February 2019 and the demography section of the 77th International Conference of the University of Latvia on 22 March 2019.

Researchers were selected for interviews so as to cover a major part of the authors of relevant research publications in the period of the study. Since the research community of Latvia and its output is inherently small in quantitative terms, the 11 interviewees represent a large sample relative to the total number of authors of the publications. The nine interviewed MPs were selected based on three criteria – an MP has him/herself experience in creating policy-relevant research evidence, an MP has been particularly active in the policy fields of this study, an MP has or has had a leading role in a parliamentary committee responsible for one of the policy fields. Correspondence to one of these criteria was sufficient for the selection of an MP for an interview.

The legislative agenda of the Saeima was screened in order to identify all major decisions, which contain natalist or migration-related policy measures. One of the most challenging aspects of the study is how to approach measuring the impact of research or the research uptake. Research contribution to decision making and attribution of decisions to certain research are notoriously difficult to measure in a reliable manner (Mendizabal, 2013). This study takes a modest approach and stays short of the ambition to measure the impact in a strict sense. Instead it collects *prima facie* and indirect evidence of research uptake. Two kinds of such evidence is considered. First, correspondences between published research recommendations and adopted policy decisions are identified. These reflect alignments between opinions of researchers and policies but do not prove causality. Second, interviewees were asked to name instances of research uptake that they have experienced. Such answers may and sometimes do contain claims of causality but can be affected by response biases or limited knowledge of the interviewed persons.

Several terms in this study can have different meanings in different contexts and in perception of different actors. The generic term ‘research’ is used throughout the study. Research here is understood as both outputs of work of strict scientific rigor and policy research, which generally adheres to the principle of reproducibility of data but has support for policy making as its primary purpose. Research-based evidence denotes any evidence, which stems directly from scientific inquiry or policy analysis. Such evidence may appear not only as scientific publications or policy analysis reports but also as part of presentations, policy briefs, official policy planning documents, speeches, etc.

The term ‘researcher’ is mostly applied to both scientists in a strict sense as well as other analysts and experts who produce policy research. Meanwhile persons in their capacity as representatives of public bodies, business and other associations, lobbyists, advocates and other representatives of interest groups

are not considered as researchers even if they have relevant academic or expert credentials. The term 'researcher', as used in this study, implies a degree of independence from interest groups and public bodies. The term 'policy maker' is used to describe all public officials who develop and decide on policies (civil servants who plan policies, government members, MPs).

2 Evidence-based policy making and its challenges

This study focuses on links between research and policy making, interactions between researchers and policy makers. That such links and interactions are important is seemingly beyond dispute. Evidence-based policy making has been widely recognized as a desirable and highly legitimate approach to solving social problems. Policy interventions, which are based on valid and reliable evidence, are arguably more effective than interventions based primarily on anecdotal evidence, whims of the public opinion or pure ideological convictions. The use of evidence strengthens the legitimacy of decisions as they are expected to rationally address the society's problems rather than represent mere political expediency or temper of politicians. In some parliaments, MPs are known to initiate policy studies and evaluations and actively use their findings. Meanwhile, failures to use research-based evidence sufficiently arguably jeopardize the achievement of desired policy goals or cause adverse unintended consequences (Banks, 2009). Sometimes parliaments and governments embark on major policies and endorse spending with little rational grounds to expect the intended results. In other cases, not having or using evidence leads to overly precautionary policy because policy makers tend to avoid any risk even if only supposed rather than proven (Schenkel, 2010).

While few argue against the usefulness of valid and reliable evidence in policy making, channelling scientific findings into decision making is fraught with challenges. There are inherent **tensions** between the rationale that leads scientific work and various factors that feed into political decisions.

Researchers and policy makers face different **time pressures**. Political decisions often have to be taken quickly even if no good evidence is readily at hand (Banks, 2009). Especially in moments of real or perceived crises policy makers can feel strong pressure to act immediately rather than let a situation be researched first. As will be seen further in this study, even in the area of demography where most developments are relatively slow, politicians feel that sometimes research takes more time than they have available before making a decision.

Moreover, scientific evidence is only one of **many types of information and reasons** to be considered when political decisions are made in competitive and sometimes disorderly processes (Gamoran, 2018; Orr, 2018; Richards, 2017; Weiss, 2001; Williams, 2010). Politicians also rely on own life experience and listen to constituencies, civil servants, etc. Vested interests and lobbyists frequently participate in shaping policies (Banks, 2009). MPs are legitimately seen as representatives of their voters' interests as much as or even more than technocratic solvers of social problems informed by abstract rational principles. Policy makers may even refrain from using certain sources of evidence just because they believe their core beliefs and principles differ (Mendizabal, 2013).

A further challenge occurs when policy makers inadvertently or purposefully **distort evidence**. Politicians have a well-known inclination to justify their favourite policy and persuade the public by referring selectively to supporting evidence (Gordon and Haskins, 2017; House of Commons, 2006; Tseng, 2012; Williams, 2010) or even attempt to banish the creation of evidence (Gamoran, 2018; Sparks, 2017). To some extent, this is grounded in the nature of a political office. Politicians are expected to champion

certain worldviews and beliefs. In other words, they are inherently partial in their relations with actual and proposed policies. Moreover, the occasionally ruthless *realpolitik* incentivises certain politicians to act in a manipulative and misleading manner. Even without bad-faith intentions, drafters of policy planning documents occasionally omit references and argumentative chains found in scientific work and thus risk misinterpreting and misrepresenting evidence (Vohnsen, 2013). Several interviews for this study echoed these concerns and shared observations of ‘cherry picking’ when policy makers refer to research-based evidence only when it confirms their favoured policy positions.

Scientists and policy makers have divergent **views on what exactly constitutes evidence and research** (Richards, 2017). Policy makers can be insufficiently aware or respectful of the complexities, limitations and proper interpretation requirements of scientific research. They sometimes use the term research regarding types of evidence that are not obtained by using scientific methods (Tseng, 2012). Policy makers can be quick to claim grounds for a certain action even where prudent scientists see reasons for caution and gaps in information.

Sometimes **scientists and researchers themselves disagree** about the goals and means of policies (Nevile, 2013). Social research is often underpinned by certain values and these can significantly affect policy recommendations, which stem from such research. The review of the supply of research in this study detected instances where researchers’ publications contain divergent or even outright opposing policy recommendations. Even vested interests could affect conclusions announced by researchers. Research is a common element of lobbying strategies. In such cases, purportedly objective evidence is created and communicated to promote a certain interest.

There are also **diverse views on the proper role of scientists**. Some scientists are cautious or outright sceptical about the expectation that their inquiry should result in policy impact while policy makers lament the deficit of applied and policy-relevant information in research (Williams, 2010). It is possible and indeed quite common that scientists explore potentially policy-relevant data without an interest or motivation to participate in the policy process let alone to actively advocate particular policies.

Even if there was perfect understanding between policy makers and scientists, **evidence-based policy making would still have its limitations**. The best of evidence does not guarantee policy success and all policy making inherently involves a degree of uncertainty. The replication of policy interventions that have been proven effective in the past may not necessarily produce desired effects in new settings (Haskins, 2018; Tseng, 2016). Therefore, no matter how much data have been accumulated about past policy interventions, they will not be exhaustive and cannot be recommended as the only guidance for further action for politicians. Sometimes policy decisions are based on valid and reliable data but fail because they do not address the roots of problems (Gamoran, 2018). Evidence-based policy making has been criticized for negative side effects caused by overreliance on the traditional scientific logic. For example, the tendency to extrapolate current trends in the future can lead to radical fluctuations in the crisis–success policy responses (as reactions to respectively negative or positive current trends) and intensified targeting/auditing with ever-growing oversight efforts (Geyer, 2012). Research, it is argued, does not provide ultimate certainty and security to policy decisions but rather offers mixed, conditional or provisional findings (Pawson, Wong and Owen, 2011; Tseng, 2016). Last but not least the scarcity of funding for research and evaluation as well as unwillingness to burden implementing staff represent barriers to policy evaluation (Orr, 2018). Obtaining resources can be a challenge because it is hard to measure the return on investment in research (Williams, 2010). Smaller societies like Latvia face inevitable

constraints regarding the availability of qualified domestic researchers and policy analysts to cover all policy fields and types of research (fundamental research, evaluations, etc.)

The tensions and limitations do not deprive evidence-based policy of its merits. To limit frustration, it is important to realize that scientific evidence can serve as a counterweight or information supplement to the *realpolitik* of interests. However, such evidence will not dominate in the policy process and will not determine decisions solely (Gamoran, 2018; Mendizabal, 2013). This is one of the reasons why some authors nowadays prefer the more modest term evidence-informed policy. The approach of evidence-informed policy concedes that decision-making will not be shaped mainly by research and evaluation findings but rather informed and shaped by a broader range of relevant evidence, knowledge, values, ideologies, and interests (Head, 2015). As seen in interviews for this study, politicians are occasionally prepared to 'jump into the unknown' when they feel a policy is desirable even in the absence of supporting research-based evidence. They may also pursue a policy if the known odds of effectiveness are unfavourable because even the slim chance of success or the symbolic meaning of their action is seen as valuable.

Actions for encouraging the use of evidence include building partnerships and communication to facilitate trust and co-operation between producers and consumers of evidence (Gamoran, 2018; Richards, 2017; Tseng, 2012; Tseng and Nutley, 2014; Williams, 2010). The fact that researchers and policy makers can be overlapping groups helps developing such partnerships. Setting up leadership positions, collaborative bodies or dedicated offices ('one-stop-shops' for policy makers) to produce and use evidence as well as codified principles and practices for the use of evidence (Gamoran, 2018; Williams, 2010) can also help. Using intermediary organizations or evidence brokers can facilitate productive exchanges between scientists and policy makers (Tseng, 2012) although one also should mind the impact of the goals and agendas of these organizations themselves. Research-policy partnerships should produce visible short-term benefits for the policy makers such as more efficient gathering of information and politically more relevant framing of research findings (Richards, 2017). These recommendations largely aim to an institutional context favourable for the use of research evidence rather than merely appeal to the goodwill of researchers and policy makers.

The research itself also has to adhere to sound methodological standards, rely on relevant quality data, and ensure transparency of evidence; sufficient time, capable and independent personnel are needed (Banks, 2009). Moreover, research findings should be disseminated in creative and accessible formats for a variety of audiences and through multiple channels (Williams, 2010). It is recognized that the capacity of scientists to produce research useful for policy makers also should be strengthened through better knowledge, skills and incentives (Tseng and Nutley, 2014) as well as by making available relevant administrative data for research (Gamoran, 2016). Greater appreciation of the complexity of issues, situations and actors in monitoring and policy evaluation would avoid subjecting policies to excessively simplistic targeting and evaluation as well as provide more balanced and accurate assessments (Geyer, 2012; Nevile, 2013).

To consider evidence can be a **legal obligation**. In 2018, the Constitutional Court of Latvia deemed void a law provision because, among other things, the legislator lacked adequate analysis and reasoning regarding the constitutionality of the provision (LR Satversmes tiesa, 2018). In another case, the court argued that envisaged regulatory framework, where necessary, must be adequately grounded in explanatory research. According to the court this requirement is part of the good law-making principle. A

failure to observe the principle served as grounds for the declaring a provision void. (LR Satversmes tiesa, 2019) Kasemets has posed the question “under which circumstances the public ex-ante regulatory impact assessment information and/or its scientific quality could be interpreted as a human rights issue before parliamentary proceedings (a reason for the parliament to reject draft acts, or for the Legal Chancellor to initiate an analysis)” (Kasemets, 2018). In the Latvian context, the legal affirmation of the expectation that policies shall be based on or at least informed by evidence is a relatively new development to which lawmakers are yet to adjust.

The empirical inquiry of this study finds evidence of similar tensions between the needs and views of researchers and policy makers as described in this brief theoretical chapter. As stated above, the communities of researchers and policy makers partially overlap. Researchers sometimes become civil servants or MPs while some MPs have solid background of academic education. However, the effective use of evidence in policy making, especially if evidence is understood in the scientific sense, requires cooperation between individuals of professions and walks of life where rationales, incentives and goals are different. Luckily, there is also a fair degree of constructive mutual interest between the two groups regarding their work.

3 Supply of research

3.1 Publications

Since 2013, research findings regarding different aspects of demography have been published in various publications. They represent primary sources on what researchers conclude and recommend for public policies. This study considers almost exclusively work published in Latvia. Based on the interviews, it appears obvious that, in the policy fields of demography and migrations, the Latvian publications have a greater potential to be considered by policy makers than international publications although several of the authors also published internationally (see, for example, Kaša and Mieriņa, 2019). The main focus of this chapter is on recommendations included in the publications. Along with the evaluation of past and current policies, forward-looking analysis of how policies should develop and corresponding recommendations are key applied results of research. While the minority of the publications reflects policy evaluations, most of them contain at least some recommendations.

Doctoral theses in demography

Several doctoral theses within the doctoral programme in demography of the Faculty of Business, Management and Economics of the University of Latvia have been defended during the period of this study.

The doctoral thesis “Family and the Development of Its Support Policy in Latvia (1990 – 2015)” by Līga Āboliņa finds that the current fertility level ensures a narrowing generational replacement, high poverty in single parent families and families with many children increases the risk of inadequate childcare, the role of marriage as the start of a family has substantially changed, etc. The thesis argues that a stable, predictable and complex family support policy, which focuses on opportunities to combine work and family life, represents a substantial factor promoting fertility. There are policy recommendations for several categories of actors: the Parliament, the Cabinet of Ministers, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Welfare, the Central Statistics Board, the Council of Demographic Affairs, local governments, and NGOs. Recommendations to the Parliament are to:

- introduce a possibility to pay support benefit to a grandparent who takes care of an ill child in a single parent family,
- start a discussion on granting certain rights to unregistered couples and consider modernizing the institution of engagement,
- consider changing the co-ordination institution for the family policy, for example, designating the Cross-Sectoral Co-ordination Centre for this role,
- implement sustained support for childcare and raising children with a view of a family with 2-3 children as a model.

Several recommendations are addressed to the Ministry of Welfare and include finding a consensus on the interpretation of the term “family”, carrying out research and providing support to reduce poverty in single parent families, setting performance indicators for the reduction of poverty risk in specifically incomplete families and families with many children, implementing a pilot project to provide the service of a family support specialist, implementing activities related to school-age children, and promoting remote work in order to facilitate the combination of work and family life. (Āboliņa, 2016)

Āboliņa’s work has resulted in several publications. Together with Pēteris Zvidriņš, Āboliņa published some of the findings in the article Changes in Family Policy in Latvia (Āboliņa and Zvidriņš, 2015). The article reviews the development of family support services in Latvia. Regarding the policy, the authors conclude that cash benefits constitute the main part of public expenditures for families in Latvia. Key recommendations are to:

- increase state funding for childcare services,
- provide “special additional support to family state benefits”.

The international publication “Fertility and Family Policies in Central and Eastern Europe” with inputs by Āboliņa and Zvidriņš recommends:

- the comprehensive family policy model (conditions for women to take care of children and households and be employed, not only financial benefits but also institutional childcare, improving gender relationships) as the only model, which represents an optimal set of family policies. (Basten et al., 2015)

The doctoral thesis “Role of the Socioeconomic Factors and Regional Policy in the Demographic Development of Latvia” by Aleksandrs Dahs confirms that the level of personal income and employment are crucial determinants of the positive local demographic development, significantly outmatching all other factors included in the study, and the mid- and long-term activities carried out with the support from the European Union Structural and Cohesion funds have positive demographic effects. Recommendations of the thesis do not address the Parliament specifically. Recommendations for policy planning are to:

- consider the human capital and its demographic determinants in regional and national development policy planning,
- re-evaluate and expand some of the methodologies for the planning of national regional and cohesion policies,
- apply the EU Structural and Cohesion funds in a more centralised manner,

- plan policies for tackling the regional demographic issues minding the possibility that clusters of apparently similar contemporary regions may demonstrate diverging long-term reactions to the policy instruments and regional aid measures,
- implement comprehensive and pre-emptive policy measures on EU and national levels to avoid demography-induced downturn in the human capital creativity levels. (Dahs, 2017)

The Centre for Diaspora and Migration Research

The Centre for Diaspora and Migration Research (University of Latvia) has been a prolific source of publications on the Latvian diaspora and people who return to Latvia after time spent abroad.

The study “The Political Representation of the Diaspora in Latvia and in the European Union: the Parliamentary Dimension” explores approaches of EU member states to the political representation of diaspora as well as researches the current and desired models of the parliamentary representation of the diaspora in Latvia. The study was funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and recommends:

- technical-procedural (minimum) solutions, for example, information campaigns, convenient voting procedures, facilitated postal voting, increased capacity of the Consular Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the co-ordination of election proceedings abroad,
- socially-political (expanded) solutions, for example, promotion of voicing diaspora interests in the Saeima, support for the activities of diaspora NGOs, programmes for the support of diaspora youth, regular visits of election candidates, politicians and civil servants to diaspora residence countries, state policy for communicating with the diaspora and about diaspora activities, creating consultative councils with the representatives of the Latvian state and double citizens, furthering the discussion on changes in the parliamentary representation of the diaspora. (Lulle et al., 2015)

The comparative study on the remigration policy in Europe and other countries was carried out by the Centre for Diaspora and Migration Research in co-operation with the Baltic Institute of Social Sciences with financial support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The study contains concrete policy recommendations to:

- define a single ministry responsible for co-ordinating the co-operation with the diaspora and the policy to promote return migration (subsequently develop a relevant policy planning document),
- provide additional funding for the Latvian diplomatic and consular missions in countries with a large Latvian diaspora,
- continue providing support for Latvian language learning (distance learning, improving the quality of education in weekend schools, raising the remuneration of teachers),
- continue and expand organizing youth summer camps,
- develop cooperation with the diaspora youth who study abroad (traineeships in Latvia),
- develop economic cooperation with the diaspora entrepreneurs, scientists and professionals by involving them in mentoring programmes that facilitate the transfer of knowledge and potentially could accelerate the return of Latvian professionals,
- provide information and advice on matters relating to return migration processes,
- provide individual support to pupils who return to Latvia and to their parents,
- assess the possibility to allocate funding for repatriation and expanding the circle of persons who may apply for the status of a repatriate. (Šūpule et al., 2016)

The analysis of the survey of remigrants reviews thoroughly the findings and answers a number of empirical questions but does not contain concrete policy recommendations (Hazans, 2016).

The study “Development of Diaspora Policy” was commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and aimed to present grounded information and expert recommendations for the development of the diaspora policy. The report reflects opinions of different Latvian experts regarding various aspects of Latvia’s diaspora policy. Specific recommendations from an author of the study (Jānis Buholcs) address:

- information supply for remigrants (testing of on-line sources of information with the target group, consolidation of information in a single website, use of plain language and languages of the countries of residence, the principle of one-stop shop at least for communication and provision of information, etc.),
- communication with the diaspora (supply of information to diaspora media, consideration of additional funding to support diaspora media, training for the employees of the media, etc.). (Mieriņa, Zača and Buholcs, 2018)

The Institute of Philosophy and Sociology

The Institute of Philosophy and Sociology (University of Latvia) also implemented research and published on diaspora matters. The volume “Communities of Latvia’s Emigrants: The Diaspora of Hope” includes a part dedicated to the diaspora policy. It was based on the largest survey to date of Latvians and Latvian nationals residing abroad. The publication was prepared and published with financial support of the European Social Fund (project “Communities of Latvia’s Emigrants: National Identity, Transnational Relations and Diaspora Policy”). A chapter on the remigration policy (Kļave and Šūpule) focuses on how individuals who have remigrated or are considering remigration perceive the remigration policy but does not contain policy recommendations. Another chapter on the remigration and diaspora policy (Kārkliņa and Kļave) reviews expert opinions and reports criticism of the various aspects of the policy. Key policy recommendations relate to:

- the integration of remigration and diaspora policies,
- setting up a co-ordination institution with adequate funding,
- inter-institutional cooperation on regional and local levels, for example, the interest of local governments and the initiative of local entrepreneurs to recruit employees in the diaspora,
- continuous evaluation and monitoring of the policy. (Mieriņa, 2015)

Several other analytical reports stemmed from the same project, for example, the evaluation of the re-emigration policy from the perspective of the policy’s target group – Latvia’s emigrants and re-emigrants. The report contains a few conclusions, which critically assess certain aspects of the policy and recommendations could be inferred by the reader as desired opposites to the negative practice:

- Objectives of the remigration policy are not explicitly defined and the policy rather supports the reintegration of reemigrants than promotes the return process;
- The reemigration policy is rather symbolic without adequate funding;
- Target groups of reemigration activities are defined in a somewhat selective manner with priority given to human capital with added value (high qualification, etc.);
- Local governments should be involved more in the development and implementation of the remigration policy, notably, with regard to the provision of housing support;

- It is necessary to explain the objectives of the remigration policy and popularise the support activities more actively. (Kļave, 2015)

The latest major publication of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology is a report on the findings of the longitudinal study “Generations and Gender Survey”, which was carried out as a pilot project in Latvia in 2018 upon commission by the Cross-Sectoral Co-ordination Centre. The research being part of an international programme, the findings are comparable with data obtained by using the same methodology in other European countries. The research programme envisages the continuation of the study by surveying the same individuals repeatedly after several years in order to track developments in the lives of the individuals and their families. The survey covers the topics of transition to adult life, cohabitation and the stability of family, reproductive behaviour, relations between generations, etc. Policy recommendations are well referenced to previously published work and concern the need to recognize the diversity of families and their needs, measures to reduce the risk of poverty and provide housing support for families with children, developing care services for the elderly, the facilitation of flexible employment forms, etc. (Trapeznikova et al., 2019)

National research programmes

The Social and Policy Research Institute of the University of Latvia published the Human Development Report “Sustainable Nation” (2013), which was prepared under the auspices of the National Research Programme “National Identity” and includes a chapter on demography and poverty in families with children. The chapter ends with the following conclusions (some as recommendations and some as findings regarding the preferences of the surveyed population):

- Balancing the number of deaths with the number of births as the main short-term goal;
- The approximation of the birth rate to two children per woman as the long-term goal;
- Increase state funding to support women with children, provide relevant infrastructure (kindergartens), tax rebates, and financial benefits to counter poverty in families with at least three children;
- Increase family benefits, doubling or tripling the amount with the birth of the second and third child;
- Further raise the tax exemption for dependent children and peg the minimum childcare benefits to the minimum wage;
- Rapidly increase the total state support to young families with children to at least 2.5% of GDP. (Mežs, 2014)

The article “Demographic Development in Latvia: Problems and Challenges” by Juris Krūmiņš and Zaiga Krišjāne summarizes findings of the first stages of the EKOSOC-LV State Research Programme’s Demography Research Project. The article reports opinions derived from a population survey regarding actions for improving the demographic situation where support for the birth rate, decreasing the social inequality, and actions to decrease emigration are most frequently mentioned. The article does not include concrete policy recommendations. (Krūmiņš and Krišjāne, 2016)

The volume “Over Hundred. The Smart Latvia” contains the summary of the findings of the project “Renewal of society through reducing the risk of depopulation, through demographic development and strengthening links with the diaspora for the transformation of the Latvian economy”. The summary reviews demographic trends since the 1990s, reports the results of the said survey, provides forecasts for

the Global Creativity Index values for the human capital in the Baltic countries, etc. In the area of demography, the publication recommends:

- greater involvement of adults in life-learning programmes,
- a stable, predictable and comprehensive family policy, focused on possibilities to combine work and family life, as a factor to promote birth rate,
- a greater involvement of the public in discussions about the necessity of the renewal of the population and the objectives of social economic and demographic development. (Rivža, 2018)

The latest publication within the discipline of demography, which stems from the EKOSOC-LV project, is the multi-author monograph “Population Reproduction and Challenges for Renewal of Society in Latvia” published in 2019. The monograph covers a multitude of related subjects with several chapters dedicated to policies complete with concise policy recommendations. (Krūmiņš un Krišjāne, 2019)

Think tanks

In 2015, the think tank **Certus** published the paper “The Challenges of Depopulation and Regional Development”, which names depopulation the main problem and challenge of Latvia. Policy recommendations are setting up industrial zones, rapid action funds in order to meet the needs of investors, and partially linking the revenue of the individual income tax with the place of work. (Krēsliņš, Miglavs and Spuriņš, 2015) According to the Director of Certus Daunis Auers the intent was to focus on the economic factors, which affect population trends. Another publication by Certus was the policy brief “Latvia’s Demographic Portrait Today and Tomorrow”, which outlined past and expected key demographic trends for the world, Europe and Latvia (including within and across Latvia’s regions). The brief contains general advice for municipal and national decision makers as conclusions. (Auers and Gubins, 2017)

The discussion paper of the **Bank of Latvia** “Forecasting Natural Population Change: The Case of Latvia” by Aleksejs Meļihovs provides the natural population change forecast in Latvia until 2030: “The main findings of the paper are the following. The total period fertility rate is forecasted to increase to about 1.6 by 2030. Life expectancy at birth is projected to increase for males and females by 4 and 3.4 years respectively. Nevertheless, the natural population decrease in 19 years will reach 200 thousand including the decrease of about 190 thousand in population aged 20–64, while the old-age dependency ratio will increase to 36.5%.” As a policy recommendation: “This suggests that more active pronatalist family policies should be implemented in Latvia. Although there is not a universal rule stating what kind of pronatalist policies are most efficient, Latvian policy makers should make more effort to take appropriate measures for the Latvian society. In addition to pronatalist family policies, Latvian policy makers should improve the situation with economic activity and employment of young people, since insufficient financial security forces them to postpone family making and childbearing.” (Meļihovs, 2014)

The Centre for Public Policy PROVIDUS focuses primarily on various aspects of the integration of immigrants. For example, the think tank participated in preparing the Migrant Integration Policy Index, which measures policies to integrate migrants in all EU Member States, Australia, Canada, Iceland, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland, Turkey and the USA. Regarding Latvia the study concluded: “LV still has the weakest integration policies among the EU Member States, as its current approach creates almost no targeted support and many more obstacles than opportunities for non-EU citizens to participate in society. LV scores 4-6 points behind the next lowest-scoring countries (including

LT) and far below EE (46). LV's slight areas of strength were required by the EU (family reunion and permanent residence) and still weaker than the policies in most other European countries. If immigration increases, schools, hospitals, employment services and local communities may need greater targeted support to equally service immigrants and benefit from their skills (see improvements in EE, CZ, PT, Nordics)." (MIPEX, 2015) In 2018, PROVIDUS published the evaluation of the integration of recipients of international protection in Latvia, which included numerous recommendations, for example, regarding the period of residence permits and family reunification (Lāce and Geks, 2018).

The OECD Review of Labour Market and Social Policies: Latvia 2016 recommended with regard to managing emigration and a shrinking population to (abridged):

- ensure that Latvians abroad are informed about job opportunities in Latvia,
- reinforce and expand measures to maintain contact with the diaspora,
- target labour migrants to help address skills shortages,
- improve the retention of foreign talents in Latvia,
- shift the target of investor programmes towards investors in productive businesses and resident investors. (OECD, 2016)

The establishment "Agency of Social Services" published a study "Specialized Foster Families – the Development of the Out-of-family Care Model in Latvia". The study contains recommendations for:

- the financial and social security aspects of the care model,
- cooperation between institutions and involved specialists,
- education and support services,
- possible specializations of foster families. (Sociālo pakalpojumu aģentūra, 2016)

Other research directly procured by the government

The Society Integration Foundation commissioned research on the situation (problems, needs, required support) of families with many children, which was based on a quantitative survey of families. The study reflects responses of the surveyed families regarding the improvement of the state support system. The introduction or increase of various state or municipal benefits as well as discounts for families with many children dominated in the responses. Support in matters related to childcare, healthcare and education, etc. was among commonly expressed needs. The study was commissioned specifically in relation to the plan to introduce a card for families with many children. The majority of the surveyed families viewed such a tool positively. The survey findings also showed what advantages the families would expect from the card. (Hannu Pro, 2013)

The State Chancellery commissioned research on factors, which influence the population renewal. The work was funded by the European Social Fund (project "Support for the Introduction of Structural Reforms in the Public Administration") and carried out by the company "Projektu un kvalitātes vadība". The analysis includes elaborated benefit-based (fertility would increase but the effect small) and employment-based (conditions for combining family and work life – effective but not popular) scenarios. (Eglīte et al., 2013)

In 2015, the Ministry of Welfare commissioned research "Flexible Provision of the Child Supervision Service to Employees Working Irregular Hours", which was also carried out by the company "Projektu un kvalitātes vadība". The research stands out among the studies reviewed in this chapter as the only one,

which featured an experimental design. The experiment involved providing child supervision service for a group of individuals during irregular working hours and compared the results with the control group. The research resulted in several recommendations for the design of the child supervision service as well as for the policy and legal framework, for example:

- introduce a co-financing model for the service involving four parties: employers, employees, state and local governments,
- consider amending the Law on Local Governments to create the basis for setting up a baby-sitters' service,
- consider including individual and/or collective child supervision support mechanisms for employees working irregular hours in a policy planning document. (Brants et al., 2018)

The Cross-Sectoral Co-ordination Centre commissioned the study “Local government policy instruments for the promotion of the remigration of the population that has departed” carried out by the Baltic Institute of Social Sciences. The study included a telephone survey of all local governments and case studies of five local governments. The study reflects the opinion of local governments regarding certain policy proposals, for example, to introduce regional and municipal co-ordinators to support people who wish to return. However, it does not include recommendations by the authors of the study. (Baltic Institute of Social Sciences, 2017)

The report “Strengthening of a Unifying National Identity and the Latvian Culture Space” was commissioned by the Ministry of Culture and aims to provide problem formulations, solutions and proposals for policy results and performance indicators to be included in the draft Society’s Integration Plan for the years 2019-2025. Regarding the diaspora, the report recommends strengthening the Latvian identity, etc., the integration of the diaspora, strengthening the political and civic participation of the diaspora, and support to those who want to return. (Mierīņa et al., 2017)

In 2018, the Ministry of Welfare commissioned the ex-post evaluation of the State Family Policy Guidelines for the Years 2011-2017, which was carried out by the company SAFEGE Baltija. The evaluation concludes with numerous recommendations for the methodology of future policy planning as well as more than fifty recommendations for family policy interventions, for example:

- continue improving personal income tax deductions as a support tool for families with children (allow sharing the deduction among both parents),
- find solutions for adequate support in the area of housing to families, which do not correspond to financing requirements set by commercial banks, especially families with many children,
- constantly draw public attention to issues of sexual and reproductive health,
- create a comprehensive support system in relation to perinatal mortality,
- provide financial support to kindergartens from the state budget and subsidize child supervision services for parents who work irregular hours,
- gradually introduce public funding for meals at municipal pre-school education institutions. (SAFEGE Baltija, 2018)

Research and analysis for international bodies

The European Commission commissioned comments papers on relevant issue areas such as parenting and work-family reconciliation, the socio-economic situation of lone parents and policy tools preventing the

risk of poverty, provision of quality early childcare services. Some of such papers provide an overview of the state of affairs and challenges such as the low availability of municipal pre-school educational institutions while refraining from explicit recommendations (Korpa, 2013; Ivanovs and Korpa, 2015). Others also include recommendations such as focusing on balanced social support for the whole life cycle of a child, ensuring flexible childcare options, and promotion of flexible working arrangements (Korpa, 2015).

The report published by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung on demographic challenges in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania concludes that financial policies will not radically turn the birth rate: “Instead, other policy actions can be aimed at affecting migration, transforming the labour market and using specific tools to mitigate or make use of migration. The labour market policies – increasing productivity and labour participation, and working beyond the current retirement age – are the most efficient and are achievable only in line with improving the population’s education and health.” (Vārpiņa, 2018)

The Foreign Investment Environment Index by the Foreign Investors Council in Latvia (Sauka, 2019) notes the availability of workforce and its quality as one of top three problems in Latvia. Government decisions relative to the workforce and demography: migration, immigration, residence permits are judged critically. The report contains policy proposals expressed by interviewed investors. (Sauka, 2019)

Numerous recommendations were proposed in the UNHCR analysis on the integration of refugees in Latvia (UNHCR, 2015).

Government policy planning documents

Official planning documents also contain analysis of the state of affairs in various fields and policy proposals. Even though they do not represent scientific research, such documents should be mentioned as one of the sources of evidence for policy making. For example, the Information report on mid- and long-term prognosis for the labour market of the Ministry of Economy contains projections of the population trends and demand and supply of labour. It finds that, in the medium term, workforce immigration will have a significant role in ensuring the balanced development of the labour market. With regard to the mitigation of the negative demographic trends, the report recommends:

- support to the population renewal – state support for families with two and more children (increased family state benefit, support for the accessibility of public services),
- support activities for remigration (creation of the network of remigration coordinators),
- activities to promote the economic activity of the population,
- involvement of highly qualified labour force from abroad (facilitated attraction of specialists lacking in the labour market, eased reception of the EU blue card). (Ekonomikas ministrija, 2018)

Discussion

The selection of publications shows that extensive descriptive data are used in analyses about demographic trends (for example, Eglīte et al., 2013, see also the publications of the Analytical Service of the Saeima). To a lesser degree this is true about migration flows but also those are reviewed in some of the analyses (for example, Auers and Gubins, 2017). Both are described in various chapters of the monograph edited by Krūmiņš un Krišjāne (2019). Moreover, if to consider descriptive data sources such as publications of the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia or reports on the migration and asylum situation by Latvia’s National Contact Point of the European Migration Network, the factual developments on the

macro level are generally known. In addition to statistical data, researchers have documented policies (decisions made, legal provisions, interventions, funding). This allows placing actual developments into a policy context and identify at least *prima facie* associations between policy interventions and social developments (see, for example, Āboliņa, 2019, 2016; Āboliņa, Mežs and Mileiko, 2019).

All of the publications pay at least some attention to policies and almost all of them contain policy recommendations. This suggests a shared recognition by researchers, research institutions and commissioning parties that research work should contribute to policies. However, the level of elaboration of policy recommendations varies. Policy recommendations are generally more elaborate in research directly funded and commissioned by the government. A few of the publications review existing challenges and explicitly address each of them with specific recommendations (notably SAFEGE Baltija, 2018). In commissioned research, links between the empirical findings and the recommendations are generally better explained, i.e. the chain of inferences and rationale behind the conclusions and recommendations is more visible (Mileiko et al., 2016). Through procurement and other funding mechanisms, the government shifts the overall research activity towards applied research.

A major focus of researchers is the opinions of people who are the presumed beneficiaries of policies or whose behaviour the policies would aim to affect. Most of the major publications related to family policies and diaspora/remigration are based on surveys as at least one of the key sources of data. The body of research provides ample insights into reasons and obstacles that individuals cite in relation to reproductive or (r)emigration choices. This information allows for inferences about the values, motivations, attitudes of individuals. When making decisions aimed at reproductive or migration choices, policy makers could find a fair amount of data to reckon what the potential target groups would think about particular policy choices.

Comparative inquiry is another important research direction. Several publications provide fair insight into approaches and policies adopted by other countries. Detailed reviews of policies in other countries in support of families (Eglīte et al., 2013) or regarding diaspora groups (Lulle et al., 2015; Šūpule et al., 2016) have been carried out. This can help policy makers develop and adopt policies that are in line with or informed by experience elsewhere. Such data potentially help transferring successful policies and avoiding failures. The beginning of Latvia's participation in the Generation and Gender Programme with the first wave of the survey carried out in 2018 (Trapežņikova et al., 2019) promises even richer possibilities to carry out the analysis of comparative data.

From the point of view of the imperative that research should inform policy making, several ways for further development are identifiable. The research of causal associations between particular factors and social phenomena of interest are rare or tend to be general. Possible correlations between variables are often identified based on research carried out in other countries or based on surveys and interviews. Highly reliable data, which allow rigorous testing of possible correlations, are scarce. The studies by Eglīte et al. (2013) and Trapežņikova et al. (2019) have been rather exceptional in that they analysed quantitative associations between several factors and the birth rate/ reproductive choices in Latvia.

Available data on associations between various demographic parameters and behaviours remain fragmented. Comparative studies on developments in different regions and localities of Latvia controlled for certain factors and different regarding other factors could be one source for inferences about relevant correlations. More research inquiries into the choices, challenges, opportunities, needs and behaviour of individuals and families of different socio-economic standing and in specific life situations could identify

further correlations and help design targeted policies. A good example of this kind of research was the study regarding employees working irregular hours (see Brants et al., 2018).

Rigorous inquiry into the effectiveness of particular policy interventions remains limited. General associations between policy measures and statistical trends are noted while possible other factors are rarely excluded. There is a case to be made for the wider use of experimental research designs, of which there is only one example in the reviewed selection of published research (Brants et al., 2018). There are limitations for the possible use of experiments. A key policy intervention, if used for small groups only, could cause concerns for discrimination. Short-term experiments are unlikely to produce detectable change. Moreover, experimental studies require relatively large funding.

In an interview, the researcher Viola Korpa noted the lack of choice architecture studies and microdemography research in Latvia. Case studies on the effects of policies on particular families with certain properties would reveal important information about how policies work. Even though quantitative surveys often include questions about the individual situation of respondents and their families, detailed in-depth inquiries into the conditions, routines and challenges of families are rare.

There is also a lack of data series. Several valuable insights into relatively narrow issues provide snapshots of the situation at a particular time (see, for example, Baltic Institute of Social Sciences, 2017) but not temporal dynamics (for example, the survey of remigrants in was the first and until now only one with a large representative sample (N = 3088); see, Hazans, 2016). In an interview, the researcher Aivita Putniņa named European Union funding as one reason for the lack of longitudinal data: “There are no regular studies on family. One of the reasons is that research has been carried out based on EU funding. Supply determines demand.” This observation may serve as a reminder of the need to expand national research programmes. In this regard, for example, Latvia’s participation in the Generation and Gender Programme is a positive development with the prospect of gathering data repeatedly with the intervals of several years.

Researchers could also use normative theories to support their recommendations regarding one or another policy option. Basing recommendations on normative considerations is fully legitimate in academic work, and researchers should be transparent whether they argue, for example, for or against certain pro-natalist policies because they are (are not effective) or because they are (are not) normatively desirable. Overall there is little Latvian analysis of the normative desirability of one or another policy option.

Except Latvia’s diaspora and remigration, migration-related phenomena and attitudes remain less researched. Relatively little is known about factors that form current attitudes toward immigration, the micro-level conditions regarding the availability and shortages of labour in various sectors, the potential impact of immigration flows of different size and different types of immigrants, the use and effects of residence permits. In an interview, the researcher Agnese Lāce identified a limitation of having to rely on data collected for the needs of international research: “We use data that have been collected elsewhere or with Latvia’s assistance but are not necessarily analysed along the dimensions that are important for us.”

The elaboration of policy scenarios with expected effects depending on particular policy choices remains scarce. All of the policy-relevant research proposes particular policies or argues for the further consideration of certain policies. In a sense, researchers tend to tell instead of the policy makers what the

best option would be. This is entirely legitimate when the recommendations are based on sound reasoning. However, broader foresight with the analysis of the anticipated effects of several policy options would also represent good support for policy makers (Eglīte et al. 2013 was exceptional with its elaborations of scenarios). Another rarely used approach is cost-benefit analysis for particular policy options, which could be in part related to insufficient data or the weakness of policy analysis as a field in Latvia, as mentioned by Aivita Putniņa.

3.2 Research capacity

Research that is or potentially could be available to support policy makers is conditional on certain capacities. In this chapter, capacity is treated as resources, first of all financial and human. There are several programmes and institutions, within which resources are provided, received (as grants, orders, etc.) and accumulated (as research staff, doctoral students, etc.).

Doctoral programme

An indicator of capacity in the academic sector is the doctoral programme in demography at the University of Latvia, which was established in 1999. Eight dissertations have been defended since 2010 (Zvidriņš and Bērziņš, 2019). As of September 2019, three doctoral students were enrolled in the programme all of whom were state-funded (Krūmiņš, 2019). For the fall of 2019, admission to one state-funded study place and one privately payable place was projected with the annual tuition fee of EUR 2150 (LU, 2019).

The Centre for Diaspora and Migration Research and the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology

Within the University of Latvia, two relevant units, which carry out applied research in the field, are the Centre for Diaspora and Migration Research and the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology. The Centre for Diaspora and Migration Research was established based on the initiative of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) in 2015 in order to provide support for the diaspora and remigration policy. A co-operation agreement was concluded between the MFA and the University of Latvia. Based on the agreement, the funding of around EUR 20,000 is provided annually. In 2018, this constituted slightly less than 50% of the total budget. It is a good practice example as the arrangement secures a possibility to carry out the research on a regular basis. The centre has a base budget from the MFA plus revenue from other programmes. As of August 2019, four researchers were involved in projects of the centre. (Mieriņa, 2019)

The study of migration processes is also one of the research directions of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology. The institute has been prominent in researching the communities of Latvian emigrants. According to the website of the institute six researchers used to be involved in this field of study (LU FSI, 2015). Several of them have been involved in related research activity in both the institute and the Centre for Diaspora and Migration Research. One of the recent projects of the institute is “The Study of Welfare and Social Integration in the Context of Liquid Migration: Longitudinal Approach” funded by the Latvian Council of Science (EUR 300,000 awarded in 2018) (LZP, 2018). In 2017-2018, the executive awarded funding for Latvia’s participation in the international longitudinal study on families “Generations and Gender Programme”. The institute carried out the survey “Latvia’s Families in Generations” as part of this study. (LU FSI, 2019)

State research programmes

The programmes are the state order for the execution of scientific research (Article 35 of the Scientific Activity Law). The EKOSOC-LV programme (years 2014-2017) included ten projects, among them the

project “Renewal of society through reducing the risk of depopulation, through demographic development and strengthening links with the diaspora for the transformation of the Latvian economy”. The project task included the analysis of the effectiveness of policy guidelines and the submission of proposals to enhance the effectiveness of the policy on issues related to demography, children and family policy, migration, public health and employment.¹ Led by Professor Juris Krūmiņš, the project involved altogether 16 key researchers (Rivža, 2018). Funding for the whole EKOSOC-LV programme was EUR 1,645,000 (Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija, 2015).

A new project “Towards sustainable development and inclusive society in Latvia: response to demographic and migration challenges” (DemoMig) (VPP-IZM-2018/1-0015) started in December 2018 and has the stated aim “to assess and find solutions to migration and demographic challenges in order to promote the development of a sustainable and cohesive society in Latvia”. The overall funding of the project is EUR 600,000 and its end date is November 2021. (LLU, 2019) The Geography and Earth Sciences Faculty of the University of Latvia leads the project. The state research programmes are important sources for research capacity.

In the field of demography, the contribution of the EKOSOC-LV programme has materialized primarily as exploratory research with the number and level of detail of policy recommendations varying from publication to publication.

Private think tanks

The two private think tanks whose work has been reviewed in this study have small capacity. As of 2019, CERTUS Policy Think Tank had no permanent funding source, no funds for demography or migration related projects and no full-time researcher involved in the area. As of mid-2019, the Centre for Public Policy PROVIDUS had approximately 1.5 full time equivalents of researchers in the fields of migration and integration. Promoting evidence-based policy is a key element of its mission and the organization has a long record of policy-related advocacy activities. According to the senior policy analyst of PROVIDUS Agnese Lāce donors such as the European Commission and the Society Integration Foundation in their grants include a requirement to demonstrate policy impact, engage in advocacy, e.g. present findings. Meanwhile it is allegedly difficult to attract funding for studying the local situation as, for example, EU projects require co-operation with other countries.

Public procurement

A major source for research in the field is public procurement. Below is the summary of contracting agencies and amounts paid for research reviewed in the previous chapter based on information published by the Procurement Supervision Bureau.

Study topic	Year	Contracting Agency	Contractor	Amount	EU funded
Families with many children	2013	Society Integration Foundation	Hannu - pro	LVL 150,700.00	No
The reproduction of the population	2013	State Chancellery	Projektu un kvalitātes vadība	LVL 24,806.00	Yes (100%)

¹ See the description here:

https://www.bvef.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/lu_portal/projekti/bvef/zinatne/zin_instituts/VPPprojekts524.pdf

Non-registration of marriage	2015	Cross-Sectoral Co-ordination Centre	Projektu un kvalitātes vadība	EUR 18,692.00	No
Flexible Provision of Child Supervision Service	2015	Ministry of Welfare	Projektu un kvalitātes vadība	EUR 171,000.00	Yes (co-funded)
Social cohesion policy analysis	2017	Ministry of Culture	University of Latvia	EUR 19,970.40	No
Ex-post evaluation of the state family policy	2018	Ministry of Welfare	SAFEGE Baltija	EUR 36,425.00	No

Source: Iepirkumu uzraudzības birojs, <https://www.iub.gov.lv/lv/iubsearch>

Discussion

In terms of material resources, the research capacity is generally fragmented and unstable. Although the potentially available pool of qualified professionals in the field is more stable than funding opportunities, their professional efforts may relocate depending on the kind of analytical work that is in demand.

All procured research is required to produce policy-relevant and applicable results. For example, the terms of reference for the ex-post evaluation of the Family State Policy for the Years 2011-2017 included explicitly the request to identify policy tasks to be continued and to be revoked as well as tasks to be continued with modifications. The contractor was required to provide recommendations and proposals for the development of the family state policy in the coming years including regarding goals and measurable performance indicators.² The public database of procured studies is one of the tools of dissemination for state-commissioned research (<http://petijumi.mk.gov.lv/>).

Procurement has been the quickest method for obtaining policy-relevant findings. In this way, the findings are often available less than a year since concluding the respective contract. Meanwhile funding through procurement appears to strengthen permanent research capacity only indirectly. In such projects, the role of researchers rather resembles that of consultants rather than scientists.

The doctoral programme in demography ensures continuous scientific activity of doctoral students. As such it is a key factor to maintain scientific capacity in this field. Even though the doctoral programme does not have support for policy making as its primary focus, it is important to ensure that human resources are available, which can be involved in policy related research.

The Centre for Diaspora and Migration Research could be considered a semi-permanent policy support body (think tank) with sustainable capacity largely due to its funding agreements with the MFA. Otherwise funding and the engagement of personnel is mostly project-based. According to Inta Mieriņa approx. 80% of funding for diaspora studies comes from grants gained by scientists rather than from public administration bodies. Institutional stability is also characteristic of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the University of Latvia. The advantage of permanent institutions appears to be the possibility to continuously build new analysis and research on previous work. This is a difference from procured analysis, which is often carried out as a single project and terminated upon completion with no follow up.

² See the contract here: <http://www.lm.gov.lv/upload/iepirkumi/ligums3.pdf>

3.3 Analytical capacity of the Saeima

Until relatively recent time, the analytical capacity of the Saeima was extremely low except for legal matters. MPs have been inclined to side with the opinion of the executive uncritically (Kalniņš, 2017), and expertise for evidence-based policy making has been located primarily in the government (Valtenbergs, 2015).

Analytical Service

The Analytical Service (AS) is a new unit, which has been operational since 2017. Organizationally the AS includes also the Saeima library as a sub-unit. In 2019, the AS has three staff researchers (two with doctoral degrees in political science and environmental science, one candidate for a doctoral degree in business management) and the manager (doctoral degree in political science). The remuneration-related funding of the AS (without the library) for the year 2019 is EUR 102,353. The AS has approx. EUR 22,000 allocated annually for outsourcing analytical tasks. (Grumolte-Lerhe, 2019) It is obvious that own expertise of the AS covers a small part of all issue areas where the Saeima may need expert support.

The small capacity creates the need to strictly select and prioritize topics for deeper research. This is a sensitive aspect in the work of the AS because potentially the selection of topics of analysis can be construed as unequal treatment of requests by different committees and MPs and the manifestation of political bias. Meanwhile the demand of analysis on various complex topics can easily exceed the expertise and capacity the AS staff.

According to the current procedure a Saeima committee or at least two factions (if proposal signed by 20 MPs) may propose research topics (Saeima, 2017a). Regarding each proposal the AS carries out a preliminary review to determine the feasibility of research in the context of the resources of the AS, the optimal format of analysis, and the potential need to procure data or analytical services. The proposed themes and the findings of the preliminary review are presented to the Council of Factions (the Presidium of the Saeima together with heads of factions) where the selection process follows. The Council of Factions makes decisions regarding tasks to the AS and approves the annual research plan. The procedure has been developed with the need to limit demand and apparently also to ensure certain political control over the selection in mind. In 2019, the AS began the practice of preparing brief reviews also on those topics, which were not included in the annual research plan. The Presidium approval is required regarding the specific purposes and amounts of all expenditure for outsourcing as well.

The AS has four formats of outputs: synthesis reports, comparative analyses, cost and benefit analyses, and impact assessment of law and policies. As of August 2019, the Saeima had published eight outputs of the AS: three research reports (37, 64 and 68 pages plus appendices), three synthesis reports (40, 41 and 43 pages) and two brief overviews (6-8 pages). One of the sensitive aspects of the research outputs is the evaluation of policy options and recommendations. The AS has published two materials, which are relevant for demography. The synthesis report on the role of immigration in the supply of workforce in Latvia highlights advantages and risks associated with encouraged workforce immigration. The language is carefully crafted to avoid explicit preferences for particular policy options.

“Without a balanced migration policy, the insufficiency of workforce may become one of the main obstacles for economic growth in the future.”

“The shortage of labour is a complex problem and attempts to rely on short-term solutions may not be justified. Potential directions of action include targeted involvement of problem groups in the labour market, appropriate retraining measures for the population which experiences skills mismatches with the labour market requirements, the development of a training plan for the unemployed corresponding to the demand of employers, re-emigration measures, the integration of study programmes with the labour market requirements and the stimulation of demand for relevant study and vocational education direction among young people, promotion of workplace learning, etc.” (Beizītere et al., 2018)

The review of demography policies and their contribution to the promotion of birth rate (2019) presents several examples of effective policies from foreign countries but is even more discreet as to policy recommendations along the following lines: “Demography policies generally have only a minor positive impact on the birth rate. The most favourable effect is observable when working parents receive several kinds of support: paid leave, benefits and access to childcare services. The availability of child supervision services has a positive impact on the birth rate.” (Valtenbergs, 2019) Further elaboration of scenarios and projections in cases of alternative policies could become one way for the further development of research products of the AS. The identification of some policies as obviously superior to others involves the risk of perceived political bias. However, exhaustive referencing of sources supporting the scenarios as well as allowing for a fair range of possible outcomes (rather than insistence on very specific causality between policy interventions and their effects) should mitigate the risk.

Access to certain data is also said to be a challenge for the AS. In a response to a request for this study, the MP Ilmārs Latkovskis mentioned his proposal for the AS to research how changes in laws on demographic benefits affected birth rates in different social groups to find out whether the increase in the birth rates observed in recent years took place primarily in poor and socially disadvantaged families. According to the MP protection of personal data was allegedly one of the cited reasons for a failure to actually carry out such research. In an interview, the concern was echoed by representatives of the AS: “Another problem area is how we access data. In one of the topics of this year, we found that databases of several agencies cannot be linked as needed in order to answer a request by MPs. Access should be easier. This concerns data on individual level, which are accumulated as data sets.” It is argued that additional investment would be necessary to ensure the security of the requested personal data during processing at the AS.

The Saeima and the AS are still in search for the proper role of the service. In February 2019, representatives of the AS talked about the changing philosophy of the Saeima Presidium regarding the work of the unit: “The research philosophy changes with a greater focus on brief reports for MPs, smaller format, synthetic. The idea is to have a more active link with legislative proceedings... There are unclarified questions, for example, if the work shall be carried out proactively or upon request, only regarding proposed legislation or also regarding other topics.” Until 2019 the AS was seen as a source of relatively lengthy and in-depth studies according to annual plans with little connection with the everyday needs of committees and factions. In addition to publications, provision of brief consultations also can be a useful form of support for MPs. In an interview for this study, an MP described as good practice a situation when he made an inquiry with the AS regarding diaspora-related matters. The AS did not carry out research of its own but found recent existing research. Overall the importance of a parliamentary research entity still appears underestimated among MPs even if not many MPs would deny such importance directly.

Library

The library has eight staff positions. It stores a collection of books and other materials. The library compiles information upon request of MPs but is not expected to provide in-depth expertise of its own.

Legal Bureau

The Legal Bureau (LB) plays a major role in ensuring the legal quality of the Saeima decisions. The LB reviews all submitted draft laws from the point of view of the constitution and international obligations, legal technique and codification as well as prepares the Saeima responses in cases reviewed by the Constitutional Court. According to the Rules of Procedure of the Saeima the LB can officially submit proposals for amending draft laws or decisions with regard to the legal technique or codification. The advisors participate at numerous committee meetings. A particular advisor is typically assigned for work with a particular committee. As the MP Vita Anda Tērauda accounts, “the Bureau gets involved when it sees a need. The Bureau says – tell us what you want and we will place it in a legal form”.

As of August 2019, the LB has 15 staff positions (12 of them are legal advisors, two are the management – the head and the deputy head). The LB’s monthly remuneration budget is EUR 32 933 (this constitutes approx. EUR 400,000 annually). The LB’s competence does not include involvement in policy development and the impact assessment of adopted legislation (Meistere, 2019)

Committees

The job description of a committee consultant includes several analytical tasks such as the analysis of one or several sectors of responsibility, the legal, economic and financial evaluation of legal acts, proposals, national positions, state audit reports, the evaluation and analysis of information about the effectiveness of legal acts and actions of officials, the preparation of reports and information for the committee leadership on the implementation of policy in the sector of responsibility, etc. (Saeima, 2019b) Below is an overview of staffing with consultants in four committees of particular relevance for this study: Defence, Internal Affairs and Corruption Prevention; Budget and Finance (Taxation); Social and Employment Matters; Citizenship, Migration and Social Cohesion.

Committee	Position	Number of staff	Level of education						Field of higher education
			General secondary	Bachelor’s	Professional Bachelor’s	Other higher	Master’s	Professional Master’s	
Defence...	Senior consultant	1						1	Law; Philology; Public administration; Chemistry
	Consultant	4				1		3	
Budget...	Senior consultant	1					1		Economics; Law; Political Science
	Consultant	3	1	1				1	
Social...	Senior consultant	1					1		Law; Philology; Sociology and political science
	Consultant	3		1		1		1	
Citizenship...	Consultant	1			1		1		Law

Source: Saeima, 2019b

With exceptions, consultants of committees are generally not regarded as sources of expertise. None of the staff members of the committees have academic degrees from foreign education institutions. This cannot be taken as an indication of low qualification of the consultants. However, in combination with the absence of doctoral degree, it is *prima facie* evidence that the position is not envisaged for high-level academic experts.

In interviews, the former chairperson of the Social and Employment Matters Committee and the current chairperson of the Budget and Finance (Taxation) committee described primarily administrative tasks carried out by the committee consultants. Similar were the answers of two MPs from the Demography Subcommittee of the Budget and Finance (Taxation) Committee in the 12th parliamentary period. However, the situation may differ from consultant to consultant. The MP Andrejs Judins described the consultant of the Citizenship, Migration and Social Cohesion: “This is a case where a consultant knows matters... This is a case where an individual has been working from the very beginning at the committee. He can educate me on issues. He knows the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs very well, issues related to citizenship... He helps me not to make errors... Some consultants can perform substantive tasks, some can perform only technical tasks.” According to the MP Vita Anda Tērauda five knowledgeable consultants work at the European Affairs Committee. A typical form of their work is providing informal notes to the Chairperson. `

Every year the Saeima Presidium allocates small funding to committees for procuring contracted work. The Defence, Internal Affairs and Corruption Prevention; Budget and Finance (Taxation); and Social and Employment Matters each had an annual amount of EUR 805 (years 2014-2015)/ EUR 860 (years 2016-2019) for such purposes. The Citizenship, Migration and Social Cohesion Committee had EUR 282 (years 2014-2015) and EUR 300 (years 2016-2019). The amounts are too small for any larger analytical task. According to information provided by the Saeima, the Budget and Finance (Taxation) Committee and the Citizenship, Migration and Social Cohesion Committee never used these amounts during the said years. The Defence, Internal Affairs and Corruption Prevention Committee and the Social and Employment Matters used the funding to outsource some analytical and consultant tasks in 2014 (the social matters committee also in 2015). (Saeima, 2019b)

Assistants of MPs

This study did not obtain any evidence of a systematic use of assistants of MPs for collecting policy-relevant evidence within the fields related to demography or other. This does not mean that no MP requests such kind of support from his/her assistant. The individual character of support provided by the assistants attached to individual MPs complicates gaining a general overview about their roles.

Discussion

The Saeima has a grossly inferior analytical capacity compared with the executive. While this is a common phenomenon in many parliamentary systems, it also causes concern regarding the Saeima’s ability to screen executive policy initiatives critically and fully carry out parliamentary oversight regarding the government.

The analytical capacity of the Saeima is below the minimum level, which could be expected in an active parliament. Such minimum level could be at least a dedicated analyst assigned for work with each legislative committee, perhaps with the exception of the Legal Committee due to the existing legal

expertise in the Saeima. Most of the interviewed MPs described the current situation as a fact of life, recognized the need to strengthen the capacity but meanwhile without high urgency. For some of the MPs, possibilities to obtain evidence from the executive compensate the low level of the Saeima capacity. In the case of one MP, he was able to tap directly into the resources of the executive by managing the Demographic Affairs Centre, which had an employee assigned to it.

The advisors and analysts of the Saeima are generally not expected to carry out analysis upon own initiative. Thus, there is no regular practice for alerting MPs on prospective challenges and potential policy opportunities, which have not been already identified by the MPs themselves.

3.4 Parliamentary research services – international experience

Parliamentary research services (PRS) have been receiving increasing attention internationally. Notably, in 2015, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions published their Guidelines for parliamentary research services. The Guidelines cover several themes in a comprehensive manner from reasons for establishing a research service to the modalities of the work such as quality control. (IPU and IFLA, 2015) This chapter provides a brief insight into European trends of developing parliamentary services. After a general overview, several examples of parliamentary research services follow. A comprehensive review of all relevant aspects would be impossible in this brief chapter. Therefore, regarding the individual cases, selected themes of particular relevance in debates about the AS of the Saeima are covered, namely, the capacity of research services and the characteristics of their products. Since this review is based on desk research alone, the scope, format, and the level of detail of information on particular services depends on available publications and is not entirely uniform.

There is a great diversity of PRSs. The Sustainable Governance Indicators of the Bertelsmann Stiftung provide a comparative glimpse into parliamentary research capacity across 41 EU and OECD countries. An example of high capacity is the German Bundestag, whose members “can conduct their own research or obtain information from independent experts. The parliamentary library and the parliamentary research unit respectively have staffs of 175 and 450 individuals. Every MP receives a monetary allowance (about €16,000 per month) allowing him or her to maintain two offices and employ, on average, two experts. [...] Parliamentary groups also have resources to commission independent research studies.” In contrast, the capacity is found to be smaller in Estonia where analysts of the research department provide advice, prepare information sheets and reports. “Because of budget and personnel limitations (12 advisers in total), studies are typically very small. In addition to in-house experts, the national parliament can also commission studies from universities or private companies on a public-procurement basis. In 2016 and 2017, two studies of this kind were performed, fewer than in previous periods.” Moreover, there are administrative staff of permanent committees and parliamentary groups’ political advisers. MPs also have monthly allowances, which can be used for ordering analysis, studies or other information materials. According to this survey, there are still several parliaments with no real research units. (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2018) An earlier study found great variations of staff numbers worldwide from one (Algeria, Barbados, Burundi, Cameroon, Dominica, Iran, Jamaica, Micronesia, Mozambique, Namibia, Peru, Rwanda, Senegal, Sudan, Syria and Trinidad and Tobago) to 444 (the US Library of the Congress) (Pelizzo, Stapenhurst and Miller, 2004).

A key issue for PRSs is whose requests the unit shall service. To a large extent this is what determines all or a significant part of the research agenda of a PRS. A study of the National Democratic Institute on the

development of PRSs in Central Europe reviewed, among other things, who can request support. The findings are summarized in the below table.

	Czechia	Hungary	Poland	Slovakia	Slovenia
Deputies	X		X	X	X
Committees	X (and other authorities)	X	X	X	X
Factions, groups		X	X		X
Parliamentary leadership			X		
Chancellery, administration bodies			X	X	X

Committees are particularly important co-operation partners for some of the PRSs:

Hungary: “The Information Service for MPs provides special services for committees. Every information specialist from the staff of the department – based on their educational background – is responsible for serving one of the standing committees. They support the committee’s legislative and government-controlling functions with different background materials, such as regular media-reviews on the topic of the committee’s field of responsibility; issues for regular and pre-election hearings, media reviews and/or analyses on bills or hot topics that are on the agenda.”

Slovakia: “Committees are entitled to request information from the Parliamentary Institute. One form of cooperation between PRIS [parliamentary research and information service] and committees is providing them information – either on request or proactively according to the bills that are being discussed by the committee. Experts from the Parliamentary Institute attend the committees’ meetings (according to their specialisation) and provide the expert background for MPs.” (NDI, 2013)

A study of PRSs in the Austrian, Hellenic and Serbian parliaments found that the Greek service did not respond to requests by MPs while the Serbian service did (Fitsilis and Koutsogiannis, 2017). Generally, it could be assumed that PRSs with rather limited resources may have to focus on servicing committees while PRSs with more abundant resources are able to provide services to each individual MP who so requests.

The study of the National Democratic Institute also revealed a variety in the services and products provided by PRSs:

- **Czechia:** expert consultations, education and training services (seminars, study visits);
- **Hungary:** information packages and infosheets upon request and approx. 50 general background materials per year upon own initiative, regular media reviews upon request of a faction or a committee, analyses on current policy topics and themes of certain bills on proactive basis or by the orders of party factions or committees;
- **Poland:** opinions on draft legal acts, assistance to parliamentary committees, answers to MPs’ requests, comparative and interdisciplinary analyses, seminars and conferences;

- **Slovakia:** parliamentary studies on selected topics and, on request, comparisons with other countries' legislation or with historical legislation, answers to questions received from MPs, materials for state budget debates, training sessions and seminars, etc.;
- **Slovenia:** research papers³ upon request (by deputies, deputy groups, working bodies, the plenary, and the Secretary General) or own initiative, regular reports on the work of the National Assembly. (NDI, 2013)

The Austrian PRS has the primary task to provide legal advice in administrative and procedural questions, the Greek PRS prepares legal reports on bills and law proposals, while the Serbian PRS primarily produces research documents (such as analytical overview or background dossier of domestic and EU law) and other knowledge products (Fitsilis and Koutsogiannis, 2017). Obviously, the full spectrum of the services of a PRS can be broad and vary in terms of scope (legal only or multi-disciplinary analysis), length of written products (short briefings or lengthy reports), nature of support (background research or *ad hoc* support for legislative work), forms of communication and engagement (written materials or debates and training), time perspective (ex-ante foresight or ex-post evaluation), etc. Depending on resources, demand and other factors, virtually any combination of services is possible.

3.4.1 Estonia

There are two units of relevance for this study in the Parliament of Estonia (Riigikogu). The Legal and Analytical Department of the Riigikogu advises MPs, the leadership of the parliament, committees, factions and parliamentary servants to enable knowledge-based debate (Riigikogu, 2019b). The Foresight Centre is a think tank for analysing long-term developments in the society and economy at the Chancellery of the Riigikogu established in 2016 (Riigikogu, 2019a).

The Legal and Analytical Department is a structural unit of the Chancellery. The Head of the Department is appointed and dismissed by the Head of the Chancellery upon proposal of the Deputy Head of the Chancellery and in accord with the Riigikogu leadership (Riigikogu, 2016). The Foresight Council consisting of recognised experts approves the foresight action plan, supervises the Foresight Centre, gives approval to the employment and release of the head of centre. The action plan shall be coordinated with the Economic Affairs Committee of the Riigikogu before submission for approval to the Council. The Foresight Centre operates based on a separate law. (Riigikogu, 2018a)

Capacity

According to the contact list of the Riigikogu, the Legal and Analytical Department has 10 staff members (the head, the deputy head, seven advisors and one consultant). (Riigikogu, n.d.). A half of the staff provide legal advice, two advisers – advice on mainly economic matters, and one – on social matters (Sillajõe, 2019). The capacity appears modest considering the broad mandate of the department, which includes advising on legal, parliamentary control, economic, social, public administration and other matters as well as assisting in drafting legislation and analysing draft legislative acts submitted to the Riigikogu (Riigikogu, 2018b). The Foresight Centre has eight employees: the head (a degree in economics), the head of research (economics), three experts (degrees in applied mathematics and strategic management, technology

³ “DP - documentation with summaries (selected materials from different information sources with brief summaries of the content); - PO - data (more complex expert data, additionally edited, commented, selected and accompanied by charts, etc.); - IN - general information - brief outline of the selected issue; - PP - comparative review (review of arrangements in various EU Member States and other countries); - AN - study - analysis.” (NDI, 2013)

governance and policy and programme evaluation, economics modelling and public economy), a project manager (degrees in public administration and financial management), a communications specialist (degree in Estonian language and culture) and a consultant (a degree in linguistics and language editing). The profiles of the experts reflect a key focus on economics (Riigikogu, 2019c). Moreover, the Foresight Centre engages 17 external experts.

Products

The products of the Legal and Analytical Department include:

- Answers, short studies and analyses upon request by MPs, committees, factions and staff (approx. 430 requests per year). 32 studies of the years 2012-2015 had been published on the Riigikogu website (removed in the course of 2019). For example, a study “Impact of Child Benefits on Fertility (in other countries)” was published on 8 May 2015. The study was six pages long. It started with two particular questions. In the first chapter, it reviewed statistics on the birth rate of indigenous and immigrant populations in selected countries. The second chapter reviewed the influence of birth grants and family policy on the birth rate of immigrant population. The third chapter reviewed the outlook for Estonia regarding the population age and timing of birth. A review of source materials and references formed about a half of the material and included not only titles and links but also brief descriptions of their findings;
- Information and expert opinions on draft acts;
- Themes leaflets approx. 20 times a year on own the initiative of the Department in order to introduce issues of importance and topical societal problems in the parliamentary work. Approximately 150 themes leaflets have been published, for example, “Estonian population situation after the migration crisis” published on 30 January 2019 (4 pages) (Mängel, 2019);
- Commissioned research (often these are longer reports) and expert opinions from research centres and universities, often upon proposal of committees. 55 commissioned studies and expertise reports from the years 2002-2019 (recently one to three per year) had been published as of 30 April 2019.
- Work on the Yearbook of the Riigikogu and the Statistics Collection of the Riigikogu. (Riigikogu, 2019e; Sillajõe, 2019)

The products of the Foresight Centre include:

- Scenarios (governance and e-government 70 pages, productivity development 85 pages, labour market trends and scenarios 88 pages);
- Commissioned studies. For example, a study on migration trends in the world, Europe and Estonia was authored by Kristi Anniste of the think tank Praxis Centre in 2018. The paper features brief general considerations, which should be taken into account in Estonia’s migration policy. It refers to the need for highly qualified immigrants in Estonia and notes that migration policies are expected to become more conducive to immigration from third countries in the near future (Anniste, 2018);
- Newsletter articles (five per month in 2019);
- Articles by recognised Estonian experts;
- Articles in the media by employees of the Foresight Centre (Riigikogu, 2019d).

3.4.2 Lithuania

The Research Unit of the parliament of Lithuania (Seimas) is situated within the Information and Communication Department. In its current form, the Unit was established in 2015. However, services for systemising and analysing information in the Seimas were already set up at the beginning of 1990. The Unit has 11 staff members (Seimas, 2019).

Products

The Research Unit serves MPs and the employees of the Office of the Seimas. In exceptional cases and upon authorization by the Secretary General of the Seimas, the Unit also answers requests from institutions, NGOs and individuals. In recent years, the Unit has been receiving approx. 120 requests annually. The Head of the Unit describes co-operation with requesting parties as follows:

“Receiving requests and communication with persons making requests are important aspects in the activities of the Research Unit. In formal terms of legal framework and administrative culture, the service cannot decline any request that comes from a person entitled to submit it. However, the service enjoys the freedom of negotiating the content (questions) and the deadlines of a request with a person having submitted it. The goal is to communicate and cooperate with a person as closely and intensively as possible from the moment of submitting a request. It often happens that a person essentially changes the questions in his/her enquiry after having discussed it with the staff of the service. Thus, the very strategy for realisation of a person’s idea may change. That is largely a key to success when completing an enquiry and achieving common objectives in parliamentary work.”

The staff of the Unit also produces certain research upon own initiative with a view of the needs of information users and the relevance of developments. The products of the Unit vary from a few pages (Relevant Information and Current Issues on legislative, foreign affairs, etc.) to extensive analytical reviews of 20–30 or more pages. Approx. 70 per cent of the research papers focus on comparative law matters, with an increase in the number of inquiries on economic, social and health issues during recent years. (Lukošaitis. 2018)

3.4.3 Germany

The Scientific Services of the German Bundestag represent an information centre that assists and advises Members of the Bundestag. They exist as a separate unit since 1964. The key rationale of the Scientific Services is to provide counterbalance to the informational and expertise superiority of the executive and support parliamentarians with scientific backing in the form of data, facts and analyses.

Capacity

The Scientific Services feature ten expert areas, which relate to the structure of parliamentary committees and federal ministries. The Scientific Services have about 100 employees of whom about 65 are referents (senior non-managerial staff). About half of the referents are lawyers. (Deutscher Bundestag, 2018)

Products

Since 1997, the staff position “Hotline W”, subordinate to the Manager of the Department W, accepts tasks from MPs and parliamentary committees. “Hotline W” advises the giver of the task, consults with the expert areas regarding their competence and transfers the tasks to the respective areas. The “Hotline

W” itself answers around 50% of the requests. Most works of the Scientific Services are based on tasks given by individual MPs. (Deutscher Bundestag, 2018) Under pressing circumstances, a task can be rejected if otherwise the execution of other works would be inadequately affected. In an exceptional case, a task can be outsourced to a scientific institution or a scientist (Deutscher Bundestag, 2016a).

The Scientific Services support MPs with analysis, specialist information and expert opinions. The formats are elaborations (*Ausarbeitungen*), state-of-affairs summaries (*Sachstände*), documentations, brief information (*Kurzinformationen*), expert contributions (*Fachbeiträge*), and „active information”.

- Elaborations are deeper inquiries into particular issues or thematic areas. They vary in length from five to approx. thirty/forty pages. For example, the elaboration from 2 July 2015 reviews strategies to increase fertility in selected countries (20 pages) and represents a review of current research (OECD and other). The document finishes with a summary of findings without explicit recommendations. (Deutscher Bundestag, 2016b)
- State-of-affairs summaries present essential data and facts on certain themes or theme areas with possible annexes.
- “Documentations” are short compilations of references and links to literature, media articles, or regulations. They usually provide brief summaries on each source (or on the whole theme) without conclusions and recommendations.
- Brief information is mostly orally provided information (in presence or via telephone), for which conversation notes are prepared.
- Expert contributions are texts for the publications of the Bundestag.
- “Active information” is the series “Topical Concept”, “Info-Brief” and “Europa” presenting facts in compressed or detailed forms. (Deutscher Bundestag, 2018)

All works of the Scientific Services are published on-line after a period of four weeks since delivery to the task giver without disclosing the task giver and the author.

3.4.4 United Kingdom

Several units within the Parliament of the United Kingdom support MPs and Lords with evidence. Thus, the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) provides scientific evidence to both Houses of Parliament. The POST is overseen by a board of 14 parliamentarians, 4 non-parliamentary members from the science and technology community, five ex-officio staff members (UK Parliament, n.d.b). The House of Commons and the House of Lords libraries also support members with research and information. Other units of the parliament also have expert staff who assist the parliamentary business in various ways. Moreover, open calls for evidence represent proactive efforts to obtain evidence relevant for committees. As of 1 May 2019, 67 calls for evidence were posted (UK Parliament, 2019a). Guidance on written submissions to select and public bill committees has been published.

Capacity

The relatively modest human resources capacity of the POST consists of the head, eight scientific advisers, a science communication manager, two knowledge exchange managers, and a team manager (UK Parliament, n.d.c). The capacity of the libraries is far greater with around 150 staff members at the House of Commons Library (unofficial figure) and more than 30 staff members at the House of Lords Library (Greenhead, 2009).

Products

The POST provides a multitude of services:

- advice on research evidence related to public policy issues, provided in oral form (for example, briefings to select committees relevant to their inquiries) or as *ad hoc* peer reviewed briefings,
- analysis in the form of summaries of academic and other research findings placed in a policy context, often published as peer reviewed POSTnotes,
- horizon scanning regarding trends in science, technology, society and policy as well as their implications. (UK Parliament, n.d.a)

The POST produces several types of publications, among them POSTnotes and POSTbriefs:

- POSTnotes: "...four-page summaries of public policy issues. These are based on reviews of the research literature and interviews with stakeholders from across academia, industry, government and the third sector. They are also peer reviewed by external experts. POSTnotes are often produced proactively, so that parliamentarians have advance knowledge of key issues before they reach the top of the political agenda." (UK Parliament, 2019c)
- POSTbriefs: "...responsive policy briefings based on mini-literature reviews and peer reviews." (UK Parliament, 2019b) The briefs can be around ten pages long.

The POST has studied the use of research evidence within parliamentary proceedings as well as the impact of the POST. A key finding of the study was that parliamentarians generally did not distinguish between different types of research and this could affect how data obtained in different ways are interpreted. Nearly all surveyed MPs and staff members agreed or strongly agreed that research was useful to them in their work. Of the types of research, MPs and their staff used statistics most frequently and parliamentary staff used expert opinion most frequently. The purposes of using research were varied and included: to support scrutiny and to inform policy, to provide background knowledge, to inform opinions, to substantiate pre-existing views or hypotheses, to provide balance (the view from two different sides), to provide credibility and enhance public image, to score political points (highlight weaknesses in an opponent's argument). (Kenny et al., 2017)

The House of Commons Library publishes:

- Research briefings, which are comprehensive and detailed publications. These reports can vary between a few tens and a few hundred pages. For example, the briefing paper "Arranging and paying for a funeral" (Number 06242, 30 April 2019) has 14 pages. The paper reviews several aspects of the current situations (for example, who should arrange a funeral and what does a funeral cost). The brief does not review any future policy options or scenarios. The briefing paper "Home education in England" (Number 5108, 12 April 2019) has 30 pages. The brief reviews the current position relative to the right and responsibilities related to education at home, past and current proposals for reform, and issues and concerns raised by various parties. The briefing paper "Migration Statistics" (Number SN06077, 11 December 2018) has 37 pages and provides data on various migration flows to and from the UK and to and from other EU countries as well as migrant populations. The briefing paper "What if there's no Brexit deal?" (Number 08397, 8 February 2019) is lengthier (245 pages). The brief reviews the current situation (how no deal could happen and what preparations are undertaken by the UK government and European Union) and the

possible effects on a variety of sectors – governance, economy, trade, customs, Northern Ireland and the Irish border, etc. (UK Parliament, 2019d) The briefs are carefully referenced and their authors refrain from own conclusions;

- Insight articles, which give timely information on current issues. They are brief contributions published online;
- Dashboards – interactive online publications that present statistical data on constituencies and local areas.

3.4.5 European Parliament

The European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) provides MEPs and parliamentary committees with “independent, objective and authoritative analysis of, and research on, policy issues relating to the European Union, in order to assist them in their parliamentary work” (EPRS, n.d.). The EPRS was established in 2013 and serves both individual members and parliamentary committees (Christie, 2014).

Capacity

According to the World Directory of Library and Research Services for Parliaments the European Parliamentary Research Service has 321 staff members (includes library service; information updated as of 13 February 2018) (WDLRSP, 2018). Thus, the number of staff is nearly one for every two Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). The Members’ Research Service (one of three main divisions of the EPRS) had 82 policy analysts and 28 information specialists at the end of 2017 (¹European Parliament, 2018).

Products

The EPRS is expected to address requests of individual MEPs along with those of committees, etc. Between 2014 and 2017, the EPRS has answered more than 11,400 requests from around 91% of individual MEPs, carried out targeted research work for 17 committees, handled more than 78,000 reference requests from the parliament and 230,000 enquiries of citizens. By the end of 2017, the EPRS had produced some 3,700 publications. (European Parliament, 2018)

The EPRS publishes five types of documents of different size: ‘At a Glance’ (1-2 pages), briefings (3-10 pages), in-depth analyses (11-36 pages), studies (37 and more pages), and EU Fact Sheets. A search on the website of the EPRS found 35 documents with the keyword phrase ‘demographic analysis’ and 17 documents with the keyword ‘demography’ (as of 21 June 2019). There are also other information products such as ‘EU Legislation in progress’, which analyse the progress of substantial European legislative proposals, and ‘Topical Digests’ covering publications on EU policy issues. This summary does exhaust the outputs of the EPRS but should suffice as evidence of the comprehensive and resource-demanding mandate of the service.

Discussion

PRs fulfil more than a mere advisory role for their parliaments, parliamentary committees and individual MPs. Seen in a broader perspective, they can be vital in ensuring an active link between the science and research community and the legislature. Hence, one of the features of several services are institutionalized arrangements for the involvement of outside experts in boards, councils or advisory panels. Such outside involvement both enriches the resource base of the PRS and serves as a means to ensure certain substantive independence of the services, which institutionally are often subject to the

parliamentary administrative and/or political leadership. A degree of independence is important. PRSs are not expected to step on a polemic path with any MPs, party groups or committees. Nevertheless, a PRS should not be subject to pressures that would compel it to report only pleasing findings to powerful politicians.

Generally, the larger the PRS, the more comprehensive its services. The gold standard for serving MPs could be a service where each MP may direct any reasonable enquiry and receive a response adjusted to the nature of the enquiry from half an hour of oral explanations to an in-depth study of tens of pages like, for example, in the German Bundestag. The response must be as quick as possible so that it remains relevant given the flow of issues and decisions on the MP's agenda. Moreover, a PRS can also serve the broader public, for example, by assisting MPs in their communication with citizens. The smaller the PRS, the more attention it has to pay to prioritizing business. Probably that's a key reason why for some PRSs serving committees is the priority task.

Most likely beyond the possibilities of small and underresourced PRSs, another element of the gold standard of a modern PRS could be the production of digital services from podcasts and videos to interactive online information graphs. These can be particularly useful for reflecting complicated matters in an easily accessible manner like, for example, the Legislative Train Schedule of the EPRS (<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/>).

PRSs are not the only arrangements for supplying research-based evidence for parliamentarians. Committee proceedings are standard routes for obtaining such information in most parliaments. Specialized support units or organizations may support decision makers on matters in specific fields, for example, the Office of Technology Assessment is an independent scientific institution to advise the German Bundestag on matters related to research and technology. The UK MP-scientist pairing scheme each year pairs 30 research scientists with parliamentarians and civil servants who spend time together at the parliament and the research institutions (The Royal Society, 2019). Parliaments set up expert advisory boards for the investigation and debate on specific issues. Clearly parliaments and other stakeholders design and implement such forms of support for policy-making processes with consideration to the characteristics of the national context, resources and needs.

4 Demand

MPs are the main actors in parliamentary decision-making. Thorough understanding of their needs is a necessary condition for strengthening evidence-based policy making in the legislature. There is a fairly common perception that MPs are not very interested in research-based evidence especially when the evidence would challenge their policy preference. This chapter aims to explore nuances of the demand for research-based evidence including unsatisfied needs as expressed by the MPs. The chapter relies mostly on the material from interviews with MPs and researchers. Such data have a reliability limitation since the interviewees may express their bias or provide socially desirable answers instead of revealing their authentic attitudes. For example, some MPs may express greater interest in evidence than they really have. However, the method is still legitimate since it is not the purpose of qualitative interviews to provide any quantitative assessments. Rather they serve to identify what aspects of the demand and its satisfaction are found problematic or otherwise significant by at least some of the stakeholders.

4.1 Demand as expressed by MPs

MPs were asked what kinds of research-based evidence they need and in what forms. This covered the kinds of evidence inputs that they have received as well as those that they believe are insufficient or absent altogether.

Background information

MPs are generally interested in hearing research findings concerning the fields of legislation where they work. The apparent purpose of hearing such information for MPs is to increase their general awareness regarding issues and challenges in particular sectors. The MPs do not necessarily expect such inputs to be linked to particular draft laws or other decisions. The presentations take place most of all in committees and sub-committees, which are not directly responsible for legislative proceedings.

“In this committee [Citizenship, Migration and Social Cohesion], it seems to me that every fourth meeting is devoted to analysis from some research. This is a usual format. Researchers come, present. But it should be noted that this committee is not a legislative committee. This means that, as a result, we are not drafting a new bill. Often, this helps the members to better understand issues, not directly but indirectly it affects the outcome. Whenever there are researchers present, there are many questions, requests to explain. But it is impossible to measure the result, the extent to which it influences the members' thinking and ultimately leads to some sort of amendments. I can't measure it. But, when talking about the presentation of research, I see respect, I see interest. In my opinion, it has some impact.

When it comes to migration, it must be taken into account that researchers do not usually come to us with proposals to change the law and make specific changes. Often, they provide information that there is such a situation, a problem, and one should pay attention, plus perhaps information that in one country they dealt with it this way, in another country there are other approaches. Research in this area most often provides background information. This gives some assurance in making decisions. There is a possibility to refer to experience, knowledge.” (Andrejs Judins)

Support in relation to ongoing legislative proceedings

MPs also express interest in research-based evidence, which relates directly to and would support particular legislative proceedings. Such evidence is expected to include relevant background information, data on circumstances and policies in other countries, cost-benefit analysis regarding certain policy options, etc.

“I suggested to use the capacity of the Analytical Service to support the movement of draft laws. If the Service supported the work on the draft Media Law, it would be possible to request background information, data on other countries, cost-benefit analysis. We could ask for a critical view when the ministry has a particular stance but we would like to hear another opinion. The Service would be assigned to processes rather than be ordered a paper.” (Vita Anda Tērauda)

The MP Marija Golubeva described an example, which, although unrelated to demography, nevertheless reflects the situation of an MP relative to the need to participate in policy making on particular issues:

“[We deliberate] laws on veterinary medicine and animal protection... I see that we deliberate only based on the current legal regulation, personal views and lobbyists... I do not see analytical materials on the way other countries regulate animal welfare [in breeding pets for commercial purposes]... I do not see an analytical review, neither from the Ministry of Agriculture, nor from any other side. I myself would like to come to the committee with such a review but I do not have it and, as a deputy, I do not have time to research and compare.”

At least some requests to the AS reflect MPs’ needs related to particular initiatives. Thus, according to its former chairperson (Aija Barča), the Social and Employment Matters Committee proposed for the AS analysis on service pensions and all types of benefits paid from the state budget (such as the state social security allowance for handicapped children) within the context European experience. The requests were related to legislative proposals that the committee would have to potentially consider.

Policy analysis and evaluation

MPs who engage in developing certain policies may need the analysis of past and current domestic and foreign policies.

“...a researcher of Swedbank ... had a study comparing family support policies in the Baltic countries. It was one of the first sources I picked up and then, of course, I added information. She came to the Demography Sub-committee and presented what she had found.⁴ ... I have found a number of defended doctoral or master’s theses containing studies which were useful both for reasoning and as expert assessment at the Demography Sub-committee.” (Imants Parādnieks)

Ex-post evaluation, i.e. the analysis of the implementation and effectiveness of adopted laws and policies is also a perceived need.

“Often there is no time for research. A study will establish some facts for me already with delay. Studies also are necessary in order to find out whether what we adopted based on conviction and belief was a good decision or whether it shall be corrected. It would be most important to have an institute, which would measure the contribution of one or another support mechanism.” (Imants Parādnieks)

“The two tasks that the Social and Labour Committee of the 12th Saeima developed [for the AS] aimed at assessing the situation at that time and the state of affairs in other European Union countries. The next thing needed is evaluation after draft laws have become laws and been implemented for some time, ex-post analysis to assess whether the law delivered something or not.” (Aija Barča)

Evidence supporting a stance

One of the reasons why MPs are interested in policy analysis is the possibility to obtain supporting evidence for their initiatives.

⁴ The Director of Swedbank Private Persons’ Finance Institute Ieva Use-Cimmermane participated at a meeting of the Demography Sub-committee on 3 September 2013.

“If we could study, once we have implemented a pilot project that I propose in some local government, what the results were, that would be a fantastic confirmation that such programme works. Otherwise I have to speak dry mouth with countless responsible individuals to invite to do something like that but what’s the point? I cannot prove that it works. It is my conviction that it works, as a person I can testify why, in my opinion, it could work... Research is acutely needed in many areas... in order to convince or affirm some of policy instruments.” (Imants Parādnieks)

“I asked the people of the Bank of Latvia to send how they made their calculations. If we would improve the demographic situation and achieve the best indicators in Europe, some 1.9 or close to two children on average per woman, what would be the effect in financial and economic terms? This is vital to convince the Ministry of Finance and politicians that this or that support mechanism or instrument should be introduced as an investment in the future with a confirmation that it is desirable not only subjectively, but also somewhat objectively.” (Imants Parādnieks)

Outside expertise

MPs are aware of the limited analytical resources of the Saeima including the AS. One mentioned solution would be more extensive and systematic outsourcing.

“Own capacity of the Analytical Service would never be sufficient. Three to four staff members will never cover the whole area... One idea is the method used by the European Parliament, which tenders research services. Providers who win are expected to provide experts upon request. The tender is a pre-qualification process. (Vita Anda Tērauda)

Expertise from the executive

MPs commonly refer to evidence supplied by the executive (ministries). At least MPs of the governing coalitions tend to rely on such evidence or even actively involve executive agencies in order to secure evidence.

“Of course, we have always used the strength of civil servants. We have called for different types of calculations for each proposal... There are many different proposals and then there is always the committee's decision to send these specific proposals to both the Ministry of Welfare and the Ministry of Finance. ...we sometimes see small differences between the calculations made by Ministry of Welfare and the Ministry of Finance... We start the discussion where you got these calculations. Why is there a difference between the two?” (Aija Barča)

Such practice is reflected also in some of the interviews with researchers.

“Why so few [MPs] request the analytical support? ... There is more co-operation between the executive and researchers. Ministries or other institutions order much more research. Probably the legislature takes into account this research, they listen to ministry servants who have already considered research, maybe therefore the Saeima believes that everything has already been accomplished.” (Agnese Lāce)

“...the parliament relies a lot on the resources of the executive. The parliament trusts the information that [the executive] prepares... If there is a legal unclarity, they usually ask the Legal Bureau, request to formulate something. If facts are missing, the invited agencies or ministries are usually given a task to search answers to the questions.” (Iveta Kažoka)

Effective presentation

Research reports and similar extensive materials have limitations in reaching a larger number of MPs except a few who focus on specific matters and develop expert-like roles in their policy making positions. Some MPs acknowledge the need for evidence to be presented as catch phrases and visual presentations.

“One must find a catch that captivates, that remains in mind, that is the main string. For example, Ieva Use-Cimmermane's main message was that the support in Estonia is significantly higher, but in Lithuania it is significantly lower, that we do not have everything bad but have the opportunity to grow. In turn, Viola Korpa's key message with regard to reconciliation with the working life was that it was especially important for ensuring a full-fledged family life, including for large families. This is a policy where it is particularly necessary to invest, especially to make sure that especially a mum can devote herself to her children as well as ensure her professional growth.” (Imants Parādnieks)

The very need to use research evidence arguably needs to be presented effectively.

“[Scientists] must be prepared... to help define why they are needed in the respective sector and area. To tell that it is cool to make scientifically grounded decisions is only a Twitter phrase. Better to explain, hey, I could help you with this and that. To figure out how to tell it to this person who is in the parliament perhaps by chance.” (Mārtiņš Bondars)

One of the interviewed MPs mentioned a possibility to present visual information to the plenary as a preferable tool, which is currently not available.

Discussion

MPs generally appreciate the significance of research-based evidence in decision making. The small number of interviews preclude far-reaching generalizations. The observations represent basis for forming hypotheses, which could be tested in further quantitative surveys of MPs. Among these observations, two are related to aspects, which MPs do not mention when responding to open questions about their need for evidence.

One observation is that MPs do not express a particular preference for data obtained by scientific methods (for example, replicable surveys or experiments) and appear equally willing to consider all evidence of some apparent reliability. MPs committed to developing certain policies are keen to draw upon presentations, particular calculations, graphs, effectively presented messages, which are *prima facie* credible especially when they confirm views espoused by the respective politicians. Thus research-based evidence always is seen in the context of all other kinds of evidence, especially evidence provided by the executive.

Another observation is the lack of willingness to see researchers as lobbyists. Generally there are no signs that the MPs would like the pool of lobbyists extending. In other words, among MPs there is little eagerness to see researchers as agents making impact for the advantage of a set political agenda. The

interest is in receiving evidence rather than being subject to pressure. A review of the minutes of the Budget and Finance (Taxation), the Defence, Internal Affairs and Corruption Prevention, and the Social and Employment Matters Committees shows extensive presence of stakeholders from executive agencies, professional or business associations, other interest organizations, target groups of policies and experts. The work with major stakeholders is seen as essentially significant by several MPs and the weight of researchers in this context may be modest anyway.

Still there is also an angle of seeing researchers themselves as representatives of vested interests: “For the most part, a draft decision or proposal that comes to the budget committee has to be elaborated before the budget committee stage. The work of the researcher takes place beforehand. ...if there are two crystallisation points and one must be chosen, both sides can invite researchers, a researcher from one side, and a researcher from the other side.” (Mārtiņš Bondars) In such case, the need for research-based evidence is seen as that of the lobbyists rather than the need of MPs.

The overall demand for analysis carried out by the AS is greater than the service’s capacity and probably greater than the supply of research-based evidence overall. Several of the interviewed MPs could readily name certain unsatisfied needs in terms of research and analysis. Meanwhile there is little sense of urgency. This could be related to the perceived role of MPs as arbiters between various stakeholders more than active promoters of policies. The relatively more passive arbitration role can be fulfilled with lesser amount of evidence than would be necessary for policy champions. Listening to all sides and then deciding is the *modus operandi*, which corresponds to the commonly self-perceived role of MPs.

4.2 Demand as perceived by researchers

The question about the needs of MPs was also asked in interviews with researchers in order to map the perception of researchers about the expectations of MPs. As could be expected, the views of the researchers are generally more critical than those of the MPs. Generally, researchers tend to problematize the attitudes of MPs more than MPs do with regard to researchers.

Weakness of demand

The ex-post evaluation of the Family State Policy for the Years 2011-2017 found: “When analysing the measures implemented during the Framework Document, it is unfortunately often concluded that financially-demanding activities are sometimes carried out on the initiative of political leaders, most likely on the basis of opinions and borrowed ideas from other countries rather than research-based evidence. In the long run, such a situation may jeopardise that the invested funds are used with the highest possible efficiency and are well targeted.” (SAFECE Baltija, 2018) There is a common perception that MPs are less interested in research-based evidence than they should. Even some MPs share the perception.

“I cannot say that, on issues found in the agendas and within the scope of interest of the Saeima deputies or committees, parties or factions, they themselves were not smart enough and chose to invite experts. In most cases according to my observations in this area and many other areas they, their assistants, advisors or someone else themselves know. The need for data is not what matters most there, the need for empirical grounds is not what matters most there, the usage of terminology is not what matters most there.” (Viola Korpa)

“In the Saeima – unfortunately, literally just a few individuals are interested. I cannot praise the Saeima or politicians on the whole for having any interest in these issues [demography].

Many politicians do not really want to go deeper. [...] A few times I was invited to the sustainable development committee but how formalistic was it or not... I remember, at the most exciting moment with hot discussions, some deputies slumbering or checking Twitter or something... Half of those present were there but did not participate." (Ilmārs Mežs)

"The other Committee members do not express wishes for more material from the consultants but I would like to encourage them. For example, background information in the form of a briefing paper on two pages – related to topical proceedings and in a particular format – could hopefully affect the deliberations." (Vita Anda Tērauda)

Increasing demand

The AS sees an increase in demand for its services. On the face of it, the dynamic appears as demand generated by supply. This observation could be seen as contradictory to the claims regarding the weakness of demand but it could be seen as an increase from a low base.

"There have been two cycles [of requests for studies by the Analytical Service]. There we saw what committees are interested in. This largely reflected the topical needs of decision makers – healthcare, the mandatory procurement component, territorial reform, issues voiced in the public space. It is necessary to find a compromise in the amount of time, the amount of expertise behind an opinion. The number of topics is increasing. There were fewer topics in the first cycle, more in the second. It would be necessary to strengthen the understanding about the importance of data and quality. In this dynamic environment, there are risks that we could sacrifice quality for the sake of speed." (Representative of the Analytical Service)

Despite the increase, the demand still remains fairly low relative to the scope of issues that a parliament has to review. However, even that can be stretching for the capacity of the Analytical Service.

"Often decision makers are not aware of data. The practice of formulating requests is interesting because the formulations change after having a talk with an MP... Now [February 2019] there are 12 requests and we carry out preliminary study in order to assess possibilities... 12 requests are small demand but our capacity is dramatically small." (Representative of the Analytical Service)

Focus on basic factual information

According to some researchers the primary interest of MPs is to obtain empirical facts about the state of affairs in certain areas. As a result, decisions may be insufficiently informed with regard to possible outcomes of policy options.

"There is most of all interest in information, facts. The report by the Analytical Service⁵ is descriptive with no modelling of scenarios what happens if a particular option is accepted. Certain facts are repeated. It is good because MPs learn from it. But what is missing is what to do. Often there is expectation that researchers shall only describe the situation." (Agnese Lāce)

⁵ The interviewee means the report on the role of immigration in supplying workforce in Latvia (April 2018).

Mismatch between expectations and research possibilities

A few of the interviewed researchers spoke about unrealistic expectations that analysis will provide exact figures regarding the impact of policies or some simple recommendations. Even though such observations did not recur in most interviews, they hint at possible misperceptions regarding the role of researchers and limits of the benefits that research can bring.

“Policy makers want to measure exact numbers. How many people have you returned to Latvia? But, first of all, counting is not so easy. When you ask people if it happened as a result of government activity, almost everyone denies. But it does not mean that it is the truth. People lead increasingly transnational lifestyle in several countries. It is very difficult to say exactly when someone returned. I invite to move away from the wish to record everything very precisely because it is not always possible.” (Inta Mieriņa)

“[At a seminar] one deputy asked me twice to explain to her in simpler terms. She said – ‘you, researchers, could give us simple recommendations’.” (Ilmārs Mežs)

The issue of time gap between policy-making needs and the availability of research findings, which has been widely described in literature on evidence-based policies, also came up in interviews for this study.

“It is rather hard to argue and convince that tackling a topical problem requires a study, which will take some longer time, because politicians need answers right now and right there.” (Līga Āboliņa)

Līga Āboliņa also described how the attention of policy makers could be focused on particular elements of the policy while researchers prefer focusing on sectors and policies comprehensively. This reflects the reality that narrower interventions are easier to develop and adopt. They also are potentially more rewarding to politicians as it is easier to demonstrate accomplishment.

“Demography is a very big cake, which cannot be eaten in one bite. In order to include an issue in the agenda, the whole thing must be split in pieces. Each politician or opinion leader has his/her favourite pieces... Scientists wish to pull the cake together.” (Līga Āboliņa)

Discussion

The interviews with researchers reveal a diversity of opinions. On certain matters, they appear even contradictory. One interpretation of this observed diversity could be that it reflects the fact that the Saeima is not a single agent. MPs with different backgrounds and views as well as committees with different leaderships and agendas have different expectations and perceived needs.

The alleged lack of demand from the Saeima could be interpreted as an effect of reliance on the evidence provided by the executive. The interviews focused on interaction between the Saeima and researchers but unavoidably a lot of experience of the researchers involved co-operation with executive agencies. There seems to be near consensus that the demand for research-based evidence from the executive is stronger and overall continuous.

At times it is complicated to separate alleged lack of interest in research-based evidence from the lack of interest in pursuing certain policies due to ideological or other political considerations. A claim that a certain decision is ill informed may be fair and justified but the claim may also be influenced by the

ideological attitude of the speaker. Demography is a policy area where choices are often value-laden and hence value-considerations may override technically rational recommendations or recommendations informed by an alternative set of values.

The evidence allows one to make a case for continued dialogue between MPs and researchers. Some of the opinions apparently reflect the fact that there will always be a degree of misperceptions between the two groups regarding the other's needs and restraints. However, this does not exclude possibilities for mutually beneficial interaction.

5 Research uptake and interaction

The impact of research usually cannot be observed directly. In the majority of cases politicians will not declare that a certain decision was made just because research findings and recommendations argued for it. Even annotations and other accompanying documents of draft laws rarely cite research in their reasoning. Therefore, research into the impact is mostly limited to indirect evidence. The following sub-chapter identifies policy decisions, which reflect research recommendations according to interviewed researchers. Moreover, decisions are identified, which correspond or, on the contrary, contradict recommendations of published research. The second sub-chapter reviews forms of interaction or co-operation between researchers and MPs.

5.1 Selected policy decisions

The Saeima made several important policy decisions affecting demography in the period between November 2013 and the end of 2018. The start of the period is defined in relation to a major decision made in the 11th parliamentary period (2011-2014) to change the award of the parental benefit. Several interviewees mentioned the decision as a milestone in Latvia's demography policy. The end of the period is the end of the 12th parliamentary period (2014-2018). Policy development in this area continues but this study does not focus on the latest changes because some of the decision-making processes are still in progress and hence conclusive assessment is complicated.

Most of the summary descriptions of the decisions are followed by references to interviews with researchers on how research-based evidence did or did not inform the decisions as well as correspondences between the decisions and recommendations in published research. The data do not prove the independent impact that research could have on decision making but reflect the degree of alignment between policy decisions and recommendations of researchers. Regarding a few decisions, such direct references or corresponding recommendations could not be identified.

Decisions in the area of family support

- 6 November 2013: The Saeima amended the Law on Maternity and Sickness Insurance to introduce an option to receive the parental benefit until one and a half years age of the child (it was one year only before) as well as the possibility for the parent to work and still receive 30% of the parental benefit.

The researcher Viola Korpa mentioned the introduction of the option to receive the parental benefit until one and a half years age of the child as an example of a decision in line with researchers' knowledge and advice. The decision addressed the challenge of the gap between the previously set period for the parental benefit (the age of one year) and the age of admission to a kindergarten (one and a half years).

On the other hand, according to Aivita Putniņa, research recommended to calculate the permitted amount of work per family rather than per parent so that, for example, both parents would be able to work part-time and still retain the whole of the benefit. Such flexibility is still not introduced in the policy.

- 19 June 2014: The Saeima amended the Law on Assistance in Solving Housing Matters to provide, among other things, state guarantees for the purchase or construction of housing for persons with children.

Assistance in housing matters is a recurrent theme and recommendation in several analyses of the demographic situation and policies. For example, researchers defined a policy option to develop support measures for the first dwelling and protect parents who have taken up mortgage-based loans and thus to strengthen the birth rate and decrease the so-called debt emigration (Eglīte et al., 2013).

- 26 November 2015: The Saeima amended the Law on the Protection of the Children's Rights. The amendments broadened the definition of a large family. A large family is defined by the number of children under its care and the amendment redefined who is considered a child (individuals who study considered children up to the age of 24 instead of 18 as before). The amendments also introduced the honorary family certificate programme for large families. The possession of the honorary family certificate warrants advantages such as discounts in regional public transport and a discount from the tax of vehicle exploitation.

In the case of this package of changes, specific research was commissioned explicitly for the preparation of the policy, i.e. the study on the situation of families with many children (Hannu Pro, 2013) as part of the project to introduce the honorary family certificates. The study was based on a survey, which showed that the majority of families with many children held favourable views regarding the idea to introduce such certificate. This initiative also corresponds with a conclusion of an earlier study to develop services in order to reduce the poverty risk for families with many children (the study also recommended this regarding single parents) (Eglīte et al., 2013).

According to the researcher Viola Korpa, who carried out data analysis for the above study, increasing the age of children for the definition of the family with many children corresponded to one of her research recommendations. The study did not include such recommendation explicitly but noted the discrepancy where, in practice, individuals who have come of age often remained with the family, which, from the formal point of view, was no longer regarded as a family with many children.

- 3 December 2015: The Saeima amended the Education Law to, among other things, harmonize the methodology of calculating the expenditure of the local government per child in pre-school education in both municipal and private facilities and allow a child to stay in a subsidized private facility even if a place in a public facility has been offered (Saeima, 2015).

Guaranteed pre-school education and/or child supervision service in one form or another and support for the combination of childcare and employment more generally have been recurrent policy recommendations in several studies before and after this particular decision. The above decision had the stated aim to promote the availability of varied pre-school education services. Half a year later the state discontinued the temporary programme to co-fund private providers of pre-school education and childcare services. It was not possible to identify a direct link between particular policy research inputs and these policy decisions. Researchers have tended to propose actions, which far exceed the level of

services available at the time of carrying out this study (see, for example, the policy option to provide a child supervision service for children between ages of 1 and 1.5 years in the analysis by Eglīte et al., 2013).

- 23 November 2016: The Saeima amended the Law on State Social Allowances and set the state family allowance for the fourth and subsequent children as 4.4 times the benefit for the first child (increase from EUR 34.14 to EUR 50.07). The amendments also changed provisions regarding the state social security benefit to minors who have lost a provider to allow for their increase.

Research-based evidence support for increasing benefits and allowances as an effective tool to enhance the birth-rate is modest. The study on factors, which influence the population renewal, predicted that, in times of economic growth, the expected impact of benefits on the overall birth rate will likely be small (Eglīte et al., 2013). A more recent analysis concurs: "There is no proof in the literature that more financial support to families significantly increases fertility rates." (Vārpiņa, 2018)

The evaluation of the family policy (2018) noted that, according to demography scientists, Latvia should primarily encourage parents to choose to have the second child, which would have the greatest effect on the demographic situation. The particular decision to increase the allowance for families with four and more children could have only a minor effect on the overall birth rate.

- 23 November 2016: The Saeima amended the Law on State Social Insurance to extend retirement, unemployment and disability insurance to persons who care for children up to the age of 1.5 years and receive the parental benefit (the age limit was one year before). In November, the Saeima also adopted the budget for the year 2017 with envisaged means to increase the social insurance contributions for persons who care for a child till the age of 1.5 years (the basis for the calculation of the contribution increased from EUR 142.29 to EUR 171).
- 6 April 2017: The Saeima amended the Law on Immovable Property Tax to, among other things, increase the maximum limit for the reduction of the tax for families with many children and make grandparents also eligible for the reduction.

The amendment is in line with a general conclusion found in research that the family support policy should focus on the family in a broader way and include grandparents in its coverage (Āboliņa, 2016). It also addresses the known challenges of families with many children associated with the costs of maintenance of housing (Hannu Pro, 2013).

- 28 July 2017: The Saeima approved a package of laws for a major tax reform, which, among other things, envisaged increased tax relief for persons who have dependants, for example, children (EUR 250 monthly from 2020). The Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers on 14 November 2017 No. 767 set the tax break (envisaged in Section 13 Paragraph 1 Item 1 of the Law on Personal Income Tax) for a dependant at EUR 200/month in 2018, EUR 230/month in 2019, EUR 250/month in 2020.

Tax exemptions for dependent children have been advocated by some researchers (Mežs, 2014). Despite the increased tax break, several of the interviewed researchers argued that the tax policy is by and large disconnected from the family policy (Ilmārs Mežs, Aivita Putniņa). The tax break is disadvantageous for families with relatively low income and a larger number of dependants because the tax break would exceed the tax that they would have to pay by default, i.e. they would not have a chance to benefit from

the break. This limitation was already noted in the report by Eglīte et al. in 2013 regarding families with more than two children. The analysis of the University of Latvia and the Ombudsman found that in June 2018 66.4% of employees with five dependant persons could not use the untaxable minimum fully because their salary was smaller than the rebates (Koņuševskis et al., 2019).

- 22 November 2017: The Saeima amended the Law on State Social Allowances to introduce, among other things, a supplement to the state family allowance for two and more children ages one until twenty. The possibility to receive the state family allowance was extended to parents whose children have not reached the age of 20 years (before the limit was 19 years) and study in secondary education institutions. The amendments also concerned remuneration for the care of a child to be adopted and foster families (including the introduction of the association between the amount of remuneration and the number of children).

According to Aivita Putniņa, attempts to raise the birth-rate and the focus of the policy on the third child took off throughout the system of benefits since the study on factors, which influence the population renewal (Eglīte et al., 2013). Strengthening of the benefits system started already before the publication of the study but the study affirmed this policy direction. Increasing family benefits with the birth of the second and subsequent children (or parental benefits in general) has been identified as a favourable policy option in several other publications (Meļihovs, 2014; Mežs, 2014). The amendments indirectly correspond to the recommendation by Līga Āboliņa to support families with 2-3 children as a model although the recommendation does not focus explicitly on benefits and allowances (Āboliņa, 2016). Meanwhile the Professor of demography Pēteris Zvidriņš criticized the large gap, which was created in the amount of state family allowance received for the second and third child. He emphasised the decisive significance of the second child. (Neimane, 2017)

The increase of remuneration for foster families, which was implemented in 2018, was also previously recommended by a study on foster families (Sociālo pakalpojumu aģentūra, 2016). The decision exemplifies a case where a particular study is relatively soon followed by a policy change in line with its recommendations.

- 22 November 2017: The Saeima amended the Law on Assistance in Solving Housing Matters and extended the scope of persons eligible for support (persons with children up to the age of 24 and young professionals). The previous provision envisaged the support only to persons with children under the age of 18.

According to Aivita Putniņa the development of housing support and its funding took place primarily under the influence of the EU policy as, in the area of welfare, there is an inclination to move where the EU structural funds are directed. Regarding guarantees for housing, according to the former MP Inga Bite, there were data on the current use and demand provided by the state-owned financial institution “Latvijas Hipotēku un zemes banka”. Still the forecast regarding the possible excess demand in one- or two-years’ time was allegedly based on decision makers’ own guess.

- 22 November 2017: The Saeima amended the Law on State Social Insurance and extended the coverage of social insurance to persons who receive remuneration for fulfilling the obligations of a foster family.

The amendments were in line with recommendations of the study by the foundation “Social Service Agency” such as to ensure that persons who receive remuneration for fulfilling the obligations of a foster family have retirement insurance (Sociālo pakalpojumu aģentūra, 2016).

Decisions in the area of migration

- On 17 December 2015, the Saeima adopted the Asylum Law. On 20 April 2017, the Saeima amended the law and changed rules regarding support to refugees or persons with the so-called alternative status. Based on the amended law, the amount of monthly benefit was considerably reduced.

During the preparation of the amendments, according to Agnese Lāce, researchers of Providus and other stakeholders successfully argued against a requirement to verify that the people who receive the support do not have savings or property in the countries of origin. However, the amount of the monthly benefit was reduced despite expert recommendations to the contrary.

- The Saeima amended the Immigration Law several times during the period of this study. The extensive amendments of June 2016 concerned, among other things, foreigners applying for the extension of residence permits issued based on purchase of real estate or investments in subordinated capital of banks (EUR 5000 to be paid upon application for the second and subsequent extension). The amendments introduced the possibility to suspend issuing of temporary residence permits based on national security and economic development considerations. Certain thresholds for issuing residence permits to foreigners who have made investments were changed. (Saeima, 2016) In February 2017, the Saeima amended the law and, among other things, defined conditions for the employment of foreign specialists in professions where substantial deficit of workforce was expected. In November 2017, the law was amended regarding payments for temporary residence permits. In June 2018, the Saeima eased the administrative burden for foreign students and researchers as well as for their host education and research institutions (Saeima, 2018a).

It is hard to identify associations between particular pieces of research-based evidence and recommendations on the one hand and the adopted decisions on the other hand. The published minutes of the Defence, Internal Affairs and Corruption Prevention Committee, which was responsible for most of these amendments, show the presence of various stakeholders. These issues are lobbied by different agents, but the impact of rather more neutral research-based evidence is hardly identifiable.

- 1 November 2018: The Saeima adopted the Diaspora Law with aims to strengthen the diaspora’s Latvian identity and connection with Latvia, develop a diaspora support policy in order to, among other things, create favourable conditions for remigration, etc.

According to Inta Mieriņa there is a correspondence between the study of the Diaspora and Migration Centre about returning to Latvia and the network of remigration coordinators envisaged in the law: “In our studies, we kept on saying that there are things we can do to promote remigration apart from raising salaries. Often it has to do with providing basic information on taxes, on benefits, on finding residence, on the integration of children in the school. It does not require a lot of means... We kept on saying that a single focal point was needed that one can actually contact and where assistance is available on where to turn, what to do, what is actually available.” Arguably the Diaspora Law reflects the idea of maintaining

connection rather than just promoting remigration, which is in line with recommendations of researchers. There are also opportunities envisaged that local governments could provide (this is particularly important given mistrust in the national government). Overall the Diaspora Law represents an attempt to address several problems that the study on remigrants identified.

- On 6 December 2018, the Saeima adopted a resolution on non-adhesion to the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

This is an example of a decision with a significant ideological aspect. It could hardly be expected to be resolved based exclusively on expert advice. However, effective inputs of evidence could be useful also in cases of this kind. Agnese Lāce assessed the situation as follows: “It would be an excellent task for the Analytical Service to analyse how it is compatible with existing regulations and policy planning documents. The National Union had engaged their own lawyer, the lawyers of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had prepared answers to some questions by deputies and some civil society initiatives tried to explain but it is a question whether it reached all deputies. The Analytical Service could summarize it all.” This situation exemplifies a case where several interested parties attempt to provide explanations and answers and impartial expertise is scarce.

Discussion

Overall there are several correspondences between conclusions and recommendations of published research and adopted decisions. It is often not obvious that decisions of MPs in particular have been informed by research-based evidence. Since policy proposals often stem from the government, the executive is where the research uptake has taken place.

The key driving forces for many of the policy decisions are the aims of different politicians of governing coalitions and compromises that they make. Notably, since 2012, the National Union has been setting demands nicknamed as “Demographic Ultimatums” in relation to budget bills and funding for achieving demographic goals. Overall politically more strategic, ideological and contentious issues appear to be less affected by independent impact of research findings and recommendations. This can be seen in the fact that the development of the social benefits system for families has followed advice of researchers more than the strategic choice of emphasis on employment-focused family policy. Recommendations regarding both social benefits (cash payments) and measures to facilitate child-rearing and employment have been well elaborated in several publications. Nevertheless, one can see an obvious difference in the vigour with which the state has been developing the benefits system as opposed to, for example, firm guarantees of universal pre-school education and childcare services.

The inherently narrow focus of most decisions leads to perceived fragmentation of policy choices. While a typical policy-related research output covers whole policy sectors or major clusters of elements of policies, most decisions affect selected mechanisms or rules. While policy planning documents of the executive could accommodate the need to develop a comprehensive policy, final decisions are often made within adversary political process where parties and politicians compete and strike compromises with views on specific, well-defined measures. The political preferences and the narrowed focus may create an impression that decision makers use research findings in a cherry-picking manner.

The competitiveness aspect of demography-related policies is exacerbated by the need for major budget contributions to implement certain measures. In budget deliberations, different elements of the family

policy may come at odds with budget requests for policies in other areas. The resulting compromises may involve seemingly piecemeal or weaker than optimal policies. Generally, there is little evidence that research-based evidence could shift balances of power between parties and politicians with different values and world views, which determine their opinions regarding different family-support and migration policy measures. Meanwhile, in a few cases, it is possible to directly trace the origin of an adopted policy option to a policy-related research. Overall the body of research creates a pool of options and finetunes possible solutions, from which policy makers can choose.

5.2 Forms of interaction

Several forms of interaction between researchers and other policy experts on the one hand and MPs on the other hand are practiced. They differ in terms of the intensity of the involvement of researchers and the frequency of occurrence. The initiators also vary. Sometimes the initiative comes from MPs, sometimes from researchers. Regardless of arguably limited interest of some MPs, contacts between MP and researchers have developed into a convention.

Committee meetings

Participation of researchers at the Saeima committee meetings is the most common form of interaction confirmed by interviews and data drawn from published committee agendas and minutes. The practice varies between different committees. In the Saeima, certain committees are responsible primarily for legislative work in their areas of competence (the so-called legislative committees) and certain committees carry out other tasks.

In the 12th legislative period, two committees, which are not directly responsible for legislative work, had the highest share of meetings where researchers in the areas of demography, family and migration participated. The Demography Sub-committee held 30 meetings between 27 November 2014 and 19 June 2018. The Sub-committee most often heard executive agencies and other stakeholders. Researchers participated at four of the meetings (13%). The Citizenship, Migration and Social Cohesion Committee had 143 meetings between 10 November 2014 and 24 October 2018. Researchers in the areas of demography, family and migration participated at 14 of the meetings (10%) mostly related to the topics of diaspora (seven meetings) and asylum seekers (five meetings). See Annex 2 for more details.

Committees with direct responsibility for legislative proceedings hear researchers more rarely. The Social and Employment Matters Committee met 333 times during the 12th parliamentary period. It met experts of the OECD (10 December 2014, 26 September 2017) to discuss topics indirectly related to the areas of demography, family and migration. Researchers or other representatives of academic institutions participated also at three meeting related to matters of reproductive health and sexual education (21 January 2015, 20 April 2016, 15 June 2016). On 8 December 2015, the Committee heard the presentation of a study on active aging and prolongation of working life by the World Bank. In addition to three experts of the World Bank, the professor Mihails Hazans and the researcher Irina Možajeva of the University of Latvia participated. Overall the researchers were present at 2% of the Committee meetings. The Budget and Finance (Taxes) Committee met 314 times and did not hear any researchers in the areas of demography, family and migration.⁶ The Defence, Internal Affairs and Corruption Prevention Committee

⁶ The full lists of attendees have not been published for ten of the meetings.

(responsible committee for several amendments in migration legislation) met 297 times and did not hear researchers regarding migration matters.

The interviewed researchers generally acknowledge the interest of committees in learning information provided by scientists, researchers and policy experts. As could be expected, according to the accounts of the interviewees, the interest is not equally pronounced in all committees and depends largely on the priorities and attitude of the committee leadership. Researchers who wish to address MPs proactively are known to address committees and propose presentations, and this is generally not rejected.

Committee chairpersons generally claim commitment to hear as many stakeholders as possible. For example, according to the former chairperson (1998-2002, 2006-2018) of the Social and Employment Matters Committee Aija Barča, when a committee undertakes something, it attempts to hear all sides including experts. She mentioned a few experts such as Edgars Voļskis (author of a doctoral thesis on the pension system in Latvia, 2008), Feliciāna Rajevska and Olga Rajevska (doctors, scientists and experts on social policies) who have been involved. Meanwhile the review of the minutes of the committees with direct legislative responsibilities shows the presence of a large number of stakeholders, especially when complex or controversial matters are discussed. The attention of the committees is inherently a scarce and competed for resource.

Working groups

The Saeima committees occasionally set up working groups for particular legislative tasks. Two working groups for matters related to the policy area of this study could be identified in the 12th legislative period. The working group for the preparation of the draft Diaspora Law (under the Committee of Foreign Affairs and led by the deputy chair of the Committee) was established on 24 January 2018. The working group involved the Centre for Diaspora and Migration Research along with eight ministries, diaspora organizations (more than 30 experts in total) (Saeima, 2018b). On 15 March 2017, the Human Rights and Public Affairs Committee set up a working group for the review of proposals for the amendments of the Asylum Law, in particular, the article of the law on support to a refugee and a person who has acquired the alternative status (Saeima, 2017b).

Several interviewees acknowledged that the format of working groups, in both the legislature and the executive, has been most favourable for ensuring that research findings are taken into account. There researchers have the most extensive possibilities to present observations gained through research and their insights regarding expected effects of policy choices (Agnese Lāce). A participant of a working group meeting usually has a direct chance to propose solutions and wording for the document being prepared. On the other hand, only a few working groups are set up during each parliamentary period and therefore participation in working groups is much less frequent than attending committee meetings. Although working groups have evolved into a standard form of work at the Saeima, they are considerably more informal than committees and not subject to any explicit legal regulation. In difference from standing committees, working groups are set up on *ad hoc* basis and their tasks are limited to the preparation of specific matters. Working groups are less transparent than committees. The Saeima does not publish the schedule, agendas and minutes of working group meetings.

The Saeima conferences and seminars

Conferences and seminars organized by the Saeima or groups of MPs are *ad hoc* practices, which involve a variety of stakeholders and experts. On 31 January 2014, the Saeima held a conference on demography with presentations by researchers and other experts on topics such as the potential of birth rate in Riga, policy measures for the combination of childrearing and career, necessary changes in the demography policy at large, etc. (Saeima, 2014). The Ministry of Welfare summarized the results of the conference as a tentative framework and action plan for the improvement of the family policy suggested by the participants of the event. A selection of specific proposals included the differentiation of the state family allowance depending on the number of children in the family, the encouragement of family-friendly workplaces, the introduction of education programmes on family and parenthood, ensuring the provision of child supervision services, the introduction of free meals till the 9th school grade. The follow-up to this conference and to another conference held by the University of Latvia, which was presented by the Ministry of Welfare, is an example of explicit linkage between expert advice and policy-planning by the executive. (Labklājības ministrija, 2014) In the case of the said Saeima conference, the key role of the parliament appears to have been the provision of a high-level forum. Other Saeima conferences on subjects related to demography were, for example, on successful aging (9 June 2014) and policy and practice to promote the early development of children (23 November 2018) (Saeima, 2019a). The Saeima also organizes expert seminars on various subjects. The seminars involve experts and stakeholders.

These events usually are not explicitly linked to particular pieces of draft legislation or policy planning documents. It is hardly possible to measure the impact of research evidence presented within this format. In difference from committees and working groups, no MPs have an explicit or implicit obligation to attend such activities. However, they appear *prima facie* important forms of communication between MPs and researchers as well as other stakeholders.

MPs in out-of-parliament activities

A few interviewed researchers mentioned the practice of inviting MPs to activities organized by research institutions. A common form of this kind is conferences or workshops where decision makers are invited as speakers or listeners. According to Juris Krūmiņš the MP Imants Parādnieks participated in the demography section of the conference of the EKOSOC LV project in 2016. He also mentioned as an example the Population Europe's event "Convergence and Divergence in Health and Life Expectancy in the Three Baltic Countries", which took place on 30 October 2015 at the University of Latvia (Max-Planck-Gesellschaft, 2015). Aivita Putniņa mentioned the annual practice of carrying out students' studies. In 2015, two MPs engaged with the family policy (Ilze Viņķele and Imants Parādnieks) were invited for discussion with the idea that they could propose topical subjects. The resulting study on registered and unregistered cohabitation was then presented at the parliament in July 2015. The Centre for Public Policy PROVIDUS has been inviting MPs to various discussion events and viewed it as a standard tool of its regular work.

The engagement of MPs in out-of-parliament activities is an *ad hoc* form of interaction. As a mode of cooperation, it appears potentially most effective between particular motivated researchers and MPs. There is no direct evidence that such engagement has affected the preparation and adoption of particular policy decisions.

The Saeima commissioned research

The Saeima commissions little research. This study did not identify any piece of research on demography-related subjects commissioned by the Saeima directly. A few instances of the indirect role of MPs in commissioning research occurred.

The Saeima deputy Ilze Viņķele initiated research on un-registered partnerships and their legal consequences. The MP used the so-called quota (the informal practice of permitting individual MPs to choose the allocation of limited budget amounts for purposes of their choice, in this case EUR 20,000) for the budget of 2015. The funding was allocated to the Cross-Sectoral Coordination Centre, which announced an open competition for carrying out the study. The study on problems of un-registered marriage was published in December 2015 (Putniņa et al., 2015). Though formally the commission of the executive, this can be considered an instance of parliamentary activity. The MP Imants Parādnieks has been unofficially credited for securing funds for the study on families with many children commissioned by the Society Integration Foundation in 2013.

Co-operation with the executive

A significant part of researchers' involvement in policy-related work is organized as co-operation with executive bodies. According to several interviews, co-operation with the executive is viewed as equally if not more promising for achieving impact than co-operation with the parliament. Commissioned research and analysis are one of the most tangible forms of interaction (see 'other research directly procured by the government' in Sub-chapter 3.1). In interviews for this study, some researchers mentioned situations when civil servants even present research findings to MPs instead of the researchers themselves (for example, Sigita Sniķere of the Cross-Sectoral Coordination Centre presented such findings at the Saeima conference on 31 January 2014 (Sniķere, 2014)).

Like the Saeima, the executive also engages researchers in working groups. For example, on 22 July 2015, the Prime Minister Laimdota Straujuma created the inter-institutional working group for the creation of a system for receiving asylum seekers and the integration of persons who have obtained the status of a refugee or the alternative status. The working group was headed by the State Secretary of the Ministry of Interior and included only public officials as members. (Ministru prezidents, 2015) Nevertheless, according to Agnese Lāce, the working group acted in an inclusive manner with regard to researchers. Given the great weight of the executive in making policy, this is an effective way for the incorporation of research-based evidence in policy development even if it bypasses the parliament.

There are also consultative arrangements such as the Centre of Demographic Matters and the Council of Demographic Matters. The Centre of Demographic Matters is a co-operation platform set up by the Prime Minister in 2016 and led by Imants Parādnieks (MP till November 2018). In addition to representatives of executive bodies, the Centre includes the expert of social matters Pēteris Leiškalns and the demographer Ilmārs Mežs (Ministru prezidents, 2016). The Council of Demographic Matters includes a representative of the University of Latvia and a representative of the Academy of Sciences (Ministru kabinets, 2011). It is beyond the scope of this study to assess research uptake in policy preparation and planning by executive agencies. In practice, the line between the branches of state authority in this regard are blurred. The

activity of Imants Parādnieks (MP 2010-2018, advisor to the Prime Minister 2019) reflects this in a conspicuous manner. Widely regarded as the main political champion of Latvia's pro-natalist policy, Parādnieks has used actively his roles in both the legislature and the executive as expedient for the promotion of the policy.

Discussion

By and large, the forms of interaction between MPs and researchers seem to satisfy the demand for evidence. The Saeima, its committees and groups of MPs have virtually all means to engage any willing experts in their work. Generally, it is safe to interpret the state of affairs so that any sort of possible interaction, which still does not take place in practice, is not viewed essential or of first-order significance by most MPs. From the formal point of view, the Saeima can independently satisfy any of its needs in the Saeima budget (according to the Rules of Procedure of the Saeima, the Minister of Finance and the Government may not alter the parliament's budget request without the consent of the Saeima Presidium). Thus, formally the Saeima is not limited in the scope of activities for co-operation with researchers and other stakeholders that it can afford in light of available resources.

In their relations with the Saeima, researchers have a role similar to any other stakeholders. Interactions between MPs and researchers tend to be situational depending on political needs, the availability of relevant research findings, *ad hoc* activity of particular individuals among either MPs or researchers. A presentation in the form of PowerPoint or otherwise is the main vehicle for conveying research findings. Participants use such presentations at both committees and conferences.

The interactions rest on a fairly high degree of informality. A committee may invite researchers while researchers who have a good working relation with the committee leadership may themselves suggest that they would be willing to attend and make presentations. None of the interviewed researchers spoke of situations when they wanted to present certain finding but would not be able to. The review of the practice of the interactions shows a generally inclusive and easily accessible parliament.

Intense, in-depth co-operation with researchers is much rarer. A characteristic of most presentation events is that the presenters do not see if and how their messages and proposals impact policy making. In the field of demography, researchers rarely participate at committee meetings where particular draft laws are deliberated and prepared. The practice of presentations and deliberations at the so-called non-legislative committees is sometimes dubbed as a discussion club aimed at educating MPs and equipping them with background data.

Of all the forms of interaction, only working groups provide direct and mostly immediate feedback where a participating researcher sees what is being accepted or rejected and why. The format of a working group is special because it somehow places MPs and other participating individuals on equal, collegial footing. Surely, outside stakeholders, including researchers, do not make decisions instead of MPs but the informal and closed format of a working group seems encouraging free and in-depth deliberations.

With exceptions, MPs mostly do not proactively seek specific evidence, which could inform demography-related policy decisions. The high degree of reliance on policy-preparation work of the executive explains the weak demand for evidence to support proceedings related to particular draft laws. Several key

decisions of the Saeima in the area of demography were prepared by, for example, the Ministry of Welfare or deliberated and de facto decided in consultations between representatives of parties, which formed the government coalition. Hence, the need to acquire evidence is not so acutely felt at the so-called legislative committees, for example, at the Budget and Finance (Taxation) Committee.

Several tools known in the international practice have not been utilized in the Latvian parliament. These are, for example, public calls for evidence where scientists, other experts or stakeholders are publicly invited to submit evidence pertaining to certain matters. The Saeima does not formally have the tool of public hearings. An equivalent of such hearings is committee meetings with extended participation.

The activities, through which researchers engage MPs, also bear *ad hoc* character. When advocacy activities and interaction with MPs are not formal requirements tied to funding, the individual motivation (or lack of it) largely determines whether a researcher will (or will not) attempt to engage MPs. The think tank form of organization appears to be the most effective instrument for maintaining stable advocacy efforts on the part of the involved researchers. When the work of researchers is fragmented as a sequence of projects and no overarching advocacy strategy exists, efforts to involve MPs and other policy makers are likely to be fragmented and episodic, too.

6 Recommendations

This study acknowledges that for MPs and other policy makers research-based evidence is an important kind of information but not the only one of significance. On the other hand, researchers often formulate conclusions and propose recommendations, which are relevant for policies, while there is no universal duty to direct all scientific and research work for supporting policy making. However, it can be taken for granted that there is value in the use of reliable evidence when elaborating and deciding on policy strategies, laws and budget funding. The recommendations of this chapter aim to encourage and strengthen evidence-based policy making in the parliament in the area of demography and beyond. The recommendations address three actors or groups of actors: the parliament, research commissioning bodies and researchers. For each recommendation, the below tables specify what challenge the recommendation should tackle and who the specific addressee/s of the recommendation is/are.

Recommendations primarily for the parliament

No.	Challenges identified in the study	Recommendations	Addressees
1	The analytical capacity of the Saeima below the level appropriate for an active parliament. The demand for analysis by the AS in excess of the AS' capacity.	Increase the capacity of the AS to ensure that at least one analyst is assigned for supporting each legislative committee. The availability of such analytical support could strengthen the committee in conceptual discussions of policy matters, during the assessment of draft laws, in the review of <i>ad hoc</i> proposals in the legislative process, which can be submitted at short notice and require quick decisions to support or oppose, and in MPs' discussions with lobbyists and	The Administration of the Saeima, the Presidium of the Saeima

		other representatives of outside stakeholders who occasionally possess excellent backing of evidence for their needs.	
2	Continuing search for the proper role of the AS.	Once the resources of the AS are up to an adequate level, set transparent standards for the quantity, speed and quality of its services so that each MP and each committee would know what support it can expect.	The Presidium of the Saeima, the Analytical Service
3	Limited availability of elaborated policy scenarios with expected effects depending on particular policy choices.	While providing adequate resources, establish the elaboration of scenarios and projections with a view on alternative policies as a permanent type of work of the AS.	The Presidium of the Saeima, the Analytical Service
4	The Saeima's limited ability to screen executive policy initiatives critically and fully carry out parliamentary oversight regarding the government.	Consider a procedure for the internal parliamentary review of the impact assessments (annotations) of draft laws submitted by the executive. Requesting the review could be the competence of the committee responsible for the draft law. Such a review could focus on both the manner in which the annotation was prepared and on the substance of the annotation.	The Presidium of the Saeima, the Analytical Service, the Legal Affairs Committee, the Saeima as a whole (to amend the Rules of Procedure as appropriate)
5	The demand of analysis on various complex topics in excess of the expertise and capacity the AS staff.	Consider setting up a network of outside experts who can be engaged in the review of specific matters on request when the internal expertise or capacity of the AS is insufficient. The network could be based on a framework contract with a single provider or framework contracts with individual experts. While there is clearly a limit in the depth and the level of customization of analysis obtained at short notice on <i>ad hoc</i> basis, such an arrangement can be an efficient mechanism for tapping into existing expertise.	The Presidium of the Saeima, the Analytical Service
6	No regular practice for alerting MPs on prospective challenges	In the longer-term perspective, introduce analysis upon own initiative as one of the forms of work of the AS.	The Presidium of the Saeima, the Analytical Service

	and potential policy opportunities.		
7	Unsatisfied needs of MPs' in terms of research and analysis.	Consider the introduction of calls for evidence ahead of extended committee meetings or event akin to public hearings. Given the small size of the research community in Latvia, it is unlikely that a large number of contributions will be submitted. The mechanism could be accompanied with targeted requests to relevant scientific and other research institutions.	The Presidium of the Saeima, chairpersons of the Saeima committees, the Saeima as a whole (to amend the Rules of Procedure as appropriate)
8	Rare appearance of researchers at committees with direct responsibility for legislative proceedings.	Particularly the legislative committees of the Saeima should endeavour to make sure that they hear not only representatives of the executive and interest groups but also more neutral expert opinions. Given the intense agenda of regular meetings of the committees, this could be done in the form of expert hearings, etc.	Chairpersons of the Saeima committees, the Saeima as a whole (to amend the Rules of Procedure as appropriate)
9	Misperceptions between MPs and researchers regarding the other group's needs and restraints.	Create and promote an internship programme at the Saeima for graduate and post-graduate students and engage them in policy-support activities.	The Administration of the Saeima, the Presidium of the Saeima, other units in the Saeima as appropriate

Recommendations primarily for the executive

No.	Challenges identified in the study	Recommendations	Addressees
10	Little preference among MPs for data obtained by scientific methods; the interest of MPs in presentations, particular calculations, graphs, effectively presented messages.	Consider innovative activities in order to facilitate communicating policy-relevant conclusions from inquiries and analyses carried out in the frame of state research programmes. Such activities could be small workshops with participation equally shared between MPs, civil servants and researchers. As an experiment, certain MPs with appropriate academic credentials could be involved as team members in research projects.	The Ministry of Education and Science, other ministries, the Latvian Council of Science MPs and relevant units in the Saeima as appropriate.

11	In terms of material resources, generally fragmented and unstable capacity for policy-relevant research.	Consider ways to strengthen the activity of think tanks through open calls to apply for public funding for research-based advocacy activities for several years. Sustained advocacy activity requires motivation, resources and certain institutional commitment, which can be provided by a think tank. The state cannot create dedicated think tanks in all policy areas. Nevertheless, the good practice example of the Centre for Diaspora and Migration Research invites an inference that a similar actor in other demography-related fields could strongly contribute to the quality of policies. Regardless of state support, such an institution should have due guarantees for the professional independence of researchers while being obliged to support policy-making processes.	The Prime Minister, the Ministry of Culture, the Society Integration Foundation, the Ministry of Finance
12	Limited availability of time-series of data.	When procuring research and analysis, include in the terms of reference research questions and methods to allow for comparisons with earlier research where appropriate. Time-series of data are an imperfect tool for measure the impact of policy interventions, but they can show trends in behaviour and attitudes.	The Ministry of Welfare and other executive agencies, which procure research and analysis
13	Little preference among MPs for data obtained by scientific methods; the interest of MPs in presentations, particular calculations, graphs, effectively presented messages.	Together with relevant education institutions, consider creating training opportunities on advocacy and lobbying for researchers especially in the beginning of their careers. While the involvement in advocacy will always depend on the personal choice of the researcher, such training could equip the researchers with necessary skills should they wish to get involved in practical policy processes.	The Ministry of Education and Science Education institutions with specialisation in politics- and policy-related fields.

Recommendations primarily for scientific and research institutions, scientists and researchers

No.	Challenges identified in the study	Recommendations	Addressees
14	Limited availability of time-series of data, elaborated policy scenarios, the analysis of causal associations between particular factors and social phenomena, rigorous inquiries into the effectiveness of particular policy interventions.	Where appropriate and possible, pay more attention to the accumulation of time-series of data, elaboration of policy scenarios and their expected impact, cost and benefit analyses, the impact assessment of policies on persons at the individual level and other types of policy-relevant analysis.	Scientific and research institutions, scientists and researchers Agencies, which fund or procure research and analysis
15	Little preference among MPs for data obtained by scientific methods; the interest of MPs in presentations, particular calculations, graphs, effectively presented messages.	Develop the routine of preparing policy briefs and data visualizations in addition to research publications and reports. They are not only useful for communicating messages to MPs and other policy makers but also for informing engaged members of the broader public who would not normally meet the researchers at presentations or other events.	Scientific and research institutions, scientists and researchers
16	Varied levels of elaboration of policy recommendations in research publications.	<p>Avoid generic recommendations such as proposals to “develop a stable policy” or “strengthen support” without further elaboration what exactly should be done.</p> <p>In relation to recommendations, specify what particular challenges their implementation would address, who should implement the recommendations and, if appropriate, what regulations or institutions should change.</p> <p>When possible, organize discussions with stakeholders and decision makers on potential recommendations.</p>	Scientists and researchers

17	Limited availability of microdemography research, in-depth studies on the conditions, routines and challenges on the level of families.	Strengthen research efforts in microdemography with focus on individuals, families, communities or towns in order to better understand causal relations that eventually affect the larger population developments and finetune policy interventions.	Scientific and research institutions, scientists and researchers Agencies, which fund or procure research and analysis
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Annexes

Annex 1: List of interviews

Scientists and researchers

1. Līga Āboliņa, 20 March 2019
2. Daunis Auers, 6 March 2019
3. Māris Brants, 22 March 2019
4. Inese Grumolte-Lerhe, 20 February 2019
5. Viola Korpa, 29 May 2019
6. Juris Krūmiņš, 19 March 2019
7. Agnese Lāce, 28 February 2019
8. Ilmārs Mežs, 7 March 2019
9. Inta Mieriņa, 22 March 2019
10. Aivita Putniņa, 18 March 2019
11. Visvaldis Valtenbergs, 20 February 2019

Current and former Members of Parliament

1. Aija Barča (Union of Greens and Farmers), 30 May 2019
2. Dagmāra Beitnere-Le Galla (New Conservatives), 8 April 2019
3. Inga Bite (Latvian Regional Alliance), 2 April 2019
4. Mārtiņš Bondars ("Development/For!"), 11 June 2019
5. Marija Golubeva ("Development/For!"), 2 April 2019
6. Andrejs Judins (New Unity), 3 April 2019
7. Ilmārs Latkovskis (National Alliance, independent), written answer on 8 April 2019
8. Imants Parādnieks (National Alliance), 9 April 2019
9. Vita Anda Tērauda ("Development/For!"), 19 February 2019

Annex 2: Participation of scientists and researchers at committee meetings⁷

The Demography Sub-committee meetings (27 November 2014 – 19 June 2018)

Date	Topic	Participating scientists and researchers ⁸	Role according to the published information
24 March 2015	Latvia's demographic situation and family policy	Researcher of the University of Latvia Ilmārs Mežs	Presentation
31 March 2015	"Invisible" work in the family	Sociologist Viola Korpa	Invited
19 May 2015	The implementation of the honorary family certificate	Representative of the company "Hannu pro", which carried out a study on families with many children	Invited
29 March 2016	Parents' benefits	Expert of social rights Pēteris Leiškalns	Presentation
22 May 2018	Targeted support policy for younger parents. Learning, family and children.	Representative of the University of Latvia	Invited

The Citizenship, Migration and Social Cohesion Committee (10 November 2014 – 24 October 2018)

Date	Topic	Participating scientists and researchers	Role according to the published information
10 December 2014	Migration, citizenship, labour market, etc.	Experts of the Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs of OECD Herwig Immervoll, Paolo Falco, Jonathan Chaloff	Discussion
14 January 2015	Latvian emigrants' communities	Researchers of the project "The communities of Latvia's emigrants: National identity, transnational relations and diaspora policy" Inta Mieriņa and Mihails Hazans (University of Latvia)	Presentation and comments
11 March 2015	Political representation of the diaspora	Researchers of the Diaspora and Migration Research Centre of the University of Latvia Gunda Reire and Evija Kļave	Presentations
21 October 2015	Recommendation for diaspora policy	Researcher of the Philosophy and Sociology Institute of the University of Latvia Inese Šūpule	Presentation
2 March 2016	Return plans and motivation of Latvians who live abroad	Researcher of the project "The communities of Latvia's emigrants: National identity, transnational relations and diaspora policy" Inese Šūpule	Presentation
9 March 2016	Remigration potential of Latvians	Researcher of the Diaspora and Migration Research Centre of the University of Latvia Ieva Birka	Presentation

⁷ The tables only show individuals who were officially present in their capacity as scientists, researchers or policy experts. Individuals who were titled in their capacity as representatives of non-research NGOs or other stakeholders are not shown although in essence some of them may also be scientists or policy experts. For example, the Head of the International Organization for Migration Riga Office Ilmārs Mežs participated at several meetings and is not shown in the table when titled as a representative of the IOM although, in his career, he has also been a researcher and is regarded as an expert.

⁸ According to the interview, Inta Mieriņa also participated at a meeting of the Demography Sub-committee but this was not shown in the published information of the sub-committee in the period of the 12th Saeima.

	born in USA and Canada		
30 March 2016	Diaspora policy (priorities, etc.)	Researcher of the Diaspora and Migration Research Centre of the University of Latvia Ieva Birka	Presence
18 January 2017	Comparative analysis of diaspora policies of other countries	Senior researcher of the Diaspora and Migration Research Centre of the University of Latvia Inta Mieriņa	Presentation
22 February 2017	The state of affairs in relation to asylum seekers	Researcher of the Centre for Public Policy PROVIDUS on migration and integration Agnese Lāce	Presence
15 March 2017	Social economic integration of asylum seekers	Researcher of the Centre for Public Policy PROVIDUS Agnese Lāce	Presence
26 April 2017	The impact of the global migration	Professor of the University of Latvia, economist Mihails Hazans and Researcher of the Centre for Public Policy PROVIDUS Agnese Lāce	Presentations
18 October 2017	Social economic integration of asylum seekers	Researchers of the Centre for Public Policy PROVIDUS Rasmuss Filips Geks and Agnese Lāce	Presence
9 May 2018	Social services for asylum seekers, etc.	Researcher of the Centre for Public Policy PROVIDUS Agnese Lāce	Discussion
16 May 2018	Services for asylum seekers, etc.	Researcher of the Centre for Public Policy PROVIDUS Agnese Lāce	Presence