



REGIONAL TRIAL MONITORING PROJECT
COMBATting ORGANISED CRIME AND CORRUPTION
IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

A **POLICY ENGINE** FOR EVIDENCE-BASED INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

Introducing a Practitioner's Guide for

Generating evidence, developing policy recommendations
and tracking change in evolving criminal justice systems



Organization for Security and
Co-operation in Europe



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FROM UNDERSTANDING PRACTICE TO CHANGING IT

Understanding how justice works in practice is only the starting point. Identifying a problem does not necessarily explain why it persists. A sound diagnosis does not guarantee a workable recommendation. And implementing a reform measure does not necessarily change the practice it was intended to improve. The challenge is to connect these stages: to ensure that recommendations respond to the problems actually identified, that proposed solutions account for institutional realities, and that implementation is assessed against changes in practice rather than activities completed.

ROOTED IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM. ADAPTABLE BEYOND IT.

The method was developed through practice in criminal justice reform, particularly work on serious and complex organised crime and corruption cases. Court proceedings and legal acts offer a disciplined window into how rules, rights, evidence, authority and time are managed in practice.

While grounded in this experience, the Guide's underlying approach is adaptable to other areas of public policy and institutional reform. Its tools can be adjusted to different evidence sources, institutional settings and policy objectives, while retaining the same discipline: understanding practice, explaining issues, designing feasible responses and assessing whether change takes hold.

The evidence-to-change pathway.



The Policy Engine

A structured method for moving from evidence to reform decisions — and learning from what follows.

The process is iterative: new findings can challenge earlier assumptions, refine recommendations or redirect the inquiry.



	What exactly are we trying to understand?	Turns a reform concern into a focused, neutral inquiry and identifies the evidence needed to answer it.	→ Evidence strategy
	What happened, and what can we verify?	Builds a structured, source-tagged evidence base from proceedings, legal acts and complementary sources.	→ Evidence base
	What does the evidence actually support?	Builds a structured, source-tagged evidence base from proceedings, legal acts and complementary sources.	→ Bounded findings
	Why might the pattern persist?	Examines contributing conditions and competing explanations to understand how problems arise, what sustains them and where change could enter.	→ Explanatory account
	What should change, by whom and through what pathway?	Translates diagnosis into legally sound, institutionally legitimate and operationally feasible reform recommendations, with a plausible pathway to change.	→ Reform recommendation package
	What moved — and did practice change?	Distinguishes action from uptake and institutional change, verifies progress against evidence and uses emerging findings to revisit assumptions and refine the response.	→ Implementation narrative + next route

Close the loop. Keep the inquiry open.

Justice reform rarely moves in a straight line. Institutions respond, routines adapt and new evidence emerges. A reform may advance in one part of the system and stall in another. Measures may produce intended and unintended effects. Even a well-supported diagnosis may need to be reconsidered as practice evolves.

The Policy Engine does not force that complexity into a pass/fail story.

It provides a way to understand progress without overstating it, recognise setbacks without losing sight of what has been achieved, and distinguish completed activities from meaningful changes in institutional practice.

Reform becomes a process of cumulative learning, not a succession of disconnected interventions. What has been established becomes part of the institutional memory of reform. What remains uncertain informs the next inquiry. And every new response becomes another opportunity to test whether our understanding—and our interventions—hold up in practice.

The aim is not to tame complexity. It is to keep pace with it.



Explore the full Practitioner Guide

A comprehensive methodology for generating evidence, developing policy recommendations and tracking change in evolving criminal justice systems.

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