HOW TO WRITE A POLICY BRIEF

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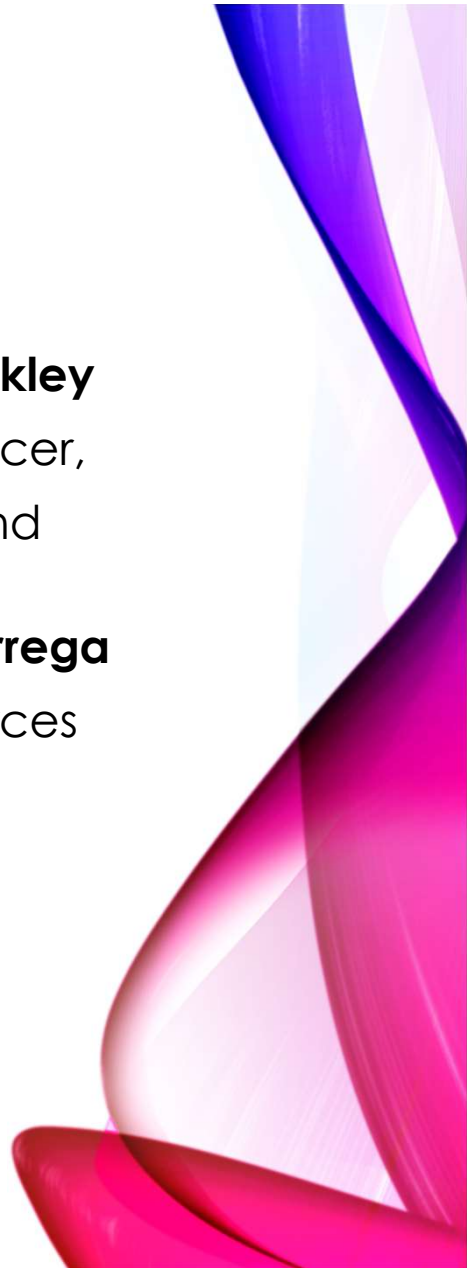


WHAT IS A POLICY BRIEF?

- **Policy brief is a concise, stand alone publication with a specific purpose to inform/advise a non-academic external audience of an issue that requires policy attention**
  - Written for a specific audience in mind (not just 'policymakers')
- They are one way key facts and points of reference about a given issue are conveyed to decision-makers for a specific purpose
  - Other types of outputs include blogs, working papers, seminars, submitted evidence to inquiries
- Can review the state of play in the field for a specific purpose (e.g. POSTNotes on marine renewables) or can focus more on translating new pieces of evidence from you or your research unit into the evidence base(what we'll do today)

WHY WRITE THEM?

- Decisionmakers and practitioners should make decisions informed by the best evidence possible
- But they often can turn to more readily accessible forms of evidence to influence their decisions. These may not have academic rigour or even be the most up to date/valid.
- **Our job as public academics is to better convey complex academic material to policy-making audiences in a way that is immediately accessible and useful**.
- **WE CAN STEP UP! YOU HAVE GREAT KNOWLEDGE & RESEARCH, SHARE IT!**

CONTENT & STRUCTURE

CONTENT

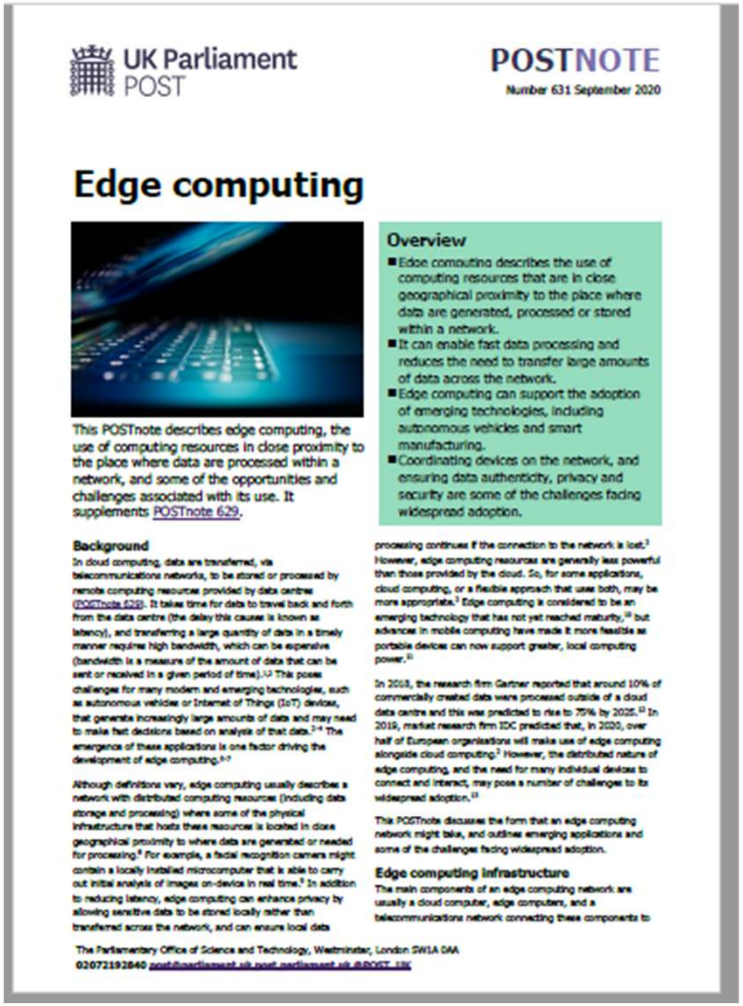
- Presents a problem, its context, and gives clear policy recommendations or implications.
- Provides evidence to support the reasoning behind these recommendations.
- Promote some kind of change: in law, health policies or regulations, agency funding priorities, organisational practices or programme implementation.
- Spend more time on new evidence and solutions/options rather than introducing the problem

STRUCTURE

- A summary and a list of key points up front.
- A clear structure with well signposted sections.
- Use of boxes for figures, case-studies, glossaries and other contextual materials
- Accessible language to ensure ease of reading: short sentences, use of common words. Avoid jargon. Use active voice.

EXAMPLES & TEMPLATES

- Come in a few standard formats, but generally a short document (2-4 pages) written using a professional style that is easy to understand without specialised knowledge.



UK Parliament
POST

POSTNOTE
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Edge computing

This POSTnote describes edge computing, the use of computing resources in close proximity to the place where data are processed within a network, and some of the opportunities and challenges associated with its use. It supplements POSTnote 629.

Overview

- Edge computing describes the use of computing resources that are in close geographical proximity to the place where data are generated, processed or stored within a network.
- It can enable fast data processing and reduces the need to transfer large amounts of data across the network.
- Edge computing can support the adoption of emerging technologies, including autonomous vehicles and smart manufacturing.
- Coordinating devices on the network, and ensuring data authenticity, privacy and security are some of the challenges facing widespread adoption.

Background

In cloud computing, data are transferred, via telecommunications networks, to be stored or processed by remote computing resources provided by data centres (POSTnote 629). It takes time for data to travel back and forth from the data centre (the delay this causes is known as latency), and transferring a large quantity of data in a timely manner requires high bandwidth, which can be expensive (bandwidth is a measure of the amount of data that can be sent or received in a given period of time).[1,2] This poses challenges for many modern and emerging technologies, such as autonomous vehicles or Internet of Things (IoT) devices, that generate increasingly large amounts of data and may need to make fast decisions based on analysis of that data.[3,4] The emergence of these applications is one factor driving the development of edge computing.[5-7]

Although definitions vary, edge computing usually describes a network with distributed computing resources (including data storage and processing) where some of the physical infrastructure that hosts these resources is located in close geographical proximity to where data are generated or needed for processing.[8] For example, a facial recognition camera might contain a locally installed microcomputer that is able to carry out initial analysis of images on-device in real time.[9] In addition to reducing latency, edge computing can enhance privacy by allowing sensitive data to be stored locally rather than transferred across the network, and can ensure local data processing continues if the connection to the network is lost.[3] However, edge computing resources are generally less powerful than those provided by the cloud. So, for some applications, cloud computing, or a flexible approach that uses both, may be more appropriate.[3] Edge computing is considered to be an emerging technology that has not yet reached maturity,[10] but advances in mobile computing have made it more feasible as portable devices can now support greater, local computing power.[11]

In 2018, the research firm Gartner reported that around 10% of commercially created data were processed outside of a cloud data centre and this was predicted to rise to 75% by 2025.[12] In 2019, market research firm IDC predicted that, in 2020, over half of European organisations will make use of edge computing alongside cloud computing.[3] However, the distributed nature of edge computing, and the need for many individual devices to connect and interact, may pose a number of challenges to its widespread adoption.[13]

This POSTnote discusses the form that an edge computing network might take, and outlines emerging applications and some of the challenges facing widespread adoption.

Edge computing infrastructure

The main components of an edge computing network are usually a cloud computer, edge computers, and a telecommunications network connecting these components to

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ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

OECD

Netherlands Policy Brief

OECD Better Policies Series | JULY 2018 | www.oecd.org/Netherlands

Gender Equality

TOWARDS A MORE GENDER-BALANCED SHARING OF PAID AND UNPAID WORK

- Female labour participation has grown enormously in the Netherlands, but gender gaps in labour market outcomes persist. The gender pay gap for full-time workers is 14%, close to the OECD average, and the gender gap in working hours is large, as most women work part-time.
- The Netherlands has been lagging behind in encouraging fathers to take parental leave and engage more intensively in unpaid care work at home.
- Extending good-quality childcare and out-of-school hours care support would help mothers to reduce participation in unpaid care work and increase hours in paid work.
- Completely closing gender gaps in labour force participation and working hours could boost the annual GDP per capita growth rate by roughly 35% relative to the baseline over the period to 2040.

What's the issue?

The employment rate for women in the Netherlands has doubled from 35% in the early 1980s to 70% in 2016. However, much of the increase has been in part-time employment: almost 60% of employed women are in paid employment for fewer than 30 hours per week in the Netherlands (see Figure). Women spend almost 4 hours per day on unpaid housework while men spend around 2 hours per day, close to the OECD average. Working part-time can add to job satisfaction of workers, freeing up time for childcare or leisure activities, but it also means that women's education and skills are not applied to their full potential in the Dutch labour market. Furthermore, part-time work affects long-term career and earnings progression of women.

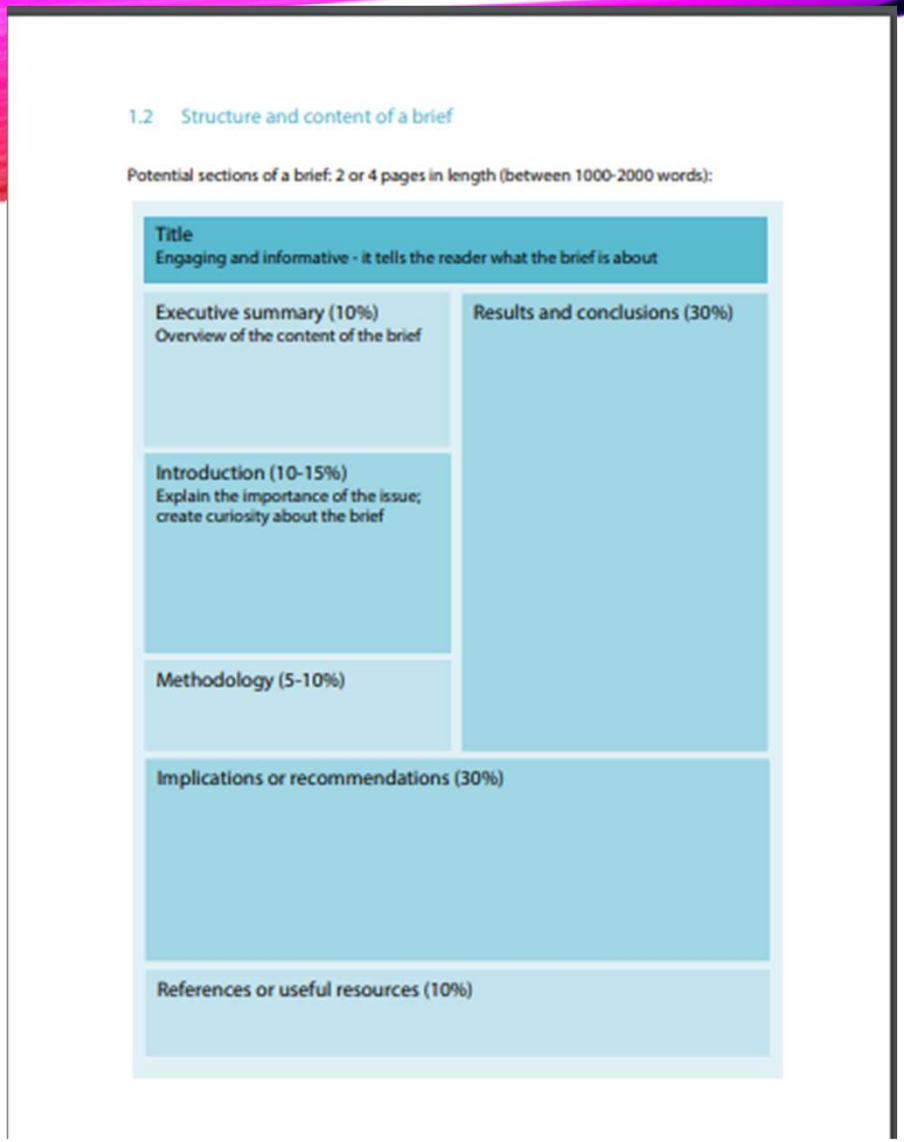
At the median, the gender pay gap for full-time workers is 14% in the Netherlands, just below the OECD average. As they are often better educated than young men, young women (age 25-29) in full-time employment often earn more than men of the same age. However, gender gaps reverse in favour of men when children enter the household.

When children are born, fathers' leave-taking is important for ensuring that both mothers and fathers take an important stake in personal caregiving. Fathers can be encouraged to take leave to care for children by providing paid paternity leave or individual entitlements to paid parental leave. Several OECD countries now offer

Many Dutch women work part-time, much more than in the OECD

Proportion of employed in part-time employment, by sex, 2016

www.oecd.org/policy-briefs



1.2 Structure and content of a brief

Potential sections of a brief: 2 or 4 pages in length (between 1000-2000 words):

Title
Engaging and informative - it tells the reader what the brief is about

Executive summary (10%)
Overview of the content of the brief

Introduction (10-15%)
Explain the importance of the issue; create curiosity about the brief

Methodology (5-10%)

Results and conclusions (30%)

Implications or recommendations (30%)

References or useful resources (10%)

LSHTM POLICY BRIEF TEMPLATE

Before you begin writing with your team:

- **Describe and identify the target audience** (done in session 1)
- **Develop and overarching message:** what is the main aim of the brief – what do you want your audience to know?
- **Describe the problem:** for introduction and context.
  - Why is this important
  - What's the extent of the issue?
- **What data and results do you think are most compelling?**
- **What actions or policy changes does the research point to?**

(Link to template in Resources slide)

TEMPLATE SECTIONS

Executive Summary (150-200 words)
- Context, key points/results (bits of new data)
- Recommendations and implications: often in bulleted list!

Introduction (150-200)
- Aim to capture attention
- Explain purpose of brief
- Context & background info

Methodology (50 -100)
- Conveys authority & validity
- Describe methods but avoid overly technical language

Research, Results & Conclusions (400 – 500)
- Provides summary of issues
- Move from general to specific for key results
- Tailor findings to audience & interests
- Base conclusions on results – these should be concrete

Policy Implications/Recommendations (400 - 500)
- State clearly what should happen next – following on from conclusions
- Recs describe steps that are credible, relevant and feasible.
- Recs are self-contained
- Implications less direct – describe consequences of research

References and useful resources: if synthesising evidence from many sources, cite list. Acknowledge funder. Direct readers to more by same author if useful.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Implications

Less direct

- 'Research suggests the promotion of X to address problem Y'
- 'Evidence points to X population being impacted in Y way, which may call for Z resource to be mobilised'
- Ex: Promote healthier foods in schools.

Recommendations

Actionable steps backed with evidence from the brief. Specific & appropriate for the audience

- 'Increase/decrease/change policy X in Y institution/location.'
- Ex: Remove soda from all vending machines on school campuses. Insert new curriculum on healthy eating to children starting at age 5.

Key point! Recommendations are not a policymaker's to-do list. Provide people with enough information to make informed decisions and give options.

Incrementalism: policy changes are often small and incremental. Consider how to amend existing policies or programmes rather than scrapping and starting over.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

- **Audience:** Keep in mind who you are writing for and know the level of influence they have/what they can change
- **Address ambiguity and complexity** (Cairney & Smith 2020): how does your evidence help us make better sense of a complex problem? What does it clarify?
- **Focus on the solution rather than the problem:** where do your results suggest efforts should be focused? Where does your evidence reduce ambiguity?
- **Keep your ethics about you!** Avoid making unequivocal claims from our data – and if there is inconclusive evidence, say so.
- **Policymakers often want one right answer, but do not fall into the trap.** Give options, suggestions, interpretations from the data. Enacting policy decisions is a political – not academic – process.

SOME RESOURCES

Policy Brief Templates and Examples:

London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 2015. Policy Briefs: A guide to writing policy briefs for research uptake https://blogs.lshtm.ac.uk/griphealth/files/2017/01/Policy-briefs-guide_2015.pdf

Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology How to write a policy briefing. https://post.parliament.uk/how-to-write-a-policy-briefing/

Policy @ Manchester Policy Brief Template Notes for Use http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=27239

See Policy Brief Template here: http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/DocuInfo.aspx?DocID=27249

A GUIDE – writing style advice for your policy briefing

Writer's Checklist by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe)

A BLOG - simple and easy definitions of complex policy terms

"What is policy? " by Professor Paul Cairney