

NORFACE EVALUATION FOR THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH COUNCIL



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

NORFACE responds to grand societal challenges and is part of a suite of ESRC investments that support international collaboration aiming to deliver against the funder's mission, strategy and priorities, including broader social impacts. NORFACE explicitly supports knowledge exchange activities and thus is a source of learning about how research creates change. It is an internationally collaborative funding scheme, and relatively unusual in its support of comparative primary research in different countries.

EVALUATION AIMS

Aim 1: Determine the impacts created from the NORFACE portfolio from years 2017 to 2023¹.

Aim 2: Determine how the NORFACE programme design may have contributed, in part, to impacts created by the portfolio, when compared to other ESRC funding instruments such as Trans-Atlantic Platform and the Open Research Area producing similar types of projects.

Aim 3: Describe the research contributions the NORFACE projects/programmes have made to their respective fields.

APPROACH

Our approach to this evaluation was informed by a systematic review conducted by Transforming Evidence Limited (TEL) ([Abudu, Boaz and Oliver, 2022](#)), which looked at the most appropriate frameworks, data and methods used by funders to assess impact methodically.

We sampled 40 projects from six NORFACE programmes, taking data from the project final reports, supplied by ESRC. For the DIAL programme data was taken from impacts reported on the [DIAL Programme website](#) as the final reports were not available. To gain additional rich insights and stress-test our conclusions from the desk review, we conducted interviews with relevant stakeholders. These included:

- ESRC programme staff: To gain insights into the management and design of comparative funding instruments.
- NORFACE grantees. We selected a subset of projects (n=20) to identify a sample of PIs to invite to interview.
- NORFACE programme coordinator. Two were approached for interview and one responded.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

¹ Note: Because this evaluation has been requested by ESRC to inform a broader international grants strategy refresh, projects in this evaluation will have limited lag time for impacts to accrue beyond the project completion date. Lag time for projects will range from 3 - less than a year post-project completion; less than the minimum of five years of follow-up time post-project completion that is recommended within research impact evaluation literature.

Table 1: Summary of findings

NORFACE Evaluation Aim	Summary of findings
<p>Aim 1: Determine the impacts created from the NORFACE portfolio from years 2017 to 2023</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>NORFACE projects delivered a very high publication productivity rate</i>, with an average of 34 publications/project. ● <i>Projects using co-production approaches and that drew upon longstanding, 'built-in' partnerships with non-academics tended to be more successful</i>. This is consistent with the broader evidence base which suggests that these are the most effective means to mobilise knowledge. ● <i>A broad spectrum of policy and practice impacts</i> that ranged from changes in awareness and decision making, through to contributions to major policy decisions at Prime Ministerial level. ● In addition to these examples above <i>the most significant, documented impacts we observed related to the following three projects</i>: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Human capital and inequality during adolescence and working life (Institute for Fiscal Studies, DIAL programme). (See Appendix 2 for case study). ○ Waterproofing Data: Engaging stakeholders in sustainable flood risk governance for urban resilience (Warwick University, T2S programme). (See Appendix 2 for case study). ○ Misty: Migration, Transformation and Sustainability (University of Exeter, T2S programme). ● <i>Most programme interviewees reported that knowledge exchange activities and arising impacts were primarily delivered within the national setting</i> of the individual researchers. ● <i>Sustained funding collaborations</i> beyond the project lifecycle, with further funding leveraged from COST, and ERC Consolidator and Advanced awards or through national funding schemes.
<p>Aim 2: Determine how the NORFACE programme design may have contributed, in part, to impacts created by the portfolio, when compared to other ESRC funding instruments producing similar types of projects.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The emphasis on capacity-building within NORFACE and its interpretation by most research teams as a mechanism to support and develop researchers has led to <i>extremely positive outcomes and impacts vis a vis early career development</i>. ● NORFACE specifies particular participating countries, encouraging some researchers to work with academics in countries in which they have not worked previously. In the majority of cases, research teams brought in at least one new country partner. Often these new relationships, formed through NORFACE, were with <i>countries with less developed research systems</i>. ● <i>The majority of researchers were positive about the coordination activities</i>. ● The T2S scheme, which as we have noted was particularly positive in terms of outcomes and impacts, was <i>specifically designed to value knowledge exchange and co-production</i>.

NORFACE Evaluation Aim	Summary of findings
<p>Aim 3: Describe the research contributions the NORFACE projects/programmes have made to their respective fields.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>The 40 projects which we reviewed produced on average more than 30 publications each, with a total of 1062.</i> ● Across all programmes there was some evidence that <i>networks were extended through the NORFACE programmes (i.e. beyond pre-existing relationships)</i>. Moreover, nearly all researchers reported that their research partnerships had continued following the formal end of the NORFACE funding period. ● Researchers reported that relationships had been continued through the <i>successful acquisition of additional funding</i>, including from the European Commission. ● Project partners, particularly those in the more recently completed T2S and Democratic Governance schemes <i>continue to publish together</i>. ● Two researchers from the Migration programme reported that <i>their work continues to have a ripple effect through the methods or data developed</i> through the NORFACE-funded programme that is now used by a wide network of researchers.

FEEDBACK FROM RESEARCHERS

- **NORFACE programme coordination across projects was mixed.** Fewer references were found to the impact of this role in relation to knowledge exchange, than in relation to research partnerships. Delivery appears to have been inconsistently experienced within and across programmes.
- **NORFACE has been responsive to programme changes/professional to work with.** However, there was inconsistency in the recognition of NORFACE as an entity and of the ESRC's role within in it from researcher community.
- **NORFACE could be improved if finances could be tailored to local contexts.**
- **NORFACE could have benefited from a longer project duration.** Furthermore, several researchers reported inconsistency in funder approaches to project extensions.
- **NORFACE reporting template could be improved** (especially in relation to knowledge exchange). We also noted inconsistencies in the approach and reporting format across schemes which presents challenges in relation to evaluation.

SECTION ONE: CONTEXT AND APPROACH

EVALUATION AIMS

Aim 1: Determine the impacts created from the NORFACE portfolio from years 2017 to 2023².

Aim 2: Determine how the NORFACE programme design may have contributed, in part, to impacts created by the portfolio, when compared to other ESRC funding instruments such as the Trans-Atlantic Platform and the Open Research Area producing similar types of projects.

Aim 3: Describe the research contributions the NORFACE projects/programmes have made to their respective fields.

BACKGROUND

NORFACE responds to grand societal challenges and is part of a suite of ESRC investments that support international collaboration aiming to deliver against the funder's mission, strategy and priorities, including broader social impacts. NORFACE explicitly supports knowledge exchange activities and thus is a source of learning about how research creates change. It is an internationally collaborative funding scheme, and relatively unusual in its support of comparative primary research in different countries.

There are previous [NORFACE network evaluations](#), but none published that look at UK-level investments specifically. Previous evaluations include:

- [Assessing the impact of NORFACE I](#) (this is a full report of the evaluation of NORFACE I, with all of its work packages. The report focuses mostly on the utility of the work packages, and less on the impacts of funded research projects).
- [Welfare State Futures](#) (this is a summary report of the Welfare State Futures Programme but lacks methodology write-up).
- [Final Report on the Scientific Coordination of the NORFACE Research Programme: Re-emergence of Religion as a Social Force in Europe](#) (this is a final report on the coordination of the Religion programme, but is lacking a methodology write-up and is written in the first-person by the programme coordinator. It mentions that individual final reports from each project have not yet been completed).

APPROACH

Our approach to this evaluation was informed by **a detailed understanding of research impact assessments (RIAs), as well as practical experience of delivering these**. Specifically, we drew from research by Transforming Evidence Limited (TEL) ([Abudu, Boaz and Oliver, 2022](#)) - a systematic review of the most appropriate frameworks, data and methods used by funders to assess impact methodically.

SAMPLE AND METHODS FOR DESK REVIEW

For the purposes of this evaluation, we sampled 40 projects from six NORFACE programmes. Projects were chosen randomly from the following programmes:

² Note: Because this evaluation has been requested by ESRC to inform a broader international grants strategy refresh, projects in this evaluation will have limited lag time for impacts to accrue beyond the project completion date. Lag time for projects will range from 3 - less than a year post-project completion; less than the minimum of five years of follow-up time post-project completion that is recommended within research impact evaluation literature.

- *Re-Emergence of Religion as a Social Force in Europe*, 2007-2010 (n = 5/10)
- *Migration in Europe - Social, Economic, Cultural and Policy Dynamics*, 2009-2014 (n = 4/6)
- *Welfare State Futures*, 2014-2019 (n = 5/11)
- *Dynamics of Inequality across the Lifecourse (DIAL)*, 2017-2021, (n = 11/12)
- *Transformations to Sustainability (T2S)*, 2017-2022, (n = 7/8)
- *Democratic Governance (Governance)*, 2020-2023 (n = 8/10)

For projects from the Religion, Migration, Welfare, and T2S programmes, the primary source of project impact data came from the project final reports, supplied by ESRC. Projects from the DIAL programme were assessed via the impacts they reported on the DIAL Programme website (<https://dynamicsofinequality.org/>), as the final reports were not available. Publication data was well-catalogued for DIAL projects on this website, but only some dissemination activities were captured and no capacity-building activities were listed for this programme; data collected for the DIAL programme reflects these limitations. The first progress reports for projects from the Governance programme were supplied by ESRC for this evaluation, and so data on outcomes and impacts is only preliminarily recorded for these projects.

Using a proforma sheet, we extracted data on publications (academic and others); capacity-building activities (including capacity-building/training workshops staff attended, students and other individuals trained, visiting scholars/guest researchers, and if training spanned multiple countries); knowledge dissemination activities (talks given, conferences/workshops organised, media and policy briefings, and other dissemination activities); and data about project management that was collected as standard fields within the project progress and final reports starting with the Welfare programme (anticipated social impact, audience/users of project, follow-up activities, collaboration and communication in consortium, added value of transnational collaboration, collaboration with external partners, changes in consortium, completed PhDs, any difficulties experienced, total meetings, and feedback for NORFACE). Having a standard reporting template allowed us to ensure that data could be coded reliably between two data extractors.

SAMPLE AND METHODS FOR INTERVIEW

To gain additional rich insights and stress-test our conclusions from the desk review, we conducted interviews with relevant stakeholders. These included:

- ESRC programme staff: To gain insights into the management and design of comparative funding instruments.
- NORFACE grantees. We selected a subset of projects (n=20) to identify a sample of PIs to invite to interview.
- NORFACE programme coordinator. Two were approached for interview and one responded.

Interviewees were purposively invited to enable a range of professions, geographies and impacts to be represented.

Interviews were conducted over March and April 2024. Interviews were recorded and themes identified from transcripts and field notes. These were discussed within the team to draw out patterns and to compare with emerging insights from the desk review. As insights evolved, we adapted our interview proforma to explore emerging issues, such as the role of capacity building within projects.

FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT

Due to the unique nature of this evaluation, we have developed a programme-specific framework drawing on appropriate elements from existing (e.g. Payback) models (see Appendix 1).

In partnership with ESRC, we refined and agreed this framework using the ESRC’s stated ‘values’ for the scheme (p.2 tender specification), and our own experience with demonstrating the value of international research to a national funder to develop a theory of change (ToC) (see Appendix 1). We mapped each category of impact against the ESRC values to help us to identify relevant indicators for the impact assessment (see Table 2).

Table 2: Adapted from Klautzer et al., who adapted the Payback framework to assess the ESRC Future of Work Programme in 2011

Category of Impacts from Payback Framework	Category of Impacts for NORFACE Evaluation	ESRC Value and associated impacts	Indicators
Knowledge	Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Enabling large scale, internationally comparative research. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Partnership agreements and research outputs demonstrating robust participation from cross-country team members. ● High quality research outputs which explore and compare cross-national factors influencing impact. ● High quality research outputs which demonstrate the value-add of an international research approach over national approach. ● Higher production of research outputs compared with similar international funding instruments & engagement mechanisms.
Benefits to future research and research use	Impacts on future research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Enabling UK researchers access to the best and diverse expertise. ● Providing capacity strengthening/ opportunities for UK early career researchers: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Evidence of research communities, outputs and activities including non-European partners. ● Evidence of improved capacity-building for Early Career Researchers (ECRs) in comparison with other funding instruments/projects. (evidence of opportunity - mentoring/P2P). ● Activities and outputs based on KE functions; funded KE staff. ● Higher level of KE activities and outputs compared with other

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting better knowledge exchange: 	international funding instruments, and other researcher-led projects.
Benefits from informing policy and product development Health and health sector benefits	Impacts on policy and practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delivering increased impact, and impact at an international level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Citation in policy documents. Evidence of sustained partnerships beyond the NORFACE funding period.
Broader economic benefits	Wider social and economic impacts (i.e. changes in public opinion)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delivering social and cultural benefits, e.g. opportunities for public engagement with research, arts and the humanities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of changes in public opinion found in openly available documentation (e.g. meeting minutes). Reported public engagement activity and evaluations.

SECTION 2: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

NORFACE responds to grand societal challenges and is part of a suite of ESRC investments that support international collaboration aiming to deliver against the funder’s mission, strategy and priorities, including broader social impacts. NORFACE explicitly supports knowledge exchange activities and thus is a source of learning about how research creates change. It is an internationally collaborative funding scheme, and relatively unusual in its support of comparative primary research in different countries.

Table 3: Summary of findings mapped to ESRC values

Research Process	ESRC Value	Outputs and Impacts
Research activity...	Enabling large scale, internationally comparative research	32 completed projects and 8 ongoing (based on available final/progress reports).
That produces new knowledge....	Enabling UK researchers access to the best and diverse expertise	1062 peer-reviewed publications, averaging 34 publications/project. Publications included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than 400 journal articles published. • More than 140 books or book chapters published. • More than 120 discussion/background/working papers published. <p>More than 50 papers planned/in progress at the time of final/progress report submissions.</p>
and builds capacity for research and knowledge exchange...	Providing capacity strengthening/ opportunities for UK early career researchers. Supporting better knowledge exchange:	All projects trained students and early career researchers, and 65% included international partners in their training offer. 54% of projects held more than 10 capacity-building events for students or staff. Capacity-building events/activities included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than 140 doctoral students trained across 25 projects. • More than 120 capacity-building workshops attended by staff and students across 34 projects. <p>Twenty visiting scholars across eight projects. Eight future grant applications prepared from five projects. Knowledge exchange activities included:</p>

Research Process	ESRC Value	Outputs and Impacts
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nearly 800 presentations/talks/seminars given by project staff across all projects. More than 70 conference sessions/workshops organised by project staff across 27 projects. More than 110 media briefings from 20 projects.
leading to policy and practice impact...	Delivering increased impact, and impact at an international level	<p>Nine projects produced policy briefings, and 15 produced other policy publications such as working reports.</p> <p>Policy and practice audiences included policymakers, civil servants, journalists, and European royalty.</p>
and wider social impacts...	Delivering social and cultural benefits, e.g. opportunities for public engagement with research, arts and the humanities	Fourteen studies reported wider social impacts, such as adoption of research in social care practice and contributions to public awareness raising through events and other dissemination activities.

This chart (Figure 1, below) displays the number of high-performing projects from NORFACE across all programmes, by impact category. For the purposes of this analysis, projects were considered "high-performing" in each category if they reported 10 or more total activities that corresponded to the indicator category. For example, a high-performing project reporting 10 or more advancing knowledge activities may have reported more than 10 publications; a high-performing project in the capacity building category may have reported four students trained, six workshops attended, and one visiting researcher; a high-performing project in the knowledge dissemination category may have reported two conferences organised, eight presentations given, and three media briefings.

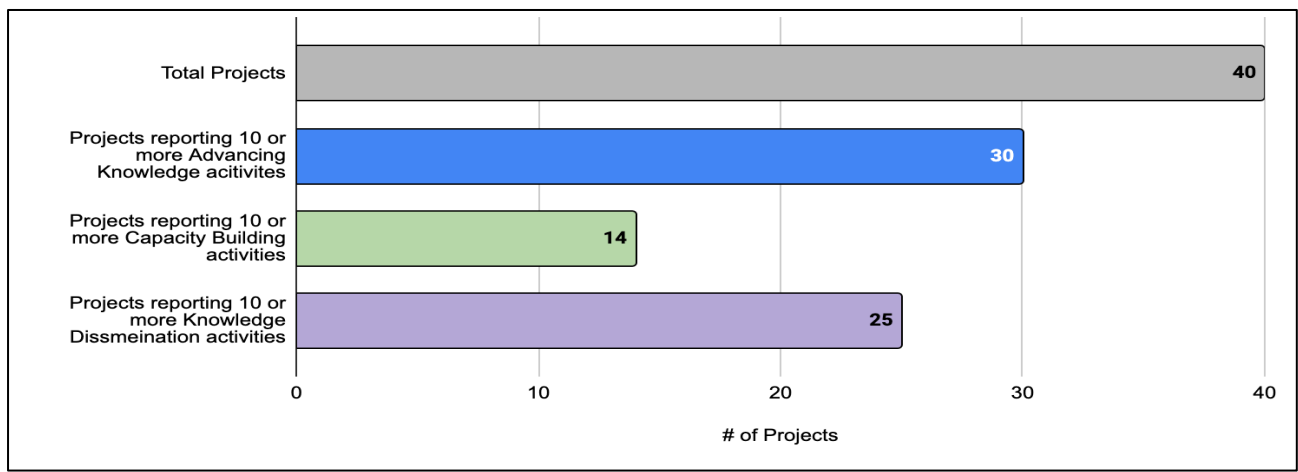


Figure 1: High-Performing NORFACE Projects 2007-2023, by impact indicator category

This chart (Figure 2, below) displays the number of projects reporting 10 or more activities across three impact categories (Advancing Knowledge, Capacity Building and Knowledge Dissemination) for each of the NORFACE programmes, as well as overall. Some projects may have reported fewer than 10 impacts in these categories, and this data is not captured within the chart. Notably, the DIAL programme does not report any “high-performing” projects for the capacity building impact category, because this data was not present on the DIAL programme website, the only source of project impact data available for this analysis. Additionally, while some projects from the Governance programme reported enough activities to be considered “high-performing” within this analysis, all projects were still in progress at the time of data collection. Some projects (across all programmes) may have reported between 1-9 impacts in these categories, and this data is not captured within the chart.

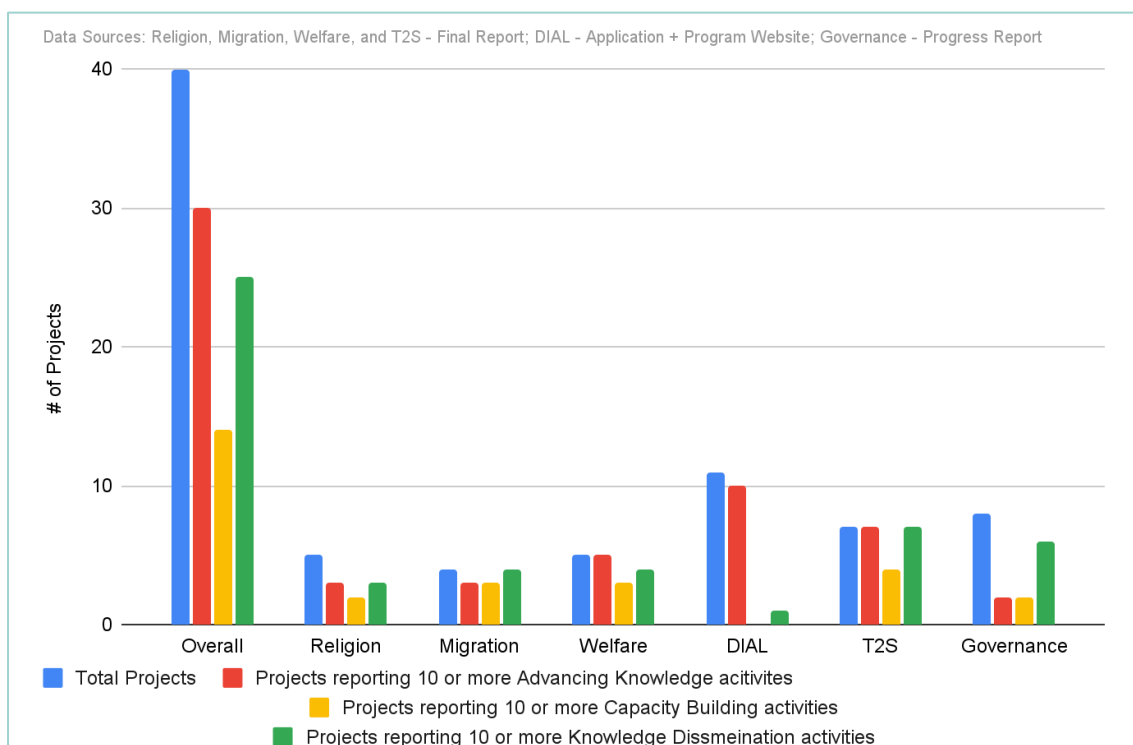


Figure 2: High-performing projects by NORFACE programme and impact category

SECTION 3: KNOWLEDGE CREATION

ENABLING LARGE-SCALE, INTERNATIONALLY COMPARATIVE RESEARCH

PRODUCTION OF RESEARCH AND ASSOCIATED OUTPUTS THAT CONSIDER CROSS-NATIONAL VARIATIONS

Through NORFACE, the ESRC has enabled UK researchers to partner with international research, policy and practice partners generating new knowledge and high-quality outputs. NORFACE researchers expressed many reasons for valuing the funding scheme, but particularly referenced the opportunity and resource it offered to conduct high-quality, internationally comparative and interdisciplinary research. These kind of opportunities are relatively rare and enable work which would not otherwise take place:

"Most of the research listed [in the final report] would not have appeared without NORFACE funding (whether it be buy-out time, funding of research assistantships or data acquisition)." (Final report)

Funded projects addressed a huge range of topics, methods and problems, from mining, through conservation, to biodiversity. The projects produced research that in the majority of cases considers cross-national variations, enabling exploration and comparison of the different social, economic, cultural and political factors which impact within local contexts:

"GoST used a comparative approach to provide valuable insights for understanding how and why contexts matter and differ in enabling or constraining T2S. One of the major achievements is that the US, Indian and German GoST teams contributed to a comparative approach to understand why the implementation of similar goals (e.g. bending the curve) may face resistance and endless controversy in some countries (e.g. the US), while securing public compliance, cooperation, and even active support in others (e.g. Germany). US citizens, for example, have been demonstrably more dubious about the causes and consequences of climate change (and more recently about the seriousness of Covid-19), and more receptive to alternative theories, than their counterparts in other advanced industrial nations, such as Germany." (Final Report)

Some projects made major methodological contributions within their field, with approaches that have since been widely implemented by others; a significant shift in research design within the topic area that has led to numerous replications of their approach.

*"Our transnational approach allowed [us] to analyse heterogeneous mobility patterns (not only one-time movements) and understand the experiences of migrants in a scaled manner (e.g. local, national and transnational frame) in order to avoid methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002, Scheibelhofer 2011). **The cross-country comparison fuelled our theoretical sampling and informed our research strategies.**" (Final Report)*

PIs felt that their projects were able to provide new research insights, data and theories, generating novel knowledge of relevance to cross-national issues. A positive aspect of the funding scheme was that NORFACE addressed neglected topic areas:

"Great idea to have a research project focusing on religion, an area which is often neglected in grant calls." (Final report)

One of the most frequently cited benefits delivered through the NORFACE scheme was the access it enabled to data outside of individual country contexts. The production and collation of high-quality data, as well as access to data within specific national contexts (e.g. the UK Biobank), was referenced within reports and interviews as a factor that added value to partnerships.

“Our team has used these data in innovative ways; one important research theme is to study the integration and assimilation of adult immigrants and their children across five different countries (UK, Sweden, Finland, Norway, and Denmark). The unique scope of the data made it possible not only to study the evolution of labor market outcomes of immigrants, but focus on broader aspects such as the school performance of immigrant children, health, fertility, crime, marriage and residential choices.” (Final report)

Projects produced research that leveraged innovative international opportunities to answer questions relevant to the UK and others, as the following example demonstrates:

“Our methodology enabled visualization of gold mining worlds in the Brazilian and Surinamese Amazon, and in parts of West and East Africa. It provided a basis to co-create knowledge with gold miners to challenge simplistic narratives and bring to light heterogeneity of mining. The methodology also enabled us to bring together mining stakeholders who would ordinarily remain separate, and to engage with wider publics on transformations to sustainability in mineral extraction.” (Final Report)

ROBUST AND SUBSTANTIVE PARTICIPATION AND COLLABORATION ACROSS COUNTRIES

All NORFACE projects were collaborative and involved partnership agreements and practices to ensure robust participation. Most projects found that collaboration went well, and attributed this to several factors including:

- Good and frequent management of the partnership itself, often very creatively and proactively.

“Despite the pandemic and moving most activities online, collaborations within teams as well as across teams have been productive and inspiring. The team has created excellent forms of collaborations online, including a regular seminar series, joint development of website content and joint publications. The team have had regular meetings at the scale of local case studies as well as internationally.” (Final Report)

- Pivoting to online interactions for those projects delivered within the pandemic.

“To coordinate and lead this international, multi-sited comparative research, regular online video-conferences were held (once a month). Additionally, face-to-face workshops were held to introduce the research strategy and discuss comparative results. A comprehensive and constantly evolving methodologically “work guide” constituted the written basis for the transnational comparative research.” (Final Report)

- Building on existing relationships that had a strong foundation of trust and that had been developed over many years.

“[T]he other advantage was that we also had worked together before on another project. So in a way, it wasn’t starting de nouveau, though there were some people we hadn’t worked with before.

So I guess it was long dure building on existing work and collaboration. So there was some trust.” (Interviewee)

- Consortia that were of optimal size and shape to enable agility and close working.

“There was a relatively small number of main partners in the project (4) and an advantage was very good collaboration and communication. The project leads communicated regularly and the whole team met at least once annually. Individual communication within country teams and between country teams working on the same work-packages was more frequent.” (Final Report)

- Substantive participation and engagement of the different country partners.

“Transnational collaboration is indispensable for a project we had envisioned. It provided the opportunity for exchange and bringing in the many relevant perspective of welfare in origin and destination across Europe which was highly informative and useful for the project. Furthermore the project was also interdisciplinary which besides being a challenge was also extremely enriching and has resulted in insights that would otherwise not have been achieved. These different types of differences in the team provided also for the more junior scholars involved a great opportunity for learning.” (Final report)

“Our Indian partners have had big networks in India, and they were able to bring together local stakeholders from the administration, from politics, but also NGOs, business and law organisations ... It was easy for them because they have been very established ... They have been pretty good in networking, and they also organised a series of workshops.” (Interviewee)

- Coherent project working methods that enabled a joined-up research approach.

Research projects employed a range of collaboration methods and modes in order to deepen existing relationships or forge new ones. This included exchange visits between countries, time spent working with data in situ with another national team, comparative workshops, Zoom conferences and the formation of informal online peer learning groups.

“A number of exchange visits between HiNews partners throughout the duration of the project. Courtney McNamara travelled to Durham University and Harvard University. Katie Thomson visited NTNU. Mirza Balaj and Anna Gkiouleka also visited Harvard University.” (Final report)

Most interviewees reported valuing the structure of NORFACE programmes. Some researchers noted that they felt the structure allowed individual partner countries to enter into the partnership from a position of greater equality (as opposed to schemes where they draw down resources from a main country lead, and then distribute, which can impose power imbalances). Those researchers that valued this structure reported that the funding distribution through national funders also allowed for an increased quality of engagement (due to incentive of having a dedicated budget).

“It’s unusual now to do research without looking at international comparisons. What’s less usual is to kind of really give them, you know, give them equal weight.” (Interviewee)

HIGH-QUALITY RESEARCH OUTPUTS DEMONSTRATING ADDED VALUE OF INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH APPROACH

The 40 projects which we reviewed produced on average more than 30 publications each, with a total of 1062. The majority of these were academically oriented. Nearly all interviewees reported that they created international outputs through NORFACE. Cross-country collaborations enabled

production of research and methods at an international level, facilitating analysis and insight. As one project report noted:

“Transnational collaboration was essential to the project since it involved a five country collaboration. The success of this collaboration is indicated by the fact that our two books, our journal special issue and three out of five of our most important scientific productions are international collaborations.” (Final report)

In many cases, as noted above, NORFACE acted as a consolidating and enabling mechanism for pre-existing partnerships where one or two additional partners were added to an existing base (with examples of new partners located in Europe, the Global South or East Asia). The tendency for NORFACE teams to build on a foundation of existing networks was similarly observed in the evaluation of the Fund for International collaboration.³ For those projects within the T2S programme, interviewees cited the importance of the inclusion of global south academic and partners to address their research questions and to achieve impact.

“I think thinking about the before and after, the outputs were very different, reflecting this international collaborative effort and also the comparative perspectives. We did a lot of comparative workshops in the other countries, in the UK and in Brazil, and this was also reflected in the output.” (Interviewee)

At least three project teams were built upon a pre-existing partnership funded through COST, with others having previously had funding from Horizon Europe. While most partnerships were built from existing collaborative relationships, there were exceptions to this. One researcher reported:

“Previously I was largely researching the UK, whereas now pretty much everything that I published in the last three years has been comparative. So it's really changed the kind of research I was doing ... I was trained as a qualitative researcher and I now collaborate regularly with quantitative analysts and I've done much more mixed method work, a lot more interdisciplinary work ... And partly that's a result of just having the opportunity to work with academics who are elsewhere, but also from different disciplinary traditions.” (Interviewee)

CHALLENGES OF MANAGING LARGE INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS FUNDED BY NORFACE

Any multinational research project will suffer challenges from the complexity of the work programme, and NORFACE was no exception. Practical methodological challenges included working in different languages (for example, having to translate research materials into multiple languages), difficulties identifying appropriate samples for comparative population research across different countries (which in some cases depended on local third sector or other intermediary partners), and working to move data collection online due to Covid-19, which affected the quality. Delays in fieldwork were common, and while not unique to NORFACE, the additional complexity of multinational working added an extra management burden that not all PIs were equal to:

“As mentioned before data collection efforts and investments were larger than expected in terms of work intensity and duration... It is nearly impossible to produce scientific high quality publications while at the same time developing a data collection design and collection, implying that we still

³ ‘FIC researchers were already active in international collaboration before FIC, but their international collaboration within FIC projects is higher than before and in comparison with other sources of funding’ (p36) . <https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/UKRI-04082023-FIC-interim-impact-evaluation-main-findings-report.pdf>

envision a substantial number of publications to be realised while at the same time facing the situation the young scholars move on with their career at the end of the project." (*Final report*)

Some felt that there was simply insufficient time to manage the project:

"As an early career PI and a co-applicant, I had to spend most of my time traveling in European countries to manage the project. This has resulted in a gap in my publication record, slowing my progress in my academic career." (*Final report*)

Several interviewees reported complications associated with continuation of partnerships. This was largely due to differing rules within each national funder regarding no-cost extensions. Many projects requested these as a result of Covid-19 related issues. Covid-19 had a major influence on the delivery of projects within the T2S and Democratic Governance schemes, with all PIs we spoke to noting the impacts that this had on their capacity for collaboration – albeit not always negatively.

"Our ability to collaborate was somewhat hampered by Covid research and travel restrictions." (*Interviewee*)

"The consortium worked together for longer than anticipated, which was a positive as it allowed time to overcome Covid-related challenges in terms of conducting in-person meetings and research. However, it has also allowed a variety of research and communications outputs more time to evolve and come out before the formal end of the project, which is a positive." (*Final report*)

Equality of participation in partnerships was not universally observed. Researchers reported differences in relation to the resources provided by each research funder. At times this resulted in asymmetries in relation to what each partner within NORFACE collaborations could do; for example, around extensions to postdoctoral funding. In other cases, different bureaucratic systems led to different start dates between partners resulting in misaligned work packages.

Researchers across NORFACE programmes mentioned that there was insufficient resource provided within the grants for third sector/civil society actors, which impeded the amount these organisations could contribute. Moreover, some interviewees reported that for researchers from the Global South there were funding asymmetries in terms of access to resources (due to funding regulations). In addition, several interviewees noted that restrictions on the allocation of resources to non-academic partners also prevented fully equal participation.

"I guess the construction that developed countries were funding countries and countries from the Global South were receiving countries, and they have had less resources and less resources for doing research. This was highly problematic". (*Interviewee*)

Furthermore, several researchers reported that difficulties extending the project had reduced the capacity for sustained collaborative activities. This had certain unintended consequences; for example, postdoctoral researchers at times had to be supported through external funds (e.g. local university funding) or through reallocation of travel budgets. This was made more possible by the travel restrictions imposed due to Covid-19. It was widely felt that additional resources for staff exchanges would have further cemented the success of the collaboration.

"The communication within the team was as envisioned both via in person and virtual meetings. This worked in general well although budgets were unfortunately rather tight and linked to the project duration so that exchange in the phase of data analyses and writing has been more limited. Research visits would have been a great addition to the project had there been an additional year and budget." (*Final Report*)

SECTION 4: CAPACITY BUILDING AND IMPACTS ON FUTURE RESEARCH

ENABLING UK RESEARCHERS ACCESS TO THE BEST AND DIVERSE EXPERTISE

RESEARCH COMMUNITIES, OUTPUTS AND ACTIVITIES INCLUDING NON-EUROPEAN PARTNERS

The scheme has brought together collaborative research relationships with 21 European countries, as well as North and South America, Africa, Asia and Australasia. UK leads feature on 19 out of 40 projects. Project leads reported that this international component added great value, and was often complemented by the different disciplinary or methodological perspectives encouraged within the NORFACE calls. NORFACE enabled transdisciplinary research communities to meet and work together, and to access expertise and communities not available within the UK. Most projects were interdisciplinary, bringing together knowledge from different perspectives and approaches in fruitful ways, as the following quotation illustrates:

“We used social science as an entry point to working in a transdisciplinary way. And the key element was working with the arts. So the knowledge exchange that we worked with artists, especially in Africa, but also in Brazil, to articulate ideas of the project and to engage with public ... bringing the arts to the fore in a way that I hadn't ... before.” (Interviewee)

Table 4: Collaborative research relationships by country

Programme	# of UK Leads	# of European Leads	Other Lead Countries	Collaborating Countries
Religion	1	4	Portugal (1) The Netherlands (3)	Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Portugal, Sweden, The Netherlands.
Migration	4	0	-	Brazil, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Morocco, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, The Netherlands, Ukraine.
Welfare	3	2	Germany (1), The Netherlands (1)	Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Slovenia, Turkey, The Netherlands.
DIAL	5	5	Germany (1), Norway (1), Switzerland (1) The Netherlands (2)	Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Italy, Ireland, Germany, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, The Netherlands, Norway, United Kingdom, United States.
T2S	3	4	Germany (2), The	Algeria, Australia, Bangladesh,

Programme	# of UK Leads	# of European Leads	Other Lead Countries	Collaborating Countries
			Netherlands (2)	Belgium, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Ghana, Guinea-Conakry, Finland, India, Ireland, Kenya, Morocco, Mozambique, Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Suriname, Tanzania, United Kingdom, United States, Uganda, Zimbabwe.
Governance	3	5	France (1), Germany (1), Luxembourg (1), Norway (1), The Netherlands (1)	Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Norway, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, The Netherlands, United Kingdom.

COUNTRIES LEADING NORFACE PROJECTS

Figure 3: Countries leading NORFACE projects depicts countries leading NORFACE projects. Among the projects selected for this analysis, the following countries led projects: UK (19), The Netherlands (8), Germany (5), Norway (2), France (1), Luxembourg (1), Portugal (1), and Switzerland (1).

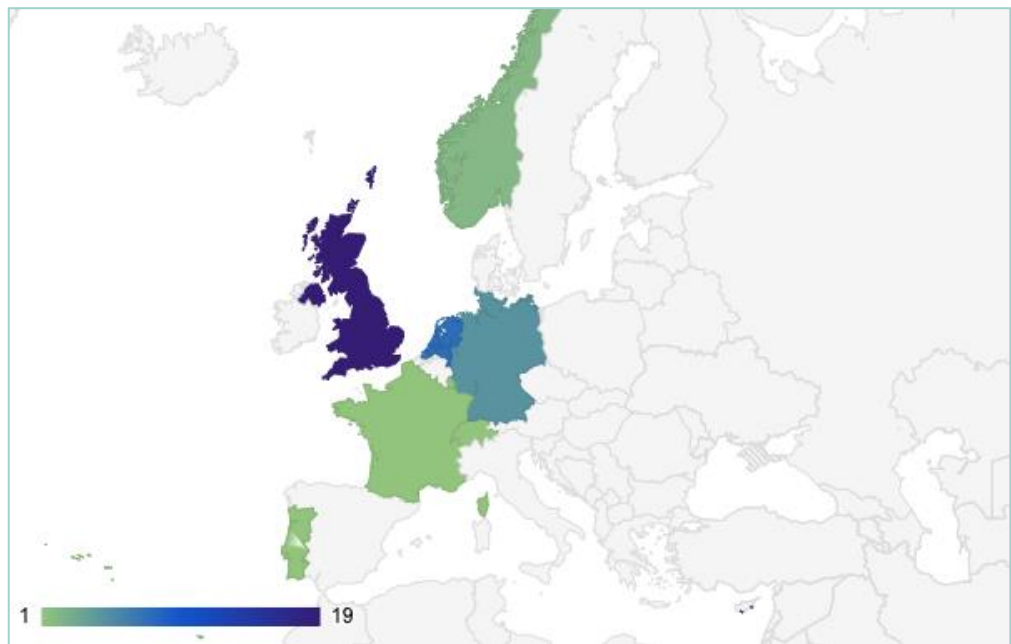


Figure 3: Countries leading NORFACE projects

COUNTRIES COLLABORATING ON NORFACE PROJECTS

The following map depicts countries collaborating on NORFACE projects. Among the projects selected for this analysis, the following countries participated on NORFACE projects: Algeria (1),

Australia (1), Austria (3), Bangladesh (1), Belgium (1), Brazil (2), Bulgaria (1), Burkina Faso (1), Canada (2), Czech Republic (1), Denmark (7), Estonia (1), Finland (6), France (6), Germany (14), Ghana (1), Guinea (1), Hungary (1), India (3), Ireland (3), Israel (1), Italy (2), Kenya (1), Morocco (1), Mozambique (1), Peru (1), Poland (4), Portugal (5), Slovenia (2), Spain (5), Suriname (1), Sweden (1), Switzerland (10), Tanzania (1), The Netherlands (1), Turkey (1), Uganda (1), United Kingdom (19), United States (5), Zimbabwe (1).

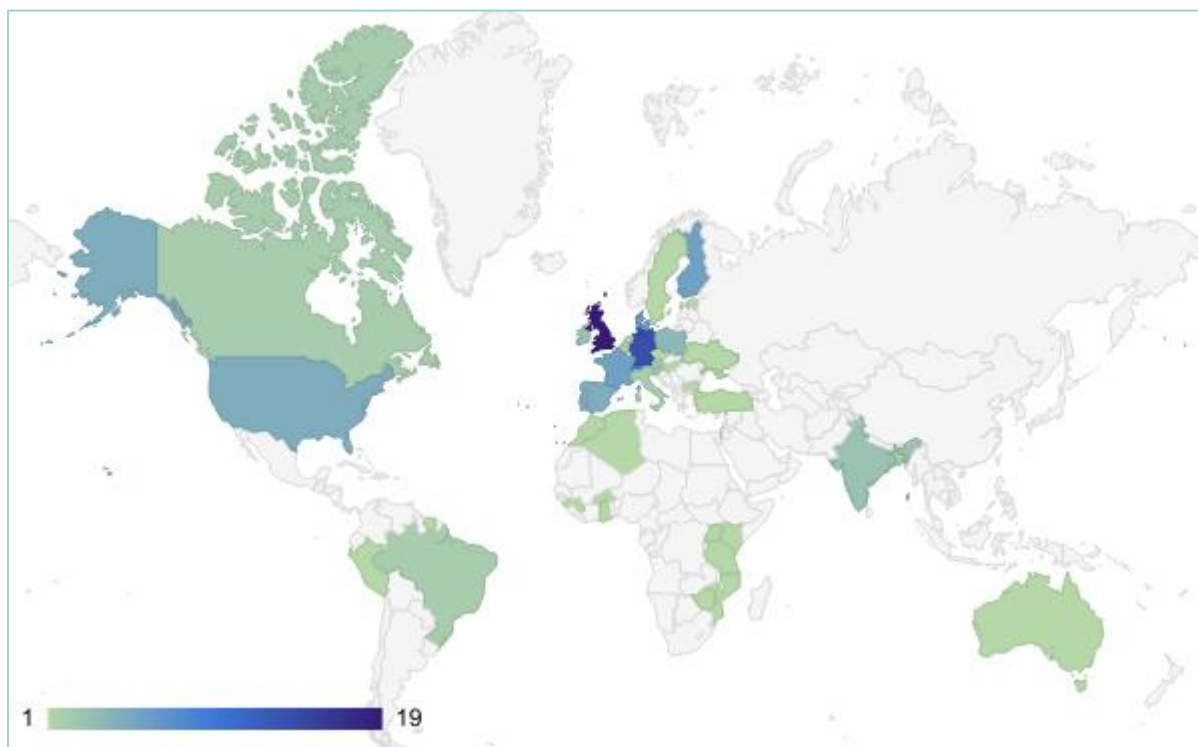


Figure 4: Countries Collaborating on NORFACE projects

SUSTAINED PARTNERSHIPS BEYOND THE NORFACE FUNDING PERIOD

Across all programmes there was some evidence that networks were extended through the NORFACE programmes (i.e. beyond pre-existing relationships). Moreover, the majority of interviewees reported that the collaboration formed through the NORFACE scheme has continued, for example through new, funded research projects. Eight interviewees reported securing funding from the European Commission (e.g. COST, and ERC Consolidator and Advanced awards) or through national funding schemes (including within the UK, such as the Leverhulme Fellowships). One researcher had secured ESRC IAA funding from their institution to continue their collaborative work in countries outside of the UK.

“Many of the collaborations highlighted will continue beyond the NORFACE funding. For instance, the Danish and the UK team are currently utilizing the refugee placement policy in Denmark to study peer effects in education and fertility. The Norwegian and the UK team are currently collaborating on a major project funded by NORFACE Welfare State Futures - this collaboration would not have happened without the NORFACE Immigration grant.” (Final Report)

Project partners, particularly those in the more recently completed T2S and Democratic Governance schemes continue to publish together. Around half of Democratic Governance leads that we spoke to continue to engage with stakeholders related to their NORFACE project. In addition, two researchers from the Migration programme reported that their work continues to have a ripple effect

through the methods or data developed through the NORFACE funded programme that are now used by a wide network of researchers.

“We generated a large scale survey data, which we have deposited to data archive, and it’s now been used in very many publications. It’s generated one book and well over 30 leading journal articles, and we are still publishing on them.” (Interviewee)

PROVIDING CAPACITY-BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR UK ECRS

We found considerable evidence of capacity-building activities, with a particular focus within projects of support for Early Career Researchers (ECRs). For most researchers, ‘capacity building’ refers to the development of research and analytical skills, and/or the creation of substantive expertise by training researchers and enabling their exposure to research environments and practices. We summarise this capacity building data in Figure 5.

29 of 40 reported capacity-building data.

Of the 29 projects reporting data, 14 projects reported 10 or more capacity-building activities/training for students. The average number of capacity-building activities/persons trained reported was 34.

Of the 13 projects reporting fewer than 10 activities, the average number of capacity-building activities/persons trained was 5.4. These 13 were: 3 religion, 1 migration, 2 welfare, 3 T2S, 6 governance (only progress report)

26 projects reported providing some training to students associated with their project

17 projects reported some training to other persons, not students

23 projects reported that training provided (to anyone) spanned more than one country

Figure 5: Summary of NORFACE Capacity Building Activities

Funding provided by NORFACE for capacity-building was welcomed by researchers. Many projects provided training in the form of research methods or related technical skills courses. These were primarily referenced as customised, flexible and/or *ad hoc* rather than via coordinated training offerings. Additionally, participants in earlier NORFACE programmes were able to take advantage of learning opportunities such as the NORFACE summer or winter schools.

More commonly referenced were opportunities for experiential learning as an important feature of the projects. These were seen as an important mechanism to support the career development of early career researchers (e.g. co-authoring publications, research visits to partner countries, attending conferences, engaging in conversations with senior colleagues from different countries, use of data not accessible in host country). As such, NORFACE resources were valued as they directly enabled this type of 'softer' interaction and long-term development:

“We tried to make sure that both the junior scholars themselves got to know each other quite well across these countries, but also that the junior scholars got to know senior scholars better both within our project, but also beyond with these other projects and these other conferences. So we made sure that was resources in the project, that they could be with us at these different conferences and maybe even present themselves.” (Interviewee)

“The NORFACE project also allowed the team members to build up a network, through regular meetings at the various workshops. It also allowed us to actively involve PhD students into projects; and PhD students had the possibility to work with and interact with senior researchers and present their research in front of the academic community in ways that are typically not possible.” (Final Report)

The types of positive impacts of the scheme cited by interviewees on the development of early career researchers included:

- Promotion that some researchers felt was directly attributable to the funding and publications delivered through NORFACE.
- Becoming an established academic. Interviewees reported that postdoctoral researchers employed on NORFACE had, in the majority of cases, continued into successful academic careers in tenured positions.
- Completion of theses.
- Researcher mobility. Several examples were found of researchers moving between institutions within the NORFACE project.
- Transfer out of academia into a high-profile policy role.
- Attraction of talent to the UK. Several examples of EU researchers moving to academic jobs in the UK as a result of their participation in the project.

“So they've tended to stay more in the UK, despite the fact that they could have gone elsewhere. That's because, you know, it's a more attractive place in a way to be policy researchers.” (Interviewee)

As we will go on to explain below, capacity building beyond the scope of early career research development was very limited. Exceptions included work by a project funded through the Democratic Governance programme which used the lead institution's existing suite of civil service training programmes as a dissemination route for research findings, as well as more informally organised training for executives within the regulation sector.

CHALLENGES TO CAPACITY BUILDING

Many projects teams understood capacity-building to be building substantive knowledge and skills within the research team and community. This was both in terms of involving ECRs in research and enabling their participation within the wider management of the projects:

“The 22-person team began the project with limited understanding of thinking on transformations to sustainability, including how to apply a transdisciplinary approach emphasizing the importance of

co-creation with non-academic stakeholders to address transformation and sustainability dynamics. We have developed significant new capacity, including for senior team members, for post-doctoral researchers, and for 5 PhD students.” (Final report.)

“We have established a very strong link between the main researchers working on the project. This consists of bi-monthly e-meetings. Update reports/meeting minutes are also circulated to all PIs. We also include our wider non-academic partners in these discussions.” (Interim report)

Among the interviewees, there was limited understanding of what capacity building might mean outside of the context of supporting the development of early career researchers. Those that did reference capacity-building activities for non-academics were mostly part of the T2S scheme, where activities included training and professional exchanges. This lack of understanding regarding the possibilities for capacity building (either through formal learning programmes or informal exchanges), may act as an inadvertent barrier to knowledge exchange and impact. Consequently, it may point to an area for potential refinement and development in future application processes (e.g. offering suggested models for developing these forms of capacity building, or through the coordination activities).

Some projects cited barriers to capacity building as a result of Covid-19; however, many overcame these to produce enriching, internationally focused peer learning environments for their ECRs.

“I think clearly Covid was not beneficial in many ways, but I think it did help in creating this online community where people could discuss their research ideas.” (Interviewee (non-UK))

SECTION 5: KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE AND IMPACTS ON POLICY

SUPPORTING BETTER KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

KE ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS

NORFACE projects sought to engage with, and to generate knowledge relevant to multiple audiences. Many projects included collaboration with non-academic partners, with most of those we interviewed having had some form of interaction with policy, practice or civil society stakeholders. At application stage and within projects reports, teams reported projected or actual audiences to include:

- *Academia, including funders*, engaged with through publications, conferences, seminars and people-exchanges.
- *Polymakers, including regulators, civil servants and elected representatives*. Researchers used a range of creative approaches to engage with policy audiences, often resulting in invitations to speak with policy audiences, contributions to policy reports, or other policy influence. Interviewees gave multiple examples of policy engagement such as talks to MPs, opposition parties and government bodies, including in Turkey; delivery of evidence testimony to the Scottish Parliament; contribution to commissioned research (by think tanks and membership organisations); contribution of evidence to a National Action plan; and input of evidence via intergovernmental committee and working group membership.
- *Practitioners, such as city planners, law enforcement officers, lawyers and health practitioners*, who were engaged through alternate dissemination methods such as blog posts and practitioner-focused publications, as well as city-level community dialogues. One project designed and validated a tool to be used directly by health practitioners.
- *Media*, including journalists and publishers, were engaged through briefings and direct contributions (e.g. through op-eds for The Conversation).
- *Private sector and industry*, such as startups and start-up incubators were mentioned as audiences, but less frequently. For example a T2S project with a collaborator in India drew on their partner's extensive local networks to engage businesses.
- *Civil society/NGOs*, such as those led by/ or representing migrant communities, were often engaged with directly as project partners or co-producers of research proposals or outputs:

“We used participatory action research in which there was an immersion within a community and ... a longstanding engagement with that community. Again, that was only viable having ...a local partner who was able to do ... very frequent interactions, you know, that was very important for us, gave us a very different richness of detail and understanding of the context.”
(Interviewee)

Researchers funded through the T2S scheme appear to have taken the most integrated approach to their KE and collaborative activities, with non-academic organisations involved in the design and delivery stage, as well as final dissemination activities. Researchers interviewed shared several examples of where their partnerships in the Global South led to strong, diverse and sustainable KE activities.

“The project has advised and engaged with international actors ranging from C40 Cities to national and international actors within the climate change global governance regime such as the Non-

economic Loss and Damage Working Group of the Warsaw International Mechanism in the UNFCCC.” (Final report)

In contrast with the majority of T2S projects, within most other programmes interviewees reported that knowledge exchange activities and arising impacts were primarily delivered within the national setting of the individual researchers. Interviewees reported that policy engagement and associated impacts most commonly took place at a national level, rather than cross-national. The exception to this was the T2S scheme which saw UK and European academics partnering with Global South partners – but in these instances local partners still led activities, with the following comment typical:

“We did things within France and within Norway, and probably this fed into a more broader agenda that is influencing policy more broadly. But generally, policy impacts come through national institutions and commissions.” (Interviewee)

Factors that led to this localisation of KE activities included: requirement of local networks and knowledge, nationally specific data, language differences, pre-existing relationships and Covid-19 .

Often projects had one very strong team in terms of KE with existing connections with non-academic stakeholders that they could build on. These experiences and networks did not always read across to the PIs based in other national contexts.

“But one thing that then was, again, in terms of the NORFACE design, where it’s relevant that you have different teams in different countries, again, different funders, different also traditions. And so for us, the main difficulty when we try to tick that box is that for us in the UK, it was very easy because I’m very closely connected with many security, you know, actors, non-academics in the UK, but in the other two countries, they had, I think, a more academic tradition where impact is not something that you do much.” (Interviewee)

“I think our project took it quite seriously that we should actually work with non-academic actors and really co produce the work and co-produce, try to understand co production, but also try and co-produce together and look at change in a more dynamic way.” (Interviewee)

DELIVERING IMPACT, AND IMPACT AT AN INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

HIGH-QUALITY RESEARCH OUTPUTS EXPLORING CROSS-NATIONAL FACTORS INFLUENCING IMPACT

Within around half of the interviews we found evidence of continued policy, practice and civil society impact that could be tied back directly or indirectly to ESRC NORFACE investments. Interviewed researchers reported that impacts were still anticipated and/or in some cases had not yet been delivered. Those involved in earlier projects had not widely tracked their impacts post the funded period.

Impacts that were identified within the final reports and the interviews include:

- Changes in awareness about key policy issues such as migration
- Impacts on future care/service delivery
- Reframing of questions of sustainability and transformation leading to shifts in opinions
- Changes in practice e.g. through training and workshops
- Direct contribution to a National Action Plan.
- Contributions that led to legislative changes

- Laid the groundwork for future policy conditions through committee membership

Common success factors cited by those whose projects had generated impacts included:

- Existing/longstanding relationships and connections to the relevant, local policy ecosystem
- Using integrated approaches to KE, including having civil society or other practitioners included as cooperating partners on the project;
- Having adaptive approaches to KE during the pandemic when most interactions were online
- Longstanding research portfolio in a related area.

“We explicitly did not go with any preconceived notion. I mean, of course the academics were writing the proposal, but we worked together with non-academic partners and local partners in country ... And the other advantage was that we also had worked together before on another project” (Interviewee)

Standout examples of impacts generated from NORFACE projects include:

- Within the DIAL programme, the project led by Prof Sir Richard Blundell at the Institute for Fiscal Studies led to policy engagement and impact at national government level (see Appendix 2).
- Within the Welfare State programme, the project led by Prof Catia Montagna led to extended and deepened relationships with policy stakeholders within the Scottish system (see Appendix 2).
- Also within the Welfare State programme, Prof Clare Bambra was appointed to the WHO Europe Scientific Advisory Group on health equity and as a result will be supporting the development of WHO policy in this area.
- Within the T2S programme, the project led by Prof Joao Porto de Albuquerque worked with community organisations in Brazil to enhance capacity of residents of flood prone areas to contribute data to the national flood early warning system enabling better flood modelling and improved accuracy of flood warnings and saving lives (see Appendix 2).
- All the T2S project leads that we spoke to reported ongoing policy, practice and civil society engagement and impacts. Features of the success of these engagements included: existing local networks, co-production and involvement of stakeholders from inception, resource distribution to stakeholders.

The following quotations further illustrate the forms of impacts noted within the NORFACE portfolio:

"On 11 November 2020, PI C Eckes wrote, based on SepaRope’s conceptual framework, an op-ed in a leading Dutch newspaper (NRC) that kicked off a debate on the draft election programme of the governing party (VVD) and in particular how that programme envisaged the relations of the judiciary to the national executive and legislature on the one hand and European law (ECHR) on the other. As a result of this debate, amendments were proposed, petitions were started and, ultimately, the programme was amended.” (Final report)

CHALLENGES IN DELIVERY OF KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE AND GENERATION OF IMPACT

Researchers reflected on a number of factors that influenced the effectiveness of their knowledge exchange activities. For some they felt that their work was not relevant to non-academic stakeholders. For others, they reflected on the effectiveness of their approaches to KE, and reported that in retrospect they felt that they should have embedded stakeholders earlier in the research project process:

“I think I would also try to engage policymakers earlier on in the project. If there's any lesson, I think it would be that because we were trying to invite a few policymakers to our conference and then trying to engage with them a little bit. But of course, they were not part of the project. They didn't feel any ownership or responsibility for it.” (Interviewee)

The impacts of Covid-19 were also found in relation to the delivery of knowledge exchange activities and collaboration with non-academic partners. Those that had a preferred method for impact prior to the pandemic (e.g. dissemination events) found, in some cases, that it was hard to pivot.

Although many researchers felt that the activities would have been better had in person interaction been possible, most project teams found ways of mitigating the disbenefits of not meeting online. Those researchers that had experience using co-production approaches and drew upon longstanding, ‘built-in’ partnerships with non-academics tended to be more successful in their adaptation. This is consistent with the broader evidence base which suggests that these are the most effective means to mobilise knowledge.⁴

“I think this time I really tried to work at a much earlier stage with external partners. I think previously I've worked with partners to either help deliver something or as a kind of end product, whereas this time [because of Covid-19] the method we'd planned just wasn't viable ... It was just kind of a series of conversations trying to work out what they were interested in thinking about and how that dovetailed with the things that we were interested in looking at. But they bought in quite early to the work that we were doing. So although we conducted it ... we ended up writing a report that they produced as a[n] ... early output from some of the research and subsequently developed it as an academic paper.” (Interviewee)

⁴ Martin S. Co-production of social research: strategies for engaged scholarship. *Public Money Management*. 2010;30:211–8.; and Nystrom ME, Karlun J, Keller C, Gare A. Collaborative and partnership research for improvement of health and social services: researchers experiences from 20 projects. *Health Res Policy Syst*. 2018;16:46.

SECTION 6: IMPACTS CREATED BY THE NORFACE PORTFOLIO – COMPARISONS WITH OTHER FUNDING INSTRUMENTS

HIGHER PRODUCTION OF RESEARCH OUTPUTS AND IMPACTS COMPARED WITH SIMILAR INTERNATIONAL FUNDING INSTRUMENTS

It is difficult to make comparisons with other funding mechanisms in relation to output productivity due to the numerous variables impacting upon their production (e.g. disciplinary variations, different funding values, influence of Covid-19, different time periods/lags). In addition, reporting of project values was highly inconsistent and variable. Nonetheless, we note that when looking at the recent evaluation of the Fund for International Collaboration (FIC), we see that the average number of publications per £m invested from the Fund (based on Researchfish data) was reported as 14.26, with UKRI international grants (excluding FIC) 13.31. For NORFACE we note that there is an average of 34 publications/project (but the average per £1m not possible to calculate due to quality of data).

Interviewees referenced valuing the following aspects of the NORFACE programme (making direct comparisons when making these comments to other international funding schemes such as TRAP, COST Action, European Research Council):

- The emphasis on data and empirical work.
- The scale of the funding is not so big that vast, potentially unwieldy, consortia are formed (as with some other European funding). Manageable, medium-sized teams are formed, leading to potential productivity gains.
- The challenge-focused nature of the calls, which enabled researchers to see clearly the relevance of their potential contributions.
- The amount of funding distributed.
- The availability of funding for research and knowledge exchange activity (not just networking).
- The coordination aspect which allowed them to interact with a broader range of relevant research and researchers.
- The opportunity that NORFACE creates to establish a supportive network of researchers working towards a shared goal.

As noted earlier in this report, researchers reported valuing the structure of NORFACE programmes which they felt allowed individual partner countries to enter into the partnership from a position of greater equality (as opposed to schemes where they draw down resources from a main country lead, such as via the ESRC's international Co-Project Lead [Co-PL mechanism]). According to interviewees, this created greater equality of engagement (especially for those countries with less well-resourced research systems within Europe).

“It's unusual now to do research without looking at international comparisons. What's less usual is to kind of really give them, you know, give them equal weight.” (Interviewee)

The following quotation illustrates the positive experience that NORFACE researchers gained from the coordination activities integral to the programme (which is different from Trans-Atlantic Platform (T-AP) and projects funded via the international Co-PL route that do not benefit from these coordination activities).

“I think the community-building aspect of this project has been really unique. So over the three years, we've met regularly enough as a team in person that there's now really strong interpersonal ties between us all. I think other ESRC grants I've had before, they tend to be more fragmented and

you don't get the. Well, you don't meet together, that you collaborate, but it's more kind of around specific projects. Whereas the really nice thing about this project is I genuinely know what they've been doing individually ... on the projects that they've been leading at other institutions. But we've also regularly got together and thought about, the overarching contributions that each of our individual studies are advancing. Yeah, that feels quite different, I think, because it's allowed us to think about the bigger picture impact of the work that we've done and how each small study that we've done to advance our own research objectives helps us answer that kind of bigger question. I've never kind of had that collective responsibility for thinking about that bigger question on another grant.” (Interviewee)

Two researchers we interviewed mentioned that collaborations were bilateral in nature (rather than multi-lateral), which they found was a comparatively different experience from their involvement in projects funded through other schemes.

“We're writing a book manuscript together. So in that sense, that was this idea. We still want to sort of do these joint outputs and they are sort of coming and in draft forms and so on. So that is all happening. But I hadn't anticipated the extent to which these bilateral relationships emerge here. So that came as, especially from having done this Horizon 2020, where it was far more sort of, you might say, unified and centralised.” (Interviewee)

Several researchers reported that they appreciated the thematic approach. Some interviewees noted that NORFACE allows for greater scope/resources for KE and capacity building when compared with other multi-country schemes (e.g. at least two were built through a previous COST Action network and made direct comparisons). One researcher reported that their civil society partners had benefited from the exposure of being part of an international project. This researcher also reported that the NORFACE programme provided a catalyst to a number of new collaborative interactions.

“I would push the ESRC and other funders to also be a little more open in the way they understand change and impact, because that's what the project was also doing. It was the process and the working within and the learning within and also the work with the communities, etcetera.” (Interviewee)

CHALLENGES OF THE NORFACE PROGRAMME

Although overall most feedback received about the NORFACE programme was positive, there were also challenges identified in addition to those specifically about knowledge generation, capacity building and knowledge exchange described above.

Funding and contracts were the biggest area of discussion, as noted above. Another issue was around time lags between applying for, and being granted extensions for severe health-related issues, for example, where one applicant had to wait many months before a one month extension was granted.

The limited flexibility and administrative resource within the NORFACE programme seemed to not always optimise team working and productivity.

Table 5: Challenges of NORFACE programme

Challenge area	Description
Contracts	Some countries have specific rules in relation to length of contract term for contract researchers, meaning that this can dictate project lengths – rather than being led by the specific needs of the project.
Budgets	Approaches to funding and costing varied across countries. For example, FeC in the UK makes these researchers much more expensive than elsewhere, Netherlands won't fund investigator time but will fund contract researchers.
Different funder approaches to extensions	Different funders had contrasting approaches to project extensions. As such, for some projects some parts of their team were granted extensions whereas other team members were refused an extension, causing issues in project completion.
KE budgets	interviewees frequently reported sourcing supplementary funding from outside the UK, secured by researchers working in country which 'topped up' the NORFACE funding, especially for KE work and resourcing non-academic partners.
Different start up times for awards	Different start up times for awards, meaning that researchers were sometimes working out of sync, leading to overall project delays.
PhD students	NORFACE allowed a maximum salary for PhD students which was below the national guidelines for some partner countries. The term of funding was also not always long enough to enable PhD students to complete their studies.

"I guess the construction that developed countries were funding countries from the Global South, and they have had less resources and less resources for doing research. This was highly problematic." (Interviewee)

"A one plus three structure and so on, which basically forces us to go for the postdoc model, which then of course you get better, more trained researchers and more independent researchers, but creates greater risk [they] might go somewhere quickly." (Interviewee)

"We had eight project partners in our project, and all of these eight different partners had to run under their own national budget rules ... That is tricky because there are differences across countries in terms, for example, of buyout. Can you have. Can you not have buyout? Do you get 100%, do you get 80%." (Interviewee)

While many researchers reported valuing the coordination aspect of the NORFACE programme, for some the relevance was less clear:

"There is no collaboration yet with other partners in the NORFACE Governance programme. Our project is a bit far from most other funded projects, so we have not put in efforts to reach out and build bridges." (Interim report)

Moreover, while tangible and clear benefits have been generated through coordination of the NORFACE programmes, there appear to be inconsistencies in terms of the resources allocated to these activities across the programmes, as well as differences in the types of coordination work carried out. We also note that interviewees primarily recall the value of the coordination work in relation to the academic networks that it fostered and that translate into academic outputs, rather than coordinated knowledge exchange activities with non-academic stakeholders. Additionally, these forms of coordination activities were severely impacted by Covid-19.

NORFACE identity and ESRC's role were sometimes occluded because of the collaborative/multilateral set up and recognition was therefore quite low of the ESRC's role.

"The International Science Council was very instrumental in bringing together the projects and partnerships and the communication aspect. So Norface was more a hidden element within the grant. It was how the funding mechanism, how funding was dispersed." (Interviewee)

SECTION 7: LESSONS FOR NORFACE

AIM 1: DETERMINE THE IMPACTS CREATED FROM THE NORFACE PORTFOLIO FROM YEARS 2017 TO 2023⁵

- *A very high publication productivity rate*, with an average of 34 publications/project.
- *Projects using co-production approaches and that drew upon longstanding, 'built-in' partnerships with non-academics tended to be more successful*. This is consistent with the broader evidence base which suggests that these are the most effective means to mobilise knowledge.
- *A broad spectrum of policy and practice impacts* that ranged from changes in awareness and decision making, through to contributions to major policy decisions at Prime Ministerial level.
 - Changes in awareness about key policy issues such as migration.
 - Impacts on future care/service delivery.
 - Reframing of questions of sustainability and transformation leading to shifts in opinions.
 - Changes in practice e.g. through training and workshops.
 - Direct contribution to a National Action Plan for the Bangladeshi government.
 - Contributions that led to legislative changes.
 - Laid the groundwork for future policy conditions through committee membership.
- In addition to these examples above *the most significant, documented impacts we observed related to the following two projects*:
 - Human capital and inequality during adolescence and working life (Institute for Fiscal Studies, DIAL programme). (See Appendix 2 for case study).
 - Waterproofing Data: Engaging stakeholders in sustainable flood risk governance for urban resilience (Warwick University, T2S programme) (See Appendix 2 for case study).
 - Misty: Migration, Transformation and Sustainability (University of Exeter, T2S programme).
- *Most programme interviewees reported that knowledge exchange activities and arising impacts were primarily delivered within the national setting* of the individual researchers.
- *Sustained funding collaborations* beyond the project lifecycle, with further funding leveraged from COST, and ERC Consolidator and Advanced awards or through national funding schemes (including within the UK, such as the Leverhulme Fellowships).

AIM 2: DETERMINE HOW THE NORFACE PROGRAMME DESIGN MAY HAVE CONTRIBUTED, IN PART, TO IMPACTS CREATED BY THE PORTFOLIO, WHEN COMPARED TO OTHER ESRC FUNDING INSTRUMENTS PRODUCING SIMILAR TYPES OF PROJECTS.

- The emphasis on capacity-building within NORFACE and its interpretation by most research teams as a mechanism to support and develop researchers has led to *extremely positive outcomes and impacts vis a vis early career development*.
- *KE was enabled mostly within national contexts and with national partners*. International KE was enabled only where this was a specific aim of the scheme, e.g. TS2 and where researchers adopted a co-production approach that mobilised existing networks.

⁵ Note: Because this evaluation has been requested by ESRC to inform a broader international grants strategy refresh, projects in this evaluation will have limited lag time for impacts to accrue beyond the project completion date. Lag time for projects will range from 3 - less than a year post project completion; less than the minimum of five years of follow-up time post project completion that is recommended within research impact evaluation literature.

- NORFACE specifies particular participating countries, encouraging some researchers to work with academics in countries in which they have not worked previously. In the majority of cases, research teams brought in at least one new country partner. Often these new relationships, formed through NORFACE, were with *countries with less developed research systems*.
- *The majority of researchers were positive about the coordination activities*. While other multilateral programmes do offer coordination support, this is a distinctive feature within the ESRC portfolio (e.g. especially in relation to the international Co-Project Lead (Co-PL) funding route). The scheme that elicited the most positive feedback from researchers in this regard was T2S. Those interviewees we spoke to especially valued the role of the International Science Council. In terms of outputs linked to the coordination, T2S researchers cited in particular the role the ISC had played in convening a special issue in a high impact journal (*Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, which included contributions from 11 T2S projects).
- The T2S scheme, which as we have noted was particularly positive in terms of outcomes and impacts, was *specifically designed to value knowledge exchange and co-production*. This design, plus the existing expertise, capacities and networks possessed by the project teams demonstrates the importance of ‘designing in’ KE in order to attract teams that have the greatest chance of delivering impact.

AIM 3: DESCRIBE THE RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS THE NORFACE PROJECTS/PROGRAMMES HAVE MADE TO THEIR RESPECTIVE FIELDS.

- *The 40 projects which we reviewed produced on average more than 30 publications each, with a total of 1062*. The majority of these were academically oriented. Nearly all interviewees reported that they created international outputs through NORFACE. Cross-country collaborations enabled production of research and methods at an international level, facilitating analysis and insight.
- Across all programmes there was some evidence that *networks were extended through the NORFACE programmes (i.e. beyond pre-existing relationships)*. Moreover, nearly all researchers reported that their research partnerships had continued following the formal end of the NORFACE funding period.
- Researchers reported that relationships had been continued through the *successful acquisition of additional funding*, including from the European Commission (e.g. COST, and ERC Consolidator and Advanced awards) or through national funding schemes (including within the UK, such as the Leverhulme Fellowships). One researcher had secured ESRC IAA funding from their institution to continue their collaborative work in countries outside of the UK.
- Project partners, particularly those in the more recently completed T2S and Democratic Governance schemes *continue to publish together*.
- Two researchers from the Migration programme reported that *their work continues to have a ripple effect through the methods or data developed* through the NORFACE-funded programme that is now used by a wide network of researchers.

FEEDBACK FROM RESEARCHERS

Table 6: Feedback from researchers

Theme	Illustrative comment(s) from reports and interviews
<p>NORFACE programme coordination across projects was mixed. Fewer references were found to the impact of this role in relation to knowledge exchange, than in relation to research partnerships. Delivery appears to have been inconsistently experienced within and across programmes.</p>	<p><i>“Though yearly meetings with all NORFACE teams were a good idea and useful, in practice it proved that some of the projects were (both content and methodology-wise) far apart from each other. This lead to rather monologue presentations rather than the envisaged cross- project address of theoretical issues and content discussions on religion as a social force in Europe. Having said that, that NORFACE decided to fund both quantitative and qualitative projects in the same call for projects was a good idea and altogether it enriched the knowledge of the religious landscape of today’s Europe.”</i></p>
<p>NORFACE has been responsive to programme changes/professional to work with. However, there was inconsistency in the recognition of NORFACE as an entity and of the ESRC’s role within in it from researcher community.</p>	<p><i>“We appreciate that NORFACE has been very helpful in responding swiftly to requests and being flexible re. responding to changing demands of the projects.”</i></p> <p><i>“The administrative staff involved with NORFACE has been very kind an professional all the time, and Roger Hewitt a very engaging intermediary who need being congratulated.”</i></p> <p><i>“I have been impressed by the efficiency of the entire process, from initial application through the various stages of work. The programme administrators should be congratulated.”</i></p> <p><i>“This has been a great project which would not have materialized without the support of NORFACE. The NORFACE staff have also been very helpful and supportive.”</i></p>
<p>NORFACE could be improved if finances could be tailored to local contexts.</p>	<p><i>“Given our experience with the Netherlands, we would like to suggest that allocation of grants be better adjusted to local situations.”</i></p>
<p>NORFACE could have benefited from a longer project duration. Furthermore, several researchers reported inconsistency in funder approaches to project extensions.</p>	<p><i>“One challenge that might be of importance for NORFACE evaluation is the fact that a three-year project period, while on the one hand long, is on the other hand quite short, especially when young career participants have to be recruited and new empirical studies have to be designed, conducted and analysed. A four-year project period would have been preferable.”</i></p>
<p>NORFACE reporting template could be improved (especially in relation to knowledge exchange). We also noted inconsistencies in the approach and</p>	<p><i>““We have done our best to report as accurate as possible, but due to the Covid-19 pandemic, partners were working remotely which made it difficult to collect all necessary data. This reporting system is also not very user-friendly, especially not for a collaborative project. It would be good if partners can fill in their own information to ease the work for the coordinator/administrator.”</i></p>

Theme	Illustrative comment(s) from reports and interviews
reporting format across schemes which presents challenges in relation to evaluation.	

APPENDIX 1: PAYBACK FRAMEWORK EVALUATION MODEL

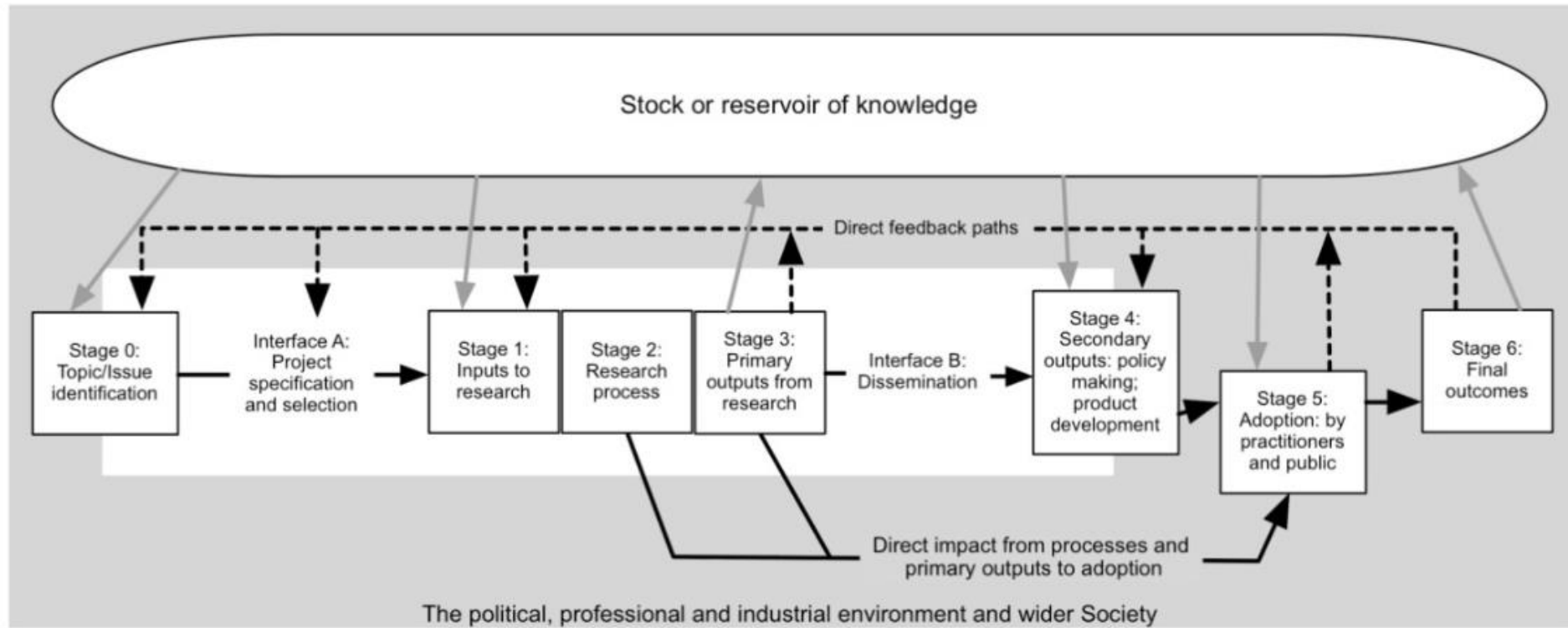


Figure 1. The logic model of the Payback Framework

Source: Hanney *et al* (2004)

APPENDIX 2: CASE STUDIES

CASE STUDY: WATERPROOFING DATA: ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS IN SUSTAINABLE FLOOD RISK GOVERNANCE FOR URBAN RESILIENCE

NORFACE THEME: TRANSFORMATIONS FOR SUSTAINABILITY

PROJECT DATES: OCTOBER 2018 – SEPTEMBER 2021

PI: PROFESSOR JOÃO PORTO DE ALBUQUERQUE

PROJECT SUMMARY

'Waterproofing Data' investigated the governance of water-related risks, with a focus on social and cultural aspects of data practices. The project aimed to rethink how flood-related data is produced, and how it flows, to help build sustainable, flood resilient communities.

The project co-designed methods with the communities that incorporated their priorities about flooding. The team initially trained local facilitators across eight Brazilian cities to teach students and volunteer community members about the concepts of flooding risk, resilience, and how they could generate and analyse data about their own neighbourhoods, such as constructing and using low-cost rainfall gauges, thus helping residents generate the data used to predict when floods will occur.

They also worked with local communities to co-develop a Waterproofing Data mobile app and participatory mapping tool where citizens could record daily rainfall, as well as flooding events and their impacts on the neighbourhood. The Waterproofing Data app has now been used by more than 410 'citizen scientist' reporters spread across more than 20 cities.

IMPACTS CREATED

IMPROVED DATA

The Waterproofing Data project demonstrated that including communities and citizens in data collection and analytics not only filled existing data gaps but also enhanced the capacity of vulnerable communities to take preventative action and inform risk reduction.

The community-generated data was shared with Brazil's National Center for Monitoring and Early Warning of Natural Disasters, CEMADEN. This enabled better flood modelling, mapping of risk perception, and improved accuracy of flood warnings, as well as greater understanding of flood risk in the community.

DEMOCRATISING DATA GENERATION AND USAGE

The project enabled citizens and communities to contribute data to the national flood early warning system and to play a role in preparing and defending against floods, empowering local citizens not only to gather data but also to incorporate their own priorities around flooding.

IMPROVED FLOOD INFRASTRUCTURE AND RISK-REDUCTION STRATEGIES

The team's approach, expanding the types of data used in disaster risk reduction and establishing better connections to communities, has plugged local-level data gaps. This has enabled infrastructure improvements and the design of more effective risk-reduction strategies, such as early warning systems. The sharing of data with CEMADEN has enabled better flood modelling and improved accuracy of flood warnings.

The project has literally saved lives - When extraordinary rainfall hit the north-eastern region of Brazil in May 2022, two young 'citizen scientists' who took part in Waterproofing Data activities in the city of Jabotão dos Guararapes were able to use the app and knowledge they gained about flood risks to alert community members (May 2022) in time for them to move to safer places and save their lives.

CAPACITY BUILDING

The PI reported that the project was 'transformational' for him – it allowed him to manage a large international consortium. The team included early career researchers (ECRs) in each of the partner countries, who co-authored publications for high impact journals, as well as gaining experience of co-production with non-academic stakeholders and working as part of an international team.

NORFACE CONTRIBUTION

The 'Waterproofing' project involved partners from Brazil, the UK and Germany. This enabled comparative approaches to the challenge of flooding, from partners with complementary experience and expertise.

The research team reported that a benefit of the programme was the coordination and exchange among projects within the same call theme, including meetings to discuss and share experience. The PI welcomed the autonomy within the scheme, but also the equitable partnerships.

The flexibility of the funding rules was beneficial, especially given the international nature of the collaboration - for example, this flexibility enabled the funding of the ECRs in each country, and the provision of travel grants for them.

PROJECT RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

The project has clearly made a major contribution to flood risk research. The project team has produced journal articles, book chapters, conference proceedings, and conference and other presentations. It has created educational materials in both English and Portuguese, including fact sheets, videos and downloadable tutorials. Beyond that, there are other demonstrable contributions to the field more broadly:

CO-PRODUCTION WITH NON-ACADEMIC PARTNERS

The project vividly demonstrates the benefits of working with local stakeholders. The team engaged in participatory action research, becoming embedded within the local community. The local researchers organised workshops and knowledge exchange workshops with the non-academic partners.

METHODOLOGICAL INNOVATION

The project has expanded perspectives on what counts as flood data, who counts as a data producer and to whom flood data is addressed. This was achieved by complementing the traditional sources of data for flooding, which are dominated by the natural sciences such as meteorology and hydrology (e.g., rainfall gauges, water river gauges, satellite imagery etc.) with other types of data, including rainfall measured with artisanal gauges from plastic bottles, sketch maps of risk perception, alongside flood memory videos with personal stories and lived experiences.

FURTHER FUNDING AND SUSTAINED COLLABORATION

Team members have obtained follow-on funding allowing the data gathering approaches to be extended to new geographical areas and new projects.

The PI secured additional funding from UKRI's GCRF Global Research Translational Award programme to scale up several activities by supporting the production of guidelines for schools wishing to provide a flood risk management module and an accompanying mobile application for data collection. This is expected to increase the reach of Waterproofing Data to some 81 schools across Brazil.

The PI also secured ESRC Impact Acceleration Account funding to enable evidence synthesis and translation of materials and findings from the project for translating impact to a non-academic audience of policy-makers, disaster preparedness and response professionals and the global disaster risk reduction and sustainable development community.

CASE STUDY: GLOBLABWS: GLOBALISATION, LABOUR MARKETS, AND THE WELFARE STATE

NORFACE THEME: WELFARE STATE FUTURES

PROJECT DATES: 2015 –2018

PI: PROFESSOR CATIA MONTAGNA

PROJECT SUMMARY

GlobLabWS aimed to explore the role of the welfare state in shaping the relationship between globalisation and labour markets and in affecting a country's economic performance.

The project demonstrated the complexity of the processes at work. Globalisation and participation in the global production chain affect workforce structure and the degree of mismatch between workers' skills and those demanded by firms. The welfare state plays an important role in mediating these effects. Comparison among welfare state systems suggests that Nordic countries perform better in terms of aggregate labour market outcomes than countries with less generous welfare states and more flexible labour markets. The project found evidence, therefore, that increasing the generosity of the welfare state could bring about productivity gains and increases in employment.

IMPACTS CREATED

POLICY IMPACTS

As a result of the project, the PI has worked with the national government in Scotland. Following a presentation to the Scottish Parliament, Montagna was invited to become a (founding) member of the Expert Network on Social Security, Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe). (Note that Scotland has devolved powers over social security.) She has given evidence to the Scottish Parliament, had meetings with the fair work and skills divisions of the Scottish Government, and established close links with the economic analysis macroeconomic group of the Scottish Government Economic Service. She was also asked by the Scottish TUC to undertake an analysis of the Aberdeen economy and the effect of the financial crisis on structural changes.

CAPACITY BUILDING

The project helped to further the careers of a number of early career researchers (ECRs), who all co-authored papers, and developed research and other skills, for example in grant-writing and collaboration across a broad and international project team.

NORFACE CONTRIBUTION

The international collaboration mandated by Norface was crucial to this project. The focus of the research was try to understand the interaction between welfare state policies, institutional settings, labour markets and globalisation, so it was vital to have a multi-country approach. It allowed access to detailed micro data for three countries, and pooled the institutional knowledge about details of welfare state policies in those countries.

Researchers found the theme meetings with researchers across the projects to be extremely useful, and even “inspiring”. The PI noted that her subsequent research has been influenced by discussions at those meetings and the contacts with other projects, and collaborations have continued.

PROJECT RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

The results of GlobLabWS are central to current socio-economic debates on the effectiveness and sustainability of welfare state institutions and provide policy makers with deeper understandings of the key trade-offs entailed by different policy scenarios. The project provided suggestions as to the key features of an enabling welfare state. It highlighted the experiences of countries, such as Denmark, that combine good productivity and export performance with generous active and passive labour market policies.

GlobLabWS found that an important implication is the need to recognise and exploit policy interactions not only among welfare state policies but also among different policy areas: e.g., education and industrial policies can strengthen the effectiveness of welfare state policies. It found that a country’s ability to compete internationally does not require welfare state retrenchments, so for example higher welfare spending increases a country’s ability to attract and retain internationally mobile firms.

The project highlighted:

- the effects of globalisation on the skill-structure of employment.
- the importance of the ‘policy mix’ in determining the effects of welfare state reforms.
- the role of intra-industry reallocations in determining the effect of international shocks on employment and the effectiveness of welfare state policies in offsetting them.
- the importance of exploiting policy interactions between policy areas.
- the effects of welfare state policies on the location decisions of industries.

METHODOLOGICAL INNOVATION

The project bridged the gap between micro and macro analysis of the welfare state. It brought together theoretical analysis and the development of mathematical models of the economy and empirical data to test hypotheses. It brought together granular data in terms of welfare state policies and macroeconomic policies with the functioning of the labour market.

CASE STUDY: HUCIAW: HUMAN CAPITAL AND INEQUALITY DURING ADOLESCENCE AND WORKING LIFE

NORFACE THEME: DYNAMICS OF INEQUALITY ACROSS THE LIFE-COURSE

PROJECT DATES: FEBRUARY 2018 – FEBRUARY 2021

PI: PROFESSOR SIR RICHARD BLUNDELL (UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON AND THE INSTITUTE FOR FISCAL STUDIES)

PROJECT SUMMARY

This project investigated the role of human capital in shaping inequalities over the life course and aimed to shed new light on the process of human capital formation during adolescence and adulthood. The team explored a multi-dimensional view of inequality, over education opportunities and outcomes, employment and earnings, studying how they relate to individual circumstances, gender and family arrangements, how they develop over the life course and how they are influenced by institutional background.

One strand of work was around the effect of COVID on human capital and education, and the different ways Norway, the UK and France reacted (for example with school closures), and the different impacts (for example on work-related training). In the UK apprenticeships and training both fell, while time in education was particularly reduced for children of poorer parents. The team continues to use the models to look at recovery.

IMPACTS CREATED

The team held discussions with the UK Department for Education and the Social Mobility Commission, with some very specific policy impact resulting. The Head of HE analysis at DfE, Olly Clifton-Moore, wrote in an email that “*The analysis done on the chance of a good outcome from HE for people of different backgrounds and prior attainment was part of a package of evidence that convinced the Prime Minister not to proceed with plans to introduce minimum eligibility requirements for HE. Indeed The Prime Minister specifically cited the evidence (of which the IFS analysis was an integral part) as key in changing his mind.*”

Mr Clifton-Moore also said that the general lifetime earnings work and the key findings “set the general context for the Government’s recent HE policy. i.e. reducing the amount of low value higher education.”⁶

Evidence to the SMC included findings from comparative studies across Norway and the UK around support for women returning to work after maternity leave or longer periods of child-rearing, and a recommendation into investment in skills.

The project found that in the UK socio-economic status affects the economic outcomes of graduates: otherwise similar students graduating from the same institution and field of study

⁶ See e.g. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/crackdown-on-rip-off-university-degrees>

experience average earnings paths that dependent of their family background. The findings were particularly influential in shaping the public discussion on High Education policy, and were used by the Department for Education and The Social Mobility Commission.

The Social Mobility Commission also subsequently commissioned a follow-up policy report on family background education and earnings.

The UK team has written a set of reports that developed from HuCIAW on social mobility in Britain and around training and the labour market, which will be used by the Social Mobility Commission.

CAPACITY BUILDING

A number of PhD students and postdoctoral researchers were able to work on the project relatively long-term, receiving training and developing their skills, for example in data analytics, and career progression has benefited as a result. Some are now of them are now professors (e.g. at Liverpool and at York), while another is working in the Downing Street policy unit.

NORFACE CONTRIBUTION

The research benefited from the international scope of the call. It was important to compare countries which might be similar in some ways (e.g. GDP, levels of inequality) but have different institutions and structures, and to be able to give equal weight to the study of programmes and structures in different countries. The team also welcomed the Norface emphasis on data and empirical work.

PROJECT RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

The project has had a significant impact on the field of research into social inequalities across the life course, particularly with regard to gender and class imbalances. The team has published 13 journal articles so far, included the influential 'How much does degree choice matter?' (Britton et al, *Labour Economics*, 79, 2022)⁷

SUSTAINED COLLABORATION

There is follow-up, joint research across the collaborations set up through the project; for example a large-scale review of inequality. This was initially UK-focused but has now been expanded to 17 countries, in particular Norway and France.

⁷ <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2022.102268>