ONLINE

POLICY DESIGN

# UNDERSTANDING RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGIES

14 SEPTEMBER – 9 OCTOBER 2026

4 WEEKS, 60 ONLINE LEARNING HOURS

*Information Note*

International Labour Organization

ITC International Training Centre

# BACKGROUND

The world of work is undergoing profound transformations. Technological disruption, demographic shifts, climate change, global health shocks, rising inequality, and geopolitical fragmentation have converged to create a complex and uncertain environment for labour markets. Job displacement due to automation, growing informality, skills mismatches, widening gender gaps, and the need for climate-resilient transitions are just a few of the critical issues that policymakers and social partners must grapple with today.

In this rapidly evolving context, the demand for evidence-informed and data-driven policymaking has never been greater. Governments, trade unions, employers' organizations, and international agencies are increasingly expected to deliver not just policies, but results, backed by credible analysis, inclusive dialogue, and measurable impact. Yet, the capacity to generate, understand, and apply research remains uneven across countries and institutions.

Too often, policy is made in the absence of solid evidence, or evidence is used selectively, misinterpreted, or ignored. Even where data exists, there may be a gap in understanding research methods, how studies are designed, how conclusions are drawn, and how to assess the reliability and relevance of findings. Without these skills, well-intentioned actors risk relying on anecdote, ideology, or external prescriptions rather than informed judgement and critical inquiry.

This is where research methods become essential. Understanding research methods is not just a technical skill, it is a foundation for informed decision-making, participatory governance, and effective social dialogue. It allows practitioners to distinguish correlation from causation, to evaluate policy interventions, and to meaningfully engage with academic research, evaluation reports, and statistical findings.

This course, offered as part of the Diploma in Evidence-Based Public Policy by the ILO Research Department and ITCILO, responds directly to this capacity gap. It is designed to equip policymakers and practitioners, especially from ministries, workers' and employers' organizations, and labour market institutions, with the confidence and competence to engage with research, use it to shape decisions, and ensure policies are rooted in the lived realities of people and work.

Through this course, participants will not only improve their understanding of how research works, but also become better equipped to co-create solutions, navigate uncertainty, and advance decent work through the power of evidence.

# INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

### SNAPSHOT OF THE COURSE

In the face of complex and fast-changing labour market realities, the ability to understand how research is generated, conducted, interpreted and used has become a core skill for policy actors. Whether designing employment policies, negotiating reforms, or assessing programme impact, decision-makers across ministries, workers' organizations, employers' federations, think tanks and development agencies must increasingly rely on solid evidence and sound analysis.

Yet many policy practitioners feel overwhelmed by research terminology, statistical jargon, or methodological debates. This online course demystifies the research process and provides a clear, accessible and practical pathway through the essential elements of research: from identifying policy problems and formulating research questions, to selecting appropriate methodological approaches,

conducting research, understanding how data are collected and analysed, and are generated in real-world contexts, and engaging critically with findings. It enables participants to understand not only what research says, but how it is produced and why this matters for labour and social policy.

The course serves as a **foundational building block** within the broader Evidence-Based Policymaking (EBPM) framework developed by the ILO and ITCILO, serving also as a methodological foundation for the Diploma. It does not require prior research experience and is designed with non-technical users in mind. Participants will explore key research concepts, types of evidence, methodological choices, data sources, and ethical dimensions in an engaging in a practical, engaging, and inclusive way, drawing on real-world examples.

The emphasis is not on producing academic research, but rather on becoming an informed and strategic user and co-producer of research for policy purposes, able to engage effectively with researchers, statisticians, data analysts and social partners. The training links directly to the ILO's decent work agenda and supports national and sectoral efforts to strengthen data-driven dialogue, negotiation, and policy reform.

Through live sessions, videos, hands-on exercises, and real-world case studies, participants will:

- Understand the logic of research questions, and the language of research methods,
- Explore quantitative, qualitative and mixed-methods approaches,
- Learn how different types of data are gathered and organised,
- Gain confidence in interpreting basic and analytical outputs,
- Assess the quality, credibility and relevance of evidence
- Discuss the politics and ethics of research use,
- Identify situations of "politics-based evidence", when evidence is sought to justify pre-decided policy positions,
- Use research strategically in policy, programme and dialogue processes,
- Build confidence to work with researchers, statisticians, and data analysts.

This is an essential course for anyone working on policies, programmes, negotiations, or advocacy efforts related to employment, labour markets, social protection, skills development, or social justice more broadly.

# CONTENTS

### WHAT TOPICS DOES THIS COURSE COVER?

This course introduces participants to the foundations of research methods in the context of labour market and social policy. It is designed to equip policymakers, trade unionists, employers, programme managers and other practitioners with the skills needed to understand how research is generated, critically engage with evidence and use it to support evidence-informed decisions and social dialogue. The course blends theoretical understanding with practical tools, applied examples, and hands-on exercises, guiding participants through research questions, methodological approaches, data generation processes, basic analysis, and the strategic use of evidence.

The course is structured around eight core modules:

## 1. Why Research Matters for Policymaking

- What is evidence-based policymaking and why does it matter?
- The role of research in decent work deficits, social inequalities, labour market challenges, and tripartite dialogue
- The risks and limitations of policymaking without evidence
- Example from ministries, social partners, and ILO field offices.

## 2. From Policy Problems to Research Questions

- Identifying and prioritising labour market problems.
- Turning policy issues into clear, relevant and researchable questions.
- Aligning research questions with constituents' needs and policy cycles.

## 3. Methodological Approaches: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods

- Overview of major methodological families (quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods research)
- When each approach is most appropriate in labour and social policy research.
- Strengths, limitations, and complementarities
- Practical Examples (skills assessments, informality studies, enterprise surveys)

## 4. Research Design and Methodology Basics

- Moving from research questions to methodological design.
- Understanding operationalising tools and concepts (samples, variables, indicators, constructs)
- Common designs: experimental, quasi-experimental, observational
- Strengths and limitations of different approaches
- Understanding correlation vs. causation

## 5. Data Collection Methods for Labour Market and Social Policy Research

- Surveys, questionnaires, tracer studies and enterprise assessments.
- Qualitative tools for policy research: interviews, focus groups, stakeholder consultations.
- Participatory approaches (worker-centred assessments, community-based methods, social dialogue–based tools, rapid participatory diagnostics)
- Administrative datasets, labour force surveys, social security registers and enterprise data.
- Ensuring data quality, consistency and transparency.

## 6. Understanding How Data Are Generated in Real-World Contexts

- How information is collected in labour and social policy settings.
- Challenges and constraints in generating reliable information (access, response rates, documentation).
- Ethical and contextual considerations in data collection, especially in field work.
- Approaches to documenting observations and stakeholder feedback.

## 7. Basics of Data Analysis: Making Sense of Evidence

- Quantitative Analysis
- Understanding tables, charts and basic statistical outputs
- Identifying patterns, trends and correlations
- Reading and interpreting labour market indicators (employment, LFPR, NEET, wages, informality)
- Qualitative Analysis
- Identifying themes, narratives and contradictions
- Integrating qualitative and quantitative insights

## 8. Using Research Critically and Strategically for Policy and Social Dialogue

- What makes evidence reliable and valid
- Identifying bias, generalizability, and ethical considerations
- How to distinguish strong evidence from advocacy or opinion, and understand the role of values
- Translating research into action: how to use findings in policy briefs, advocacy, or negotiations
- Case studies of research uptake in ILO policy contexts

# LEARNING OBJECTIVES

### WHAT WILL I LEARN?

By the end of this course, participants will understand the fundamentals of research methods, and be able to confidently use, interpret, and critique research in the real-world context of labour and social policy. Whether designing policies, advocating for reforms, managing programmes or negotiating with stakeholders, this course empowers participants to place evidence at the heart of the decision-making. Participants will be able to:

- Identify and classify different types of research methods (quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods) and understand when and how each should be used in policy contexts.
- Formulate clear and relevant research questions aligned with real-world policy challenges and the priorities of workers, employers, and governments.
- Understand how data are generated in labour market and social policy settings, recognising the role of institutions, systems and stakeholders in shaping the evidence available.
- Use a range of data collection tools, including surveys, interviews, consultations and participatory approaches, and understand their strengths and limitations.
- Interpret research findings and statistical data with greater confidence, understanding key concepts such as correlation vs. causation, sampling, and bias.
- Assess the quality, credibility, and relevance of research and reports, distinguishing robust evidence from opinion, advocacy, or misinformation.
- Recognise the dynamics of selective use of evidence, including situations where evidence is selectively gathered or interpreted to justify pre-determined policy choices, and learn how to navigate these dynamics constructively.

- Collaborate effectively with researchers and data teams, knowing what questions to ask and how to use research strategically in your work.
- Apply evidence to support social dialogue, policy briefs, and negotiations, ensuring policies are grounded in facts, not just beliefs or assumptions.
- Build a stronger foundation for further learning, including advanced courses in research communication, impact evaluation, labour market analysis, and evidence synthesis.

This course is ideal for practitioners seeking to make better use of evidence without becoming a statistician or academic. Whether working in a ministry, trade union, employers' federation, a public institution, a research unit, or an ILO field office, these competencies support becoming a more informed, confident and impactful policy actor.

# COURSE STRUCTURE

This course will be delivered online through the ITCILO's e-Campus Platform from September 14 to October 9, 2026. The course will be divided into eight content modules, each accompanied by follow-up activities and assignments. It requires an overall commitment of 60 hours of active study/participation.

During the training, each of the 8 learning modules of the course has a fixed structure and includes the following components:

1. Online, with the group and ILO trainer and/or invited speakers (session of 120 min): ILO and ITCILO experts will facilitate a 2-hour session on the topics of each module. Each session will include a 60-minute frontal session on the contents, trends and concepts, followed by a 30-minute open discussion and a 30-minute specific application.
2. Individual self-learning, activities and assignments, as well as group activities: The main thematic sessions will be complemented by individual or group work on the same theme, to allow participants to collaborate, apply the tools and concepts they have learned and delve deeper into the practical issues of the decent work agenda. Specific case studies will be used to help participants practice using evidence for policy-making.
3. Forum discussions, self-facilitated or facilitated by the ILO and ITCILO trainers.

# PARTICIPANTS' PROFILE

### WHO ATTENDS THIS COURSE

The course is intended for:

- Policymakers, government officials, and representatives from ministries in the fields of labour, employment, and the broader world of work.
- ILO and UN staff and development practitioners and consultants
- Representatives of Trade Unions and employers' organisations
- Public investment, employment and labour market policy advisers
- Policy analysts working for national and global think tanks, financial institutions, research departments and foundations
- Individuals interested in or actively contributing to the provision of information, analysis, and recommendations crucial for policymaking and advocacy.

# METHODOLOGY

Built upon the Learning Pyramid model, participants will actively explore and engage in discussions to formulate a policy brief that reflects their learning and transfer the acquired knowledge to their professional roles. This comprehensive approach includes plenary sessions for widespread knowledge sharing, specialised sessions for in-depth learning, hands-on activities that emphasise best practices and tools, and promotes the building of an international community of practitioners, and a structured policy brief development process.

This is an online training, and through the E-Campus Platform, participants will use digital learning tools, including self-learning tools, webinars, and online interaction tools. The training will use a practical, work-based approach to evidence-based policy making and is designed to be built around everyday situations, using best practices/ case studies. This is not an academic or theoretical course. Throughout the training, participants will utilise both primary and secondary data and information sources, such as surveys, focus groups, and metadata analysis.

This training is organised in such a way as to give the participants the opportunity to learn and practice the skills and knowledge of evidence-based policymaking and to prove that they have mastered them by meeting the predefined objectives at the end of each session. It also focuses on the learners' participation throughout the learning process. The course takes a learner centred pedagogical approach while ensuring building institutional capacity in a holistic way.

The learners should be able to achieve the objectives in the minimum time and to transfer the learning to their jobs.

Each session will be organised as follows:

- Introduction: it shows the purpose, objectives, process, experiences of the participants and how the knowledge will be applied;
- Learning: structure and content, learning methods, skills and knowledge practice, progress monitoring, memory aids;
- Review: review or test learners to make sure the objectives have been achieved and to bring the session to a close (e.g. establish what the next steps are).

# CERTIFICATION

At the end of the course, in order to evaluate the knowledge and skills learnt, participants will be required to submit an individual policy brief for review by the ILO/ITCILO specialists and trainers. Upon successful completion of this assignment, participants will receive an ITCILO Certificate of Achievement.

This course is part of the **Diploma in Evidence-Based Public Policy**, launched jointly by the ILO Research Department and the ITCILO's Employment Policy and Analysis Programme. The Diploma is designed as a progressive yet flexible learning journey that develops participants' capacity to turn evidence into action for decent work and social justice. It comprises five interconnected components, four courses (three mandatory and one elective) and a capstone project, that together build technical, analytical, and communication skills for designing, implementing, and advocating evidence-informed policies aligned with the ILO's mandate. Earning this Certificate represents the first step towards the Diploma in Evidence-Based Public Policy

A post-course evaluation will be conducted to assess the individual learning outcomes. A final evaluation will be conducted to receive the feedback of the participants on the training methodology, content and the learning tools.

# APPLICATION

Find the application form at https://oarf2.itcilo.org/DST/A9719100/en and apply before **6 September 2026**.

# COST OF PARTICIPATION

The course is fee-paying. **Tuition:** €1,125.

ITCILO will offer a limited number of fellowships which may cover part of the tuition fee. If eligible, early applicants will be given priority. Please make sure to apply at earliest convenience before the above-mentioned deadline.

The payment, cancellation and refunds policy of the ITCILO can be consulted on the following website: https://www.itcilo.org/applications-payments-cancellation

### WITHDRAWAL, CANCELLATION POLICY, AND REFUNDS FOR OPEN COURSES

If an enrolled participant wishes or must withdraw from a course, they may choose to apply to a different course or be substituted by another candidate. The participant must notify the Centre, in writing, of their decision at least 14 days prior to the start date of the course. Cancellation of participation in regular courses will result in the following penalties:

- 14 days or more prior to the start date of the course: No penalty, 100% refund of amount paid less applicable bank charges
- 8 to 13 days prior to the start date of the course: Penalty of 50% of course price, refund of residual amount paid (if any) less applicable bank charges
- 7 days or less prior to the start date of the course: Penalty of 100% of course price.

# INFO

### FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT

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