

The Global Evidence Synthesis Initiative (GESI) Secretariat at the American University of Beirut

Tamara Lotfi, Elie A Akl, Fadi El Jardali, Peter Tugwell, Simon Lewin,

Compared to High Income countries, Low and Middle-Income countries (LMIC) produce and use research synthesis to inform practice and policy-making to a lesser extent. A major reason for this imbalance is due to the low capacity of synthesizing evidence in LMIC. A number of major international research organizations specialized in evidence synthesis launched the Global Evidence Synthesis Initiative (GESI) to enhance the capacity for research synthesis in LMICs. These organizations include Cochrane (previously the Cochrane Collaboration), the Campbell Collaboration, the EPPI-Centre, the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie), the Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research, and the Joanna Briggs Institute.

The goal of GESI is to increase the capacity to undertake multidisciplinary research syntheses by supporting evidence synthesis centers in LMICs. GESI is interested in building capacity in trans-sectoral evidence synthesis, i.e., covering different sectors of public practice and policy and public service delivery, including but not limited to agriculture, crime and justice, economic development, education, food security, health and healthcare, hygiene, social protection and water sanitation.

GESI Secretariat

A GESI Secretariat has been established to support and manage GESI functions. The Center for Systematic Reviews on Health Policy and Systems Research (SPARK) at the American University of Beirut (AUB), Lebanon hosts the GESI secretariat.

GESI Network

The secretariat has built a Network of established Evidence Synthesis Centers in LMICs to enhance collaboration and encourage sharing knowledge and experience. The Network currently consists of 37 Centers from 24 LMICs: Argentina, Bangladesh (2), Brazil, Cameroon (2), China, Columbia (3), Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana (2), India (3), Iran, Jamaica, Kenya, Lebanon, Malaysia (2), Mexico, Nigeria (2), Rwanda, South Africa (6), Tanzania, Uganda (2) & Zimbabwe. The Network serves as a platform for its Centers to share expertise and experiences and to facilitate collaborations between them. In addition, GESI will work to attract funders interested in supporting the Network Centers.

The Secretariat launched in June 2016, a series of capacity sharing and strengthening activities:

- GESI- Cochrane Learning Live webinar series, that explores a different type of evidence synthesis every month;
- GESI Webinar series, that allows members of the GESI Network to showcase their work or share their experience in evidence synthesis;
- Workshops at the Global Evidence Summit 2017;
- Livestreaming of activities held by the Secretariat to allow access.

The GESI Secretariat has conducted one-on-one interviews with each member of the GESI Network to assess its needs regarding capacity building in: conducting evidence synthesis, knowledge translation, administration and budgeting, communication; other needs regarding access to databases; capacity to set research priorities, to work on cross disciplinary projects and to engage with stakeholders. 33 of the 37 centres responded, and we are currently at the analysis level. The results of this needs assessment will be ready for sharing by the time of this conference.