Finanziato dall'Unione europea NextGenerationEU
Ministero dell'Università e della Ricerca
Italiadomani PIANO NAZIONALE DI RIPRESA E RESILIENZA
Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche

An Introduction to Public Policy Cycle

Design, Implementation, Evaluation, and Learning

FOSSR
Fostering Open Science in Social Science Research
Innovative tools and services to investigate economic and societal change

Giovanni Cerulli, CNR-IRCrES

What is a (Public) Policy?

- A **Policy** is a **systematic and coordinated set of actions**, **initiatives**, and **measures** implemented by government authorities to address specific issues, achieve defined goals, or influence societal conditions
- These programs are designed to address **public concerns**, allocate **resources**, and **regulate** various aspects of public life
- Public policy programs often involve the development, implementation, and evaluation of policies that impact areas such as **education**, **healthcare**, **economic development**, **environmental protection**, and **social welfare**
- These programs are crafted through a **combination of legislative**, **executive**, and **administrative processes** to guide **decision-making** and governance at the public level. The aim is to create a framework that promotes the well-being of society, addresses challenges, and shapes the direction of a community, region, or country

Main types of socio-economic policies

- **Fiscal Policies**
  Government actions related to taxation and spending to influence the economy
- **Social Welfare Policies**
  Programs and initiatives designed to support the well-being of citizens, as the universal basic income
- **Labor Market Policies**
  Regulations and interventions related to employment, wages, and workplace conditions
- **Education Policies**
  Measures to improve and regulate education systems, including access and quality
- **Healthcare Policies**
  Strategies to ensure access to healthcare services and manage public health concerns
- **Housing Policies**
  Initiatives addressing housing affordability, homelessness, and urban development
- **Trade Policies**
  Regulations and agreements influencing international trade and economic relations
- **Environmental Policies**
  Measures to address environmental challenges and promote sustainable practices.
- **Poverty Alleviation Policies**
  Programs targeting poverty reduction through income support, employment, and community development.

Policy instruments

- **Regulatory Instruments**
  Laws and regulations that govern behavior in a specific sector

- **Fiscal Instruments**
  Use of government spending and taxation to influence economic conditions

- **Subsidies and Grants**
  Financial incentives provided by the government to support specific activities or industries

- **Public procurement**
  Public administration purchase of goods, services, or works from external suppliers

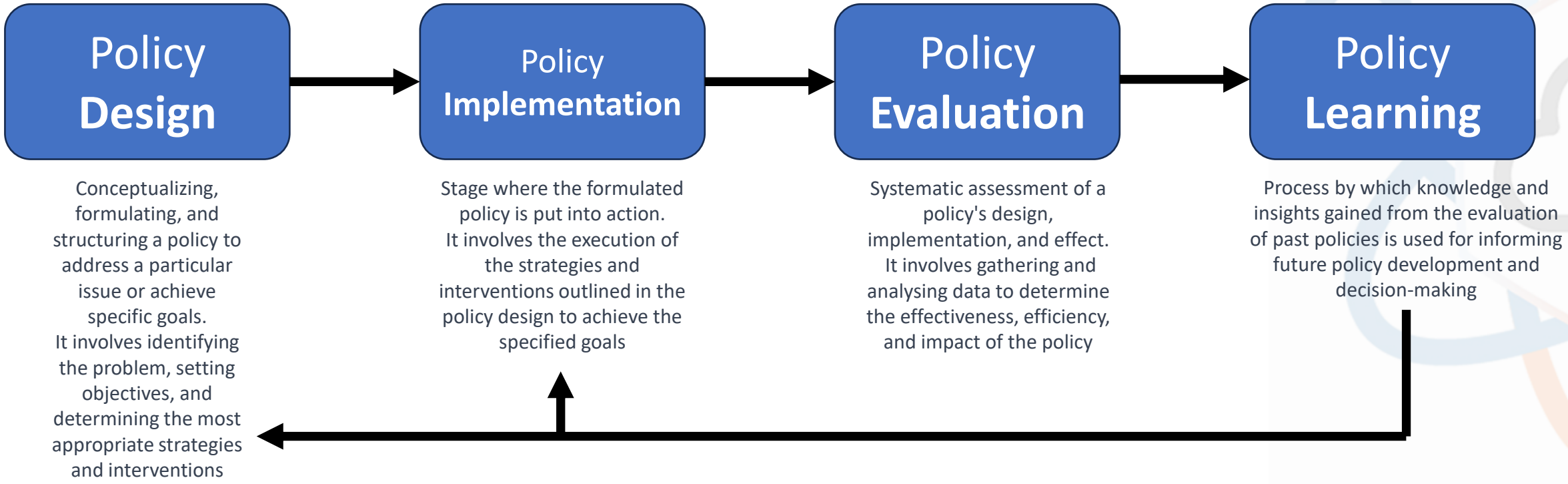
- **Direct Provision of Goods and Services**
  Government directly providing services or goods

- **Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs):**
  Collaboration between the government and private sector to deliver public services or infrastructure

- **Market-based incentives**
  For ex., vouchers for education

- **Information and Education Campaigns**
  Communication strategies to inform and educate the public about certain issues

The Policy Cycle (Design, Implementation, Evaluation, and Learning)



Policy Design

Policy design refers to the process of conceptualizing, formulating, and structuring a policy to address a particular issue or achieve specific goals. It involves identifying the problem, setting objectives, and determining the most appropriate strategies and interventions.

Key Elements

- **Problem Definition**
  Clearly articulating the issue or challenge that the policy aims to address
- **Objectives**
  Defining the desired outcomes and goals the policy intends to achieve
- **Strategies**
  Identifying the approaches and interventions to be employed
- **Stakeholder Involvement**
  Engaging relevant stakeholders in the design process to ensure diverse perspectives are considered

Policy Implementation

Phases of the policy implementation

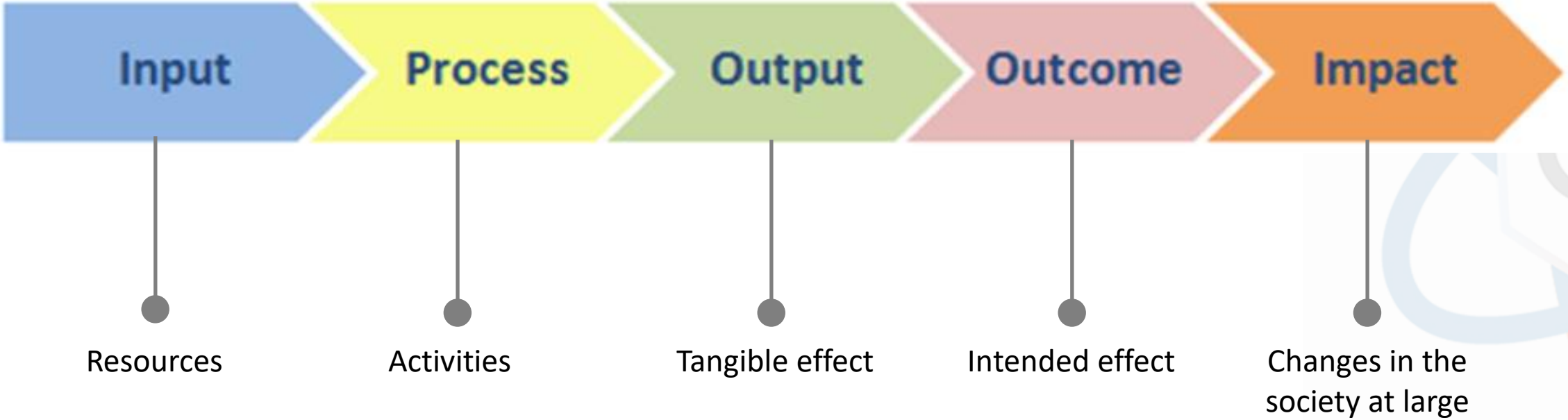
In policy implementation, we distinguish between the following **phases**:

- **Inputs**
- **Process**
- **Outputs**
- **Outcomes**
- **Impact**

This is essential for a comprehensive understanding of how well a policy is performing and whether it is achieving its intended goals

These terms represent different stages in the **causal chain** of policy implementation and impact

Policy implementation streamlining process



Inputs

Definition: Inputs refer to the resources, investments, and efforts dedicated to implementing a policy. These can include:

- *financial resources*
- *human capital*
- *infrastructures*
- *specific technology*
- *other resources*

necessary for the policy's implementation

Example: If a government introduces a policy to improve education, inputs may include funding for schools, teacher training programs, and educational materials

Process

Definition: meant as a **mechanism to transform the inputs into outputs and outcomes**, a process involves a series of activities or steps that are systematically organized to achieve a specific goal. Typical activities are:

- **Resource Allocation**
  Allocating human, financial, and technological resources for implementation
- **Coordination:**
  Establishing mechanisms for coordination among various implementing agencies and stakeholders
- **Monitoring and Oversight**
  Implementing systems to monitor progress, address challenges, and ensure compliance
- **Adaptation**
  Making adjustments to the implementation process based on ongoing feedback and changing circumstances

Outputs

Definition: Outputs represent the ***direct*** results of the policy implementation. They are the **tangible** products, services, or activities produced by the policy

Example: Using the education policy example, outputs would include the number of schools built or renovated, the number of teachers trained, and the distribution of textbooks and educational materials

Outcomes

Definition: Outcomes are the broader, often **longer-term effects** or changes resulting from the outputs of a policy. They represent the **actual intended impact** the policy has on the targeted issues or population

Example: Continuing with the education policy example, outcomes might include improvements in student performance, increased literacy rates, and enhanced socioeconomic opportunities for individuals who benefited from the improved education system

Impact

Definition: Boarder effect at societal level, including changes in habits, vision, mentality, politics and even culture

Example: Continuing with the education policy example, impact might include a new vision about the role of education, new mindsets based for example on continuing learning, etc.

Key Points

Causal Chain:

There is a ***logical progression*** from inputs to outputs to outcomes, forming a causal chain. Inputs lead to the production of outputs, and successful outputs contribute to positive outcomes

Measure of Success

While inputs and outputs are relatively easier to measure, outcomes are often more challenging to assess as they involve *assessing the broader impact* and changes in the target population

Interconnectedness

The effectiveness of a policy is not solely determined by outputs but also by the outcomes it achieves. Understanding the *relationship between inputs, outputs, and outcomes* is crucial for policymakers to make informed decisions and refine policies for better results

Policy Evaluation

What is policy evaluation?

- **Policy evaluation** is a *systematic* and *objective* assessment process that involves the analysis and appraisal of public policies to determine their **effectiveness**, **efficiency**, and **impact**

- It encompasses the examination of a policy's **design**, **implementation**, and **effects**, aiming to provide **evidence-based** insights for **decision-making**

- By means of diverse methodologies (both **qualitative** and **quantitative**), policy evaluation seeks to answer key questions about the **success** of a policy in **achieving its intended goals**, identifying areas for improvement, and **informing future policy** development and decision-making (**policy learning**)

Types of policy evaluation

Policy evaluation refers to the systematic assessment of the *design*, *implementation*, and *effects* of public policies.

Three types of policy evaluation are generally considered:

- **Ex-ante**
- **In-itinere**
- **Ex-post**

They refer to different stages in the **policy cycle** and focus on distinct aspects of the policy process

Ex-ante evaluation

Definition

Ex-ante, Latin for "before the event," refers to evaluations conducted **before** a policy is implemented or initiated.

Purpose

The primary goal is to assess the **potential impacts and outcomes** of the policy before resources are committed and changes are implemented.

Focus

It examines the logic, feasibility, and **likely consequences** of a proposed policy, helping decision-makers understand potential risks and benefits.

Methods

Modeling, scenario analysis, and cost-benefit analysis are common methods used in ex-ante evaluation

In-itinere evaluation

Definition:

In-itinere, Latin for "during the journey," refers to evaluations conducted while the policy is being implemented.

Purpose

It aims to monitor the **progress of policy implementation**, identify any challenges or unexpected issues, and make necessary adjustments in real-time

Focus

In-itinere evaluation focuses on the **ongoing processes**, **resource utilization**, and **intermediate outcomes** to ensure that the policy is on track to achieve its intended goals

Methods

Regular reporting, feedback mechanisms, and continuous data collection are common methods used in in-itinere evaluation

Ex-post evaluation

Definition

Ex-post, Latin for "after the event," refers to evaluations conducted **after** the policy has been implemented and had some time to produce outcomes

Purpose

It aims to assess the overall impact and effectiveness of the policy in achieving its intended goals and objectives

Focus

Ex-post evaluation looks at the **long-term impacts**, **direct and indirect effects**, **unintended consequences**, and **sustainability of the policy**, providing insights for future policy design and implementation

Methods

Surveys, case studies, and **counterfactual statistical analyses** are often employed in ex-post evaluation to measure the outcomes and impacts of the policy

Policy Learning

Policy learning is the process by which knowledge and insights gained from the evaluation of past policies are used for informing future policy development and decision-making.

Key Elements

Feedback Mechanisms

Establishing systems to capture and incorporate feedback from policy evaluation

Adaptive Management

Embracing a flexible approach that allows for adjustments based on lessons learned

Best Practices

Identifying and adopting best practices from successful policies

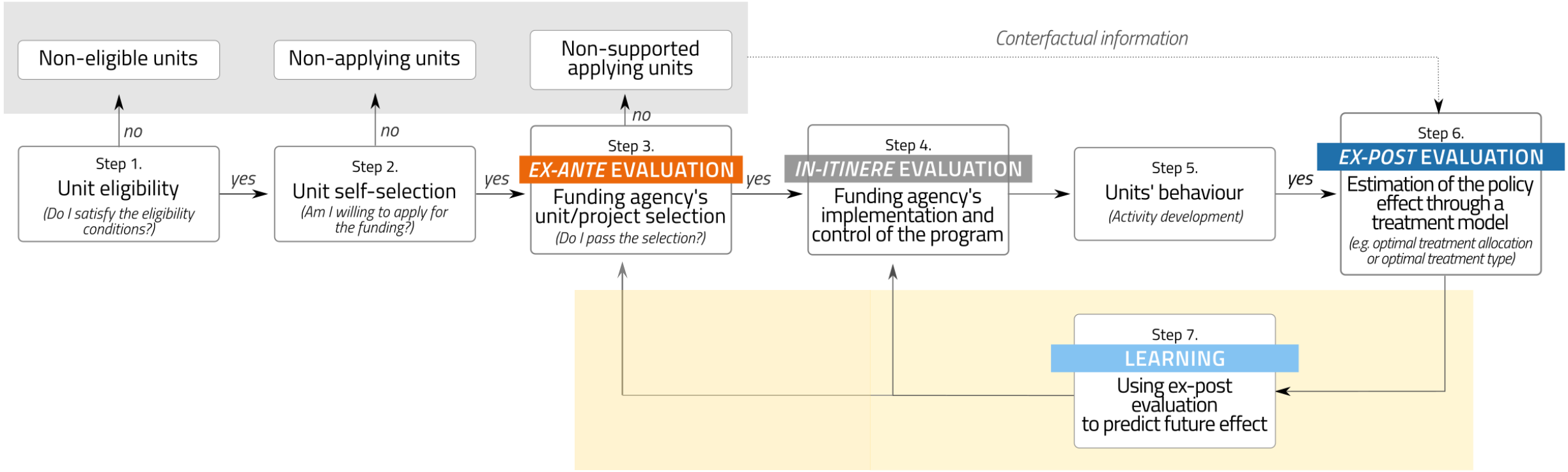
Institutional Memory

Building and maintaining institutional knowledge to inform future policy endeavors

Working example

Project-funding policy

Project funding process with properly integrated *ex-post* and *ex-ante* quantitative policy evaluation



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The ex-post assessment of policy programs impact

Logic, steps, guidelines

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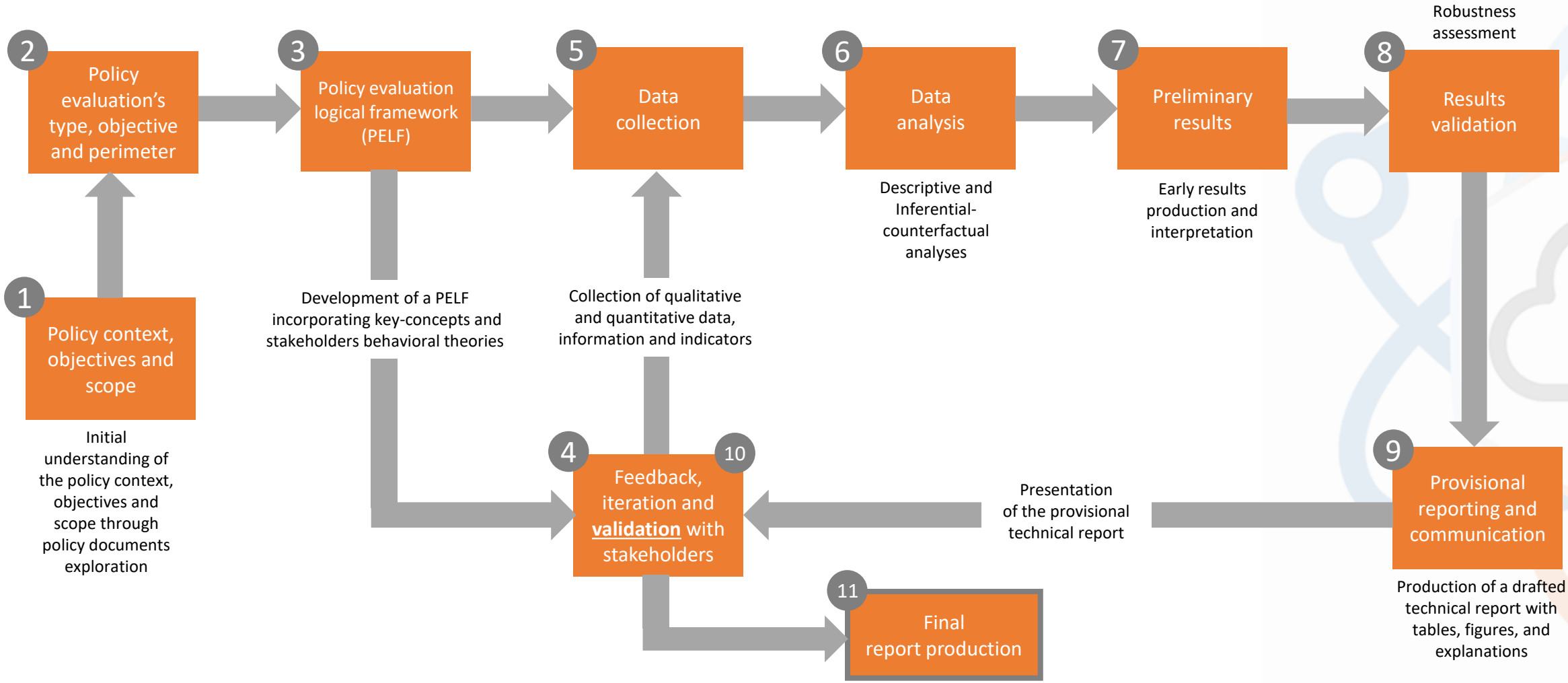
Introduction

- Assessing the impact of **policy programs post-implementation** is vital for informed **decision-making**
- A deep understanding of it requires a *synthesis* of both **qualitative** and **quantitative** methods and analyses
- The impact assessment is a **learning process**, entailing continuous feedback and adaptation to the environment (for example, the policy stakeholders)
- Here, we elucidate the **main steps** needed for correctly carrying out policy ex-post impact assessment



Ex-post program evaluation: main steps

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