Who Advises the State? The Profiles and Pathways of Scientific Advisors in the United Kingdom, Estonia, Lithuania, and Spain

Jukneviciene Vita
Vilnius University Siauliai Academy, Institute of Regional development, Šiauliai, Lithuania

Toleikiene Rita
Mykolas Romeris University, Vilnius, Lithuania

Vanagiene Salomėja
Research Council of Lithuania, Vilnius, Lithuania

Abstract: The role of scientific advice in evidence-informed policymaking and implementation has gained increasing prominence in recent years, particularly in response to crises and uncertainties characterising modern governance. Although science represents only one of several considerations in political decision-making, scientific knowledge can substantially assist policymakers in understanding complex problems, identifying and assessing policy response options, and evaluating the impact of measures implemented (Slater & Ale, 2022; Joint Research Centre, 2022). Consequently, scientific advisors play a pivotal role in ensuring that evidence is effectively integrated into the policy process. They are expected not only to provide responses to specific questions but also to highlight emerging opportunities and risks, and to clarify various scientific dimensions of policy issues (Gluckman, 2018; Teller, 2017). At the same time, advisors must remain aware of their own cognitive biases and the implicit political agendas that may shape the use of evidence in policymaking (Lombardo, 2022). This underlines the importance of understanding the backgrounds, competencies, and skills of individuals who assume scientific advisory roles within government. However, research focused on scientific advisors remains limited.

The aim of this study is to examine the educational, professional and political background of scientific advisors who actively participate in evidence-informed policymaking processes. The United Kingdom has a history of more than 60 years of scientific advice within government and is regarded as a leading and a well-established system. Estonia, Lithuania and Spain have relatively recently institutionalised scientific advisory positions within government (in 2015, 2023 and 2024, respectively). As such, the four countries selected provide a comprehensive overview of the dynamics associated with scientific advice in the context of Europe. The study employs a mixed-methods research design, examining extensive demographic, biographical, political and professional information of all scientific advisors in 2025 in the three countries selected. The findings reveal the main trends concerning gender, age, education, international experience, and professional pathways, offering insights into the evolving role and profile of scientific advisors in contemporary governance systems within Europe.

The study is conducted as part of the COST Action project CoRex: Comparative research on the executive triangle.