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# Rapid Evidence Review

What is the evidence for the effectiveness of export promotion through the capacity development of business support organizations (BSOs) in middle-income countries (MICs) in improving export outcomes?

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# \ ABSTRACT

## Background / Objective

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Export promotion via the capacity development of Business Support Organizations (BSOs) is widely recognized as a key strategy for enhancing export performance in Middle Income Countries (MICs). This review synthesizes evidence from 21 sources on how support to BSOs is likely to contribute to export outcomes in MICs, and through which mechanisms.

## Evidence Summary / Key Findings

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Export promotion via the capacity development of BSOs is widely recognized as a key strategy for enhancing export performance in MICs. Since BSOs are one of the commonly deployed elements of the export promotion programs (EPPs) it is impossible to disentangle the direct impact of BSOs on exports from that of other EPP measures.<sup>1</sup>

The review finds that:

- BSOs' work accounts, at least in part, for increase in organisational resources, know-how, and strategic ability of export-oriented firms—specifically small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).
- There is evidence that BSO-led initiatives, if properly designed and specifically matched to firm and market demands, enhance export capacity, promote international networks, and enhance risk management, thus promoting export growth and competitiveness.
- BSOs' effects on export-oriented firms is conditioned by factors such as firm size, export experience, type of support provided, and the institutional environment.
- The impact of international partners' capacity building support to BSOs is hard to disentangle from overall support to EPP, and thus poorly documented.

## Strength of Evidence / Gaps

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Most of the research sources refer to positive results of support to exports, but significant gaps in the evidence base exist on the macro-level and long-term implications of BSO capacity building, the relative effectiveness of national as compared to external aid, and the ability of BSOs to reach and impact the small or least experienced firms. The literature emphasises a need for continuous evaluation, context-specific program design, and greater inclusiveness for maximum effect.

The evidence basis for MICs specifically is relatively meagre. As of 2023, comprehensive review of literature notes only four studies in middle income countries (Egypt, Nepal, Pakistan and Vietnam) and nine studies in upper-middle income countries (Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Tunisia, Türkiye and China). In comparison, at the time there were 15 studies of high-income countries. This review has identified some more recent studies referencing MICs (Malaysia, Peru, Georgia), but these cover broader topics and are relatively superficial when it comes to BSO impact.

## Conclusion / Implications

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Although BSOs are a common and proven tool used by national governments and international partners for export promotion in MICs and UMICs. But partly because they are so ubiquitous, their direct impact on export promotion proves hard to isolate. Additional studies are necessary to close that gap. In the meantime, the research suggests that export promotions work, especially if it is well tailored to the national context. Studies highlight the need for better program design, improvement of accessibility of BSO support, and alignment with firms' needs to maximize impact.

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<sup>1</sup> Artemenko, T. (2022). Export Promotion Directions And Evaluation Indicators. The European Proceedings of Social and Behavioural Sciences. <https://doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2022.06.11>.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Export promotion through export promotion programs (EPPs) and the utilization of BSOs for that purpose is widely recognized as a key strategy for enhancing export performance. By the 1990s most of the countries in the developing and developed world had created both BSOs and specific programs promoting export: these programmes have typically included components implemented through BSOs, and a framework for boosting BSOs' capacities.

Still now, BSOs often receive a substantial amount of public funding, and, at times, international donors are engaged in the developing world to provide in-kind or financial support to BSOs as agents of EPPs. Reviewed case study evidence, from MICs, UMICs and also high-income countries consistently shows that well-designed EPPs involving BSOs can strengthen firms' export capabilities, improve risk management, and expand international networks. These effects seem to be especially pronounced among small and medium enterprises (SMEs). So EPP and BSO impact is considered broadly positive, but highly context based.

SECO has historically dedicated a significant part of its international programmes on export promotion, to the capacity building of BSOs. Other international partners, as well as national governments also resort to BSOs as a convenient interface and multiplier between an intervention and exporting firms.

Since heterogeneous factors affect exports and the capacity of SMEs to export, it has proven difficult to come up with generalizable conclusion on the impact of BSOs. Moreover, the causal chain of impact of capacity building of BSOs on exports is practically not studied, let alone quantitatively measured. Nevertheless, one can tease out some insights on what BSO capacities may need to be boosted, based on the analysis of what kinds of BSO support seems to have worked to promote exports so far.

## 2 SUMMARY: WHY EXPORT PROMOTION?

Why would the governments intervene with the markets in this way? What is the market failure they are trying to address? Researchers argue that the key rationale is to bridge the lack of trust among actors in international business, thus the government is taking over the sunk costs of obtaining the information and skills needed for building that trust.<sup>2</sup> Otherwise, the lack of information may lead to poor risk management and underinvestment.<sup>3</sup> In other words, EPPs share risk with potential exporters and BSOs are one of the vehicles for facilitating this risk-sharing.

Another broad economic assumption is that the experience gained by the exporting firms will eventually spill over<sup>4</sup> into the domestic market, including to the non-exporting firms, boosting their country's overall export capacity. There are examples of such spillover but the review showed that this claim is not considered to be confirmed.<sup>5</sup>

What does the export promotion entail?

Some of the classical export promotion efforts by public agencies include boosting the country's image (typically, promoting its natural and human resources, favourable regulations, and corruption-free public service) and providing various bundles of support through BSOs. Such services include training, assistance in meeting technical and quality standards and regulations, capacity building, aid in logistics and customs, pricing, marketing services and follow-up support. Some BSOs also offer market entry assistance, such as support in partner search and matchmaking abroad. A modelling study in Uruguay showed that export promotion services help firms enter new product and country markets, particularly through trade support activities.<sup>6</sup>

But **BSOs are not the only way** this can be done. There are alternative export-support activities that are often used as complementary to BSOs' services, and which are by now a common institutional part of the export promotion setup. One can group these export-promotion policies into three broad categories.

<sup>2</sup> Aalto, E. and Gustafsson, R. (2020). Export promotion Rationales and impacts—a review, ETLA report (No. 100). The Research Institute of the Finnish Economy, Helsinki, Finland.

<sup>3</sup> Copeland, B.R.(2008). Is there a case for trade and investment promotion policy? In: Ciuriak,D. (Ed.), Trade policy research 2007. Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, Ottawa, Canada.

<sup>4</sup> Cadot, O., Iacovone, L., Pierola, M.D., and Rauch, F. (2013). Success and failure of African exporters. *Journal of Development Economics* 101: 284–296.

<sup>5</sup> Srhoj, S., Vitezić, V., & Wagner, J (2023). Export Boosting Policies and Firm Performance: Review of Empirical Evidence Around the World. *Jahrbücher für Nationalökonomie und Statistik*, 243, 45 - 92. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jbnst-2022-0019>.

<sup>6</sup> Martincus, C., & Carballo, J. (2010). Entering new country and product markets: does export promotion help?. *Review of World Economics*, 146, 437-467. <https://doi.org/10.1007/S10290-010-0062-X>.

The first includes State-provided **framework support to exporting businesses** through, for example the efforts of Consular and trade representations, by organizing trade fairs, seeking contacts/matchmaking, providing reviews of host-country legislation and regulations, etc. This is, so to say a “heritage” model of public support for exporters.

The second type seeks to provide **purely financial incentives for export**, leaving companies to choose their own strategies for boosting their capacities. These incentives include, for example, subsidized export loans, and export credit guarantees.

The third type builds various types of **entrepreneurship promotion infrastructure**, such as entrepreneurship zones, export processing zones, or business parks, which provide quick access to business infrastructure under favourable conditions. These are not exclusively designed for exports, but they could attract foreign direct investment specifically aimed at exports.

## 2.1 DO EPPS WORK?

**EPPs work, BSOs as a core component of them:** The evidence reviewed consistently shows that EPPs, and BSO interventions within them, enhance export capabilities, knowledge, and networks, resulting in improved export performance. Available evidence demonstrates that BSOs (and EPPs) have been effective (in contributing positively to export outcomes) from MICs and up, including in high-income countries (evidence on low-income countries is inconclusive). But BSOs work in conjunction and interdependency with other EPP measures, making it difficult to isolate BSOs’ specific impact. Besides, the extent of BSO services’ effect often depends on the broader context within which an EPP is deployed.

**EPPs boost total exports and intensity:** Broadly, EPPs (including their BSO-implemented components) have been shown to have positive impact on whether non-exporters start exporting, on total exports and export intensity. There is also positive evidence on the number of export products and number of export markets, but it is unclear what kind of products this refers to (are these innovative products?) and whether firms manage to sell for a higher price as a result of the support provided by/through BSOs.<sup>7</sup> These effects are more documented in UMICs than in MICs.

**EPPs are cost efficient:** while there is no comprehensive study, the back-of-the-envelope calculation shows that the value added by exports generated is likely much higher than the costs of EPPs. These calculations focus on causally identified benefits and direct costs, ignoring the costs of public officials (which often includes BSOs), or the benefits of spillover effects.

**...and BSOs seem to be, too.** A rigorous study using Danish firm-level data found that for small firms, the gain in value added from export promotion was roughly three times higher than the direct costs.<sup>8</sup> No comprehensive study of comparable rigor could be identified for MICs/UMICs or LICs, but there seems to be a general consensus based on empirical studies that globally, such support is cost effective.<sup>9</sup> Evidently, the magnitude of benefits depends on program design, firm characteristics and sector.

## 2.2 BSOS WORK FOR SMES...

According to diverse studies that focus on BSOs services’ impacts in particular, there is corroborating evidence that the strongest effects of export promotion are observed when EPPs fulfil three key conditions:

- Services are tailored to the specific needs of the target export markets at hand, and of the firms supported through BSOs;
- Experiential learning is prioritised for SMEs;
- Programs facilitate international network-building.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Srhoj, S., Vitezić, V., & Wagner, J (2023). Export Boosting Policies and Firm Performance: Review of Empirical Evidence Around the World. *Jahrbücher für Nationalökonomie und Statistik*, 243, 45 - 92. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jbnst-2022-0019>.

<sup>8</sup> Munch, J., & Schaur, G. (2018). The Effect of Export Promotion on Firm-Level Performance. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 10, 357-387. <https://doi.org/10.1257/POL.20150410>.

<sup>9</sup> Srhoj, S., Vitezić, V., & Wagner, J (2023). Export Boosting Policies and Firm Performance: Review of Empirical Evidence Around the World. *Jahrbücher für Nationalökonomie und Statistik*, 243, 45 - 92. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jbnst-2022-0019>.

<sup>10</sup> Haddoud, M., Jones, P., & Newbery, R. (2017). Export promotion programmes and SMEs’ performance: Exploring the network promotion role. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, 24, 68-87. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JSBED-07-2016-0116>.

The literature also highlights persistent challenges: smaller firms may face barriers to access support, and program effectiveness can be limited by administrative hurdles or misalignment with firms' needs.<sup>11</sup> The literature underscores the need for continuous evaluation, adaptation, and greater inclusivity in program design.<sup>12</sup> Some studies also call for more rigorous causal analysis and longitudinal research to better understand long-term impacts of BSO support on exports.<sup>13</sup>

**SME capacity development provided by BSOs improves SME export outcomes through indirect channels.** In the evidenced interventions, the outcome of BSO-provided support was particularly high and/or decisive for SMEs. Export promotion programs that offer information, experiential learning, and financial support improve SMEs' export performance in MICs, especially when complemented by strong networks and underpinned by SMEs' improved institutional capacity.<sup>14</sup> It is also noted in more specialized grey literature, that while SMEs benefit most from such support, to achieve better and quicker macro-level results BSOs must focus on businesses with high-growth potential in emerging sectors and markets.<sup>15</sup>

**Exports grow through enhanced capabilities and risk management:** In a study of French SMEs, export promotion programs involving BSOs were found to increase export performance not directly, but through building firms' export capabilities and risk management practices.<sup>16</sup>

## 2.3 ...BUT THERE ARE CONDITIONS AND LIMITATIONS

**BSO interventions must be tailor-made to be effective:** Evidence from Croatia indicates that larger firms, despite receiving more export promotion funding, did not demonstrate proportional export improvements, suggesting that capacity-building should be more performance-driven.<sup>17</sup> Earlier studies have also explored the importance of developing the information handling capacity and attitudes to international partnerships, as some of the key capacities that support export growth.<sup>18</sup>

**BSOs are more effective in MICs than in LICs:** Evidence suggests that interventions like foreign direct investment (FDI)—which often complement BSO capacity-building—are most effective in promoting exports in emerging and MICs, but least effective in LICs. This is attributed to the higher likelihood of human capital gaps, less developed financial markets, and inadequate infrastructure in LICs, all of which bridle the effectiveness of capacity-building and export promotion efforts.<sup>19</sup> Case studies, such as Ethiopia's floriculture sector, highlight that successful export promotion in LICs depends heavily on firm-level learning, local business group dynamics, and tailored industrial policies. The broader economic and political context, as well as the existing capabilities and networks of local firms, play a critical role in shaping outcomes.<sup>20</sup>

Nonetheless, the evidence on this remains heterogenous and is primarily based on panel data analyses and in-depth case studies, which may not be generalizable across all LICs and MICs. Moreover, there are no direct comparative studies measuring the differential impact of capacity building in LICs and MICs. While the impact of EPPs was proved considerable also in UMICs, there is little in terms of comparative evidence on whether the impact here is higher than that observed in MICs.

<sup>11</sup> Heriqbaldi, U., Esquivias, M., Samudro, B., & Widodo, W. (2023). Do National Export Promotion Programs in Indonesia support export competitiveness?. *Heliyon*, 9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e16918>.

<sup>12</sup> Klasen, A., Lomitashvili, T., Rosbach, K., & Taniguchi, K. (2024). Policy approaches to stimulate exports: The case of Georgia. *Public Administration and Development*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pad.2045>.

<sup>13</sup> Malca, O., Peña-Vinces, J., & Acedo, F. (2019). Export promotion programmes as export performance catalysts for SMEs: insights from an emerging economy. *Small Business Economics*, 55, 831-851. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-019-00185-2>.

<sup>14</sup> Mansor, N., & Cheah, J. (2024). THE EFFECT OF EXPORT PROMOTION PROGRAM TOWARDS SMALL-MEDIUM ENTERPRISES' EXPORT PERFORMANCE: A GOVERNANCE PERSPECTIVE. *Journal of Governance and Integrity*. <https://doi.org/10.15282/jgi.7.1.2024.9722>.

<sup>15</sup> Trade Promotion, export growth and GDP: Fresh Data and Fresh Insights, International Trade Centre, World Trade Organization, May 2025

<sup>16</sup> Catanzaro, A., & Teyssier, C. (2020). Export promotion programs, export capabilities, and risk management practices of internationalized SMEs. *Small Business Economics*, 57, 1479 - 1503. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-020-00358-4>.

<sup>17</sup> Miocevic, D. (2013). Exploring Export Promotion Policy from a Justice Perspective. *Journal of Macromarketing*, 33, 342 - 353. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0276146713497756>.

<sup>18</sup> Welch, L., & Wiedersheim-Paul, F. (1979). Export Promotion Policy-A New Approach. *Australian Journal of Management*, 4, 165 - 177. <https://doi.org/10.1177/031289627900400207>.

<sup>19</sup> Sahoo, P., & Dash, R. (2022). Does FDI have differential impact on exports? Evidence from LICs, LMICs, and ECs. *International Economics*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.inteco.2022.10.002>.

<sup>20</sup> Melese, A., & Whitfield, L. (2023). Industrial policy, local firm growth paths, and capability building in low-income countries: lessons from Ethiopia's floriculture export sector. *Industrial and Corporate Change*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/icc/dtad003>.

**Export support services are often perceived as satisfactory but inequitably distributed:** A study in Eritrea showed that manufacturers found BSOs' export support services only "satisfactory," with smaller firms having less access to BSOs — highlighting a common gap in BSO targeting and inclusivity.<sup>21</sup>

**Export promotion is more effective for firms that already turn profit and are working in internationally exposed environments.** Financial and innovation support increase export intensity. Publicly backed BSOs were shown to increase export intensity by 16.27% and to increase the probability of turning to export by 25%.<sup>22</sup> However, case study data introduces nuances depending on the type of firms supported – already exposed to international trade, or not exposed yet:

#### CASE STUDY ON BSOS: WESTERN BALKANS AND VIETNAM

A six-country experiment in the Western Balkans, conducted by the World Bank in 2022<sup>23</sup>, looked at SMEs receiving online BSO support in digital marketing, customer acquisition and market expansion.

The evidence showed a notable improvement in digital presence and a significant improvement in customer base growth. While there was no significant increase in the number of firms that started exporting, those that were already selling abroad doubled their export sales.

The improvements in exports and digital presence were attributed by users to sector-specific advice and encouragement, while the expansion of the export markets was mostly linked to behavioural change: the recipients of advice and training felt encouraged and approached the market expansion with higher degree of confidence. Overall, the authors concluded that support programs have direct impact on export-oriented SMEs. The tailoring and targeting of this advice were identified as another key factor in determining the extent of such income.

Similarly, studies in emerging markets already turned towards export, such as Vietnam<sup>24</sup>, confirm that capacity building through BSOs can be a direct driver of improved export performance in SMEs, by systematizing decision-making, enhancing export strategies and helping develop skills that are necessary for international competition. Specific areas where the BSO programs proved beneficial in developing Vietnam's SME capacities were international marketing, financing, legislation, e-commerce, and language and cultural sensitivity training, as well as specialized government-backed workshops on export strategy development.

### 3 RELIABILITY OF EVIDENCE AND GAPS

The evidence base supporting the effectiveness of export promotion, including in MICs, is generally robust, although the particular role played by BSOs in accentuating this impact is harder to isolate. The review could not come up with research where the impact of BSO capacity development on export outcome is practically analysed in an isolated fashion. Such impact can only be circumstantially inferred from the types of BSOs-provided assistance that was considered useful by the beneficiaries, as reflected in the case-study data.

Some high-quality studies use structural equation modelling, meta-analyses, and large-scale surveys, but they mostly deal with EPPs as a general policy, rather than the narrower field of BSOs, let alone the (externally financed) capacity building provided to BSOs.

The literature review points to gaps that persist in understanding the long-term, economy-wide impacts of BSO-led export promotion, the specific mechanisms that drive success, and the barriers faced by the smallest or least experienced firms.

<sup>21</sup> Tesfom, G., & Lutz, C. (2013). Evaluating the effectiveness of export support services in developing countries. *International Journal of Emerging Markets*, 3. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17468800810906075>.

<sup>22</sup> Karoubi, B., Lecerf, M., & Bertrand, G. (2018). Are export promotion programs efficient for small and medium enterprises. *Economics Bulletin*, 38, 105-11

<sup>23</sup> Cusolito, A., Darova, O., & McKenzie, D. (2022). Capacity Building as a Route to Export Market Expansion: A Six-Country Experiment in the Western Balkans. Policy Research Working Papers. <https://doi.org/10.1596/1813-9450-10256>.

<sup>24</sup> Safari, A., Seleh, A. (2020). Key Determinants of SMEs' export performance: a resource-based view and contingency theory approach using potential mediators. *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing*, 35, 635-654. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jbim-11-2018-0324>.

Table 1: Summary table with strength of evidence for key claims

CLAIM	EVIDENCE STRENGTH	REASONING	COUNTRY OF STUDY
EPPs improves export performance in MICs, especially for SMEs	Strong	Multiple high-quality studies show significant positive effects on export capabilities and outcomes	Uruguay, Vietnam, Western Balkans, France
Experiential and network-based supports are most effective for export growth	Strong	Empirical evidence highlights the importance of relationship-building and experiential learning	Vietnam, Western Balkans, France
EPPs are cost efficient	Moderately strong	Studies suggest that EPPs generate considerably more profit than they cost, but the heterogeneity of factors makes it difficult to isolate causal links and calculate both costs and benefits	Denmark, global (consensus), MICs (limited)
Smaller and less experienced firms benefit most from EPPs	Moderate	Studies show stronger effects for these groups, though access can be uneven	Eritrea, Croatia, Western Balkans
Program effectiveness is mediated by design, accessibility, and alignment with firm needs	Moderate	Some studies report limited impact due to administrative or contextual barriers	Croatia, Western Balkans, Eritrea
Financial support increases market entry, but not always economic performance	Moderate	Financial support helps firms enter new markets, but may not boost profits	Croatia, global
BSOs are primarily responsible for export growth	Weak	BSOs are an ubiquitous part of EPPs and their effect is hard to isolate	Global
Capacity development is more important than economic and financial incentives	Weak	BSOs-led capacity building initiatives are usually considered in conjunction with other EPPs	Global, Vietnam, Western Balkans

Further targeted research is needed to understand the macro-level effects of export promotion through support to BSOs, to better calibrate policy, justify and target the allocation of resources. There is a need for rigorous, causal and longitudinal studies to clarify the mechanisms linking BSO capacity development to the support offered to firms, and in turn, to export success.

Failing to reaching the smallest and/or the least experienced firms is also a concern, since some field research points to the tendency of BSOs to focus on a rather narrow band of beneficiaries, raising concerns of corruption and collusion, or of eviction effects to smaller companies. Ensuring inclusiveness and maximizing impact requires targeted program design and delivery. This sort of concerns is common to development interventions in other spheres (e.g. enhancing minority participation, democracy promotion, etc.). Good practices from these areas could be used to enhance BSO-led projects, too.

A more rigorous look into the mechanisms that articulate BSO capacity development with export success also seems to be necessary, which is impossible without deeper, causal and longitudinal studies.

Both initial and additional review of literature yielded very little about impact of capacity development on BSOs. Most of the development research seems to have focused on the impact of international assistance on business support and export promotion, where BSOs are only one, mediating institutional element.

One promising avenue for assessing the impact on BSOs would be to conduct a **meta-evaluation of the capacity building projects** that targeted BSOs. An interesting example is presented by 2009 Synthesis of Evaluations on Support to Business Development by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark.<sup>25</sup> That report is also valuable pointing to inherent limitations of the evaluations solicited by the donors: the lack of focus of such evaluations, “the vagueness of success criteria” of BSOs and the lack of clarity with the objectives to assistance. The report notes that when successes are noted “the reader is often left to wonder why this was so and what criteria was applied.”

<sup>25</sup> Synthesis of evaluations on support to Business Development, Evaluation Study 2009/5, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark/DANIDA, <https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/toolkits/derec/evaluation-reports/derec/denmark/44006517.pdf>.

## ABOUT THIS EVIDENCE REVIEW

The evidence review was prepared by using a cascading approach, based on harvesting database suggestions through Consensus AI and widening the scope through academic databases Academia.edu and JSTOR.

Consensus.AI was used to conduct a query-driven search (“export promotion programs” AND “impact of export support programs” AND/OR “business support organizations”) in the database of academic papers, and so-called “grey literature” i.e. reports and publications by international organizations.

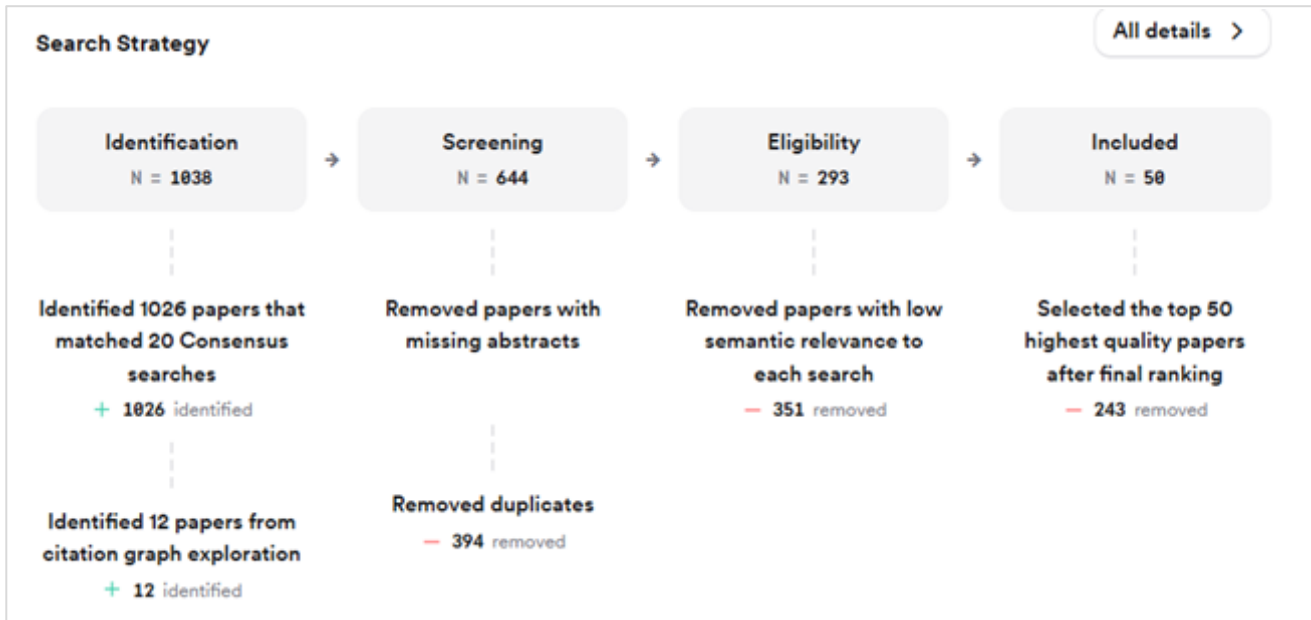


Figure 1: PRISMA graph generated through Consensus.AI

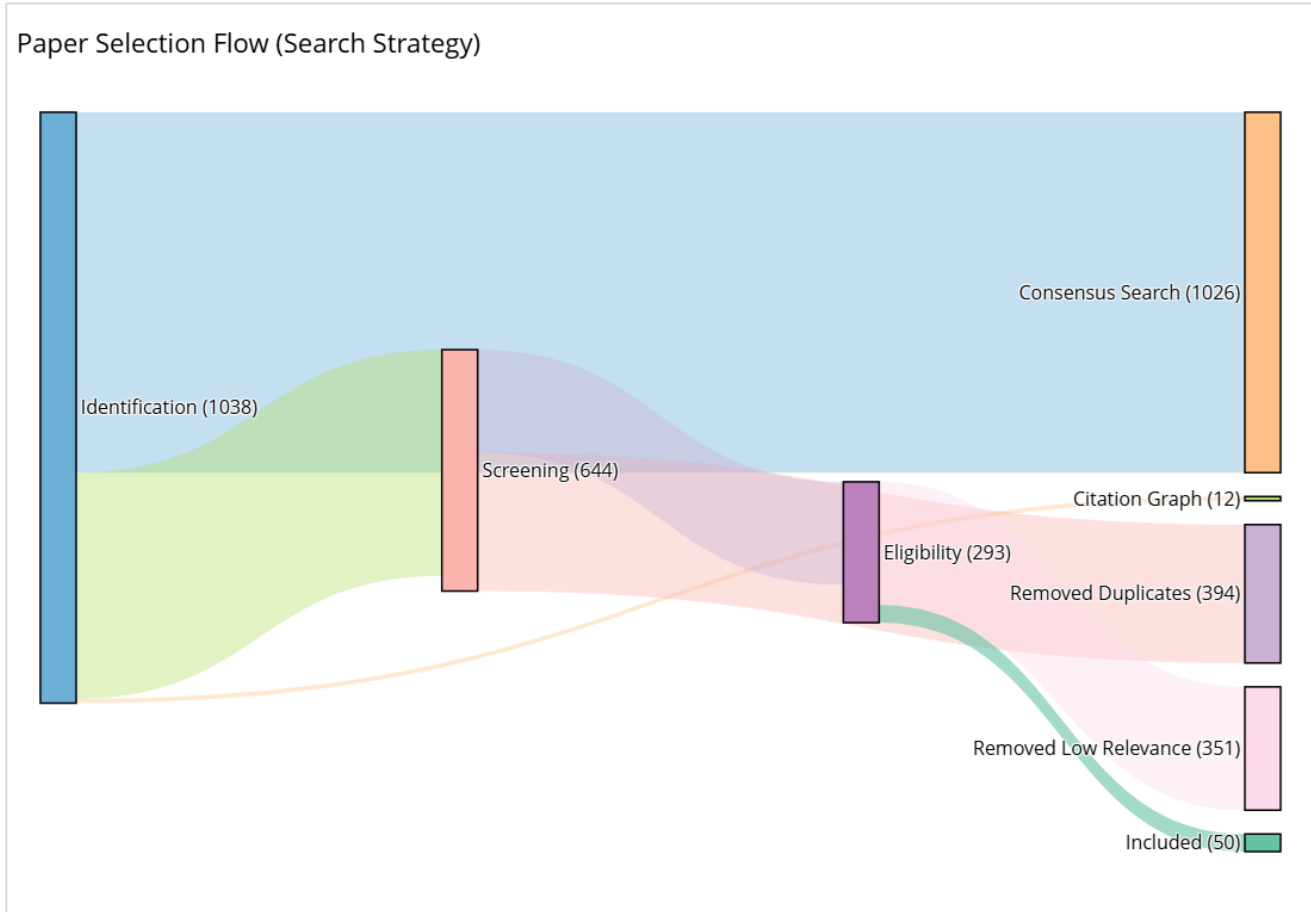


Figure 2: Author’s own plot

The summary by Consensus AI and summaries from the 50 relevant papers were then reviewed. Out of these, the 20 most relevant papers chosen after the analysis of the summaries and a brief review (summary through Adobe Acrobat AI Assistance and detailed review by the author). Six papers were discarded as being of limited relevance to the topic at hand. Based on literature review and snowballing based on footnotes in this sample, additional search was done through Academia.EDU and JSTOR to identify niche (e.g. specifically referring to BSOs capacity building) or foundational (covering broad field and highly referenced) publications on the topic. 15 extra papers were identified, and 7 out of these selected after a full-text review of all. These were integrated into the review to form the final selection of 21 which are referenced below.

An effort was made to ensure geographic representation, and quoted studies refer to Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America, Ethiopia, China and Vietnam.

## \ ABOUT THE RAPID EVIDENCE REVIEWS

### What are Rapid Evidence Reviews?

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Rapid Evidence Reviews (RERs) are concise syntheses of available evidence. They are commissioned by the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs' (SECO) Economic Cooperation and Development division. Each RER provides a structured and rigorous overview of available evidence on a topic relevant to SECO Economic Cooperation and Development's portfolio, more systematic than a traditional literature review, yet more resource-efficient than a full systematic review. Inspired by international good practice in rapid evidence synthesis, RERs are designed to bridge the gap between research and operational practice.

### Purpose and Use

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RERs are produced on demand for SECO Economic Cooperation and Development's operational units to address concrete evidence needs arising from programming decisions. They are designed to be actionable and timely, integrating evidence into real-time decision-making rather than focusing solely on retrospective experience and reporting. RERs synthesise evidence from academic literature, grey literature such as publications by multilateral organisations, and evaluation reports. They draw on research portals' resources, as well as established databases such as the 3ie Development Evidence Portal and DEval's Rigorous Evidence Database, as well as SECO's own evaluation knowledge. The service was piloted in 2025 and intends to produce up to four reviews per year.

### Production and Quality Assurance

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RERs are produced within the framework of the GOPA/CEval's backstopping mandate (2025-2028) on behalf of SECO Economic Cooperation and Development's Quality and Resource section (SECO-WEQA). Research questions are co-constructed by SECO operational units, WEQA, and the backstopping team. The evidence search strategy and inclusion criteria are developed by the backstopping team and coordinated with SECO-WEQA. Each review undergoes internal quality assurance and is reviewed by WEQA staff prior to publication. Reviews are produced by the backstopping team, requiring typically approximately 12 – 15 working days from the point at which the research question has been defined to finalisation. The backstopping team bears full responsibility for the accuracy and correctness of the reviews.

### The RER Series

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This document is part of an ongoing series of Rapid Evidence Reviews covering topics across SECO's eight business lines, including economic policy, trade, infrastructure, private sector development, and skills. Published RERs are made available through ARAMIS, the research database of the Swiss Federal Administration.

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