

Publishable summary (Reporting period 1)

STEPS (Strengthening Engagement in Public Health Research) is a 30-month project supported by the European Commission through its Science-in-Society programme.

STEPS has three linked objectives:

to identify stakeholders at national level and create dialogue between civil society organisations

to hold and report national workshops in the 12 EU new member states

to promote collective learning at European level and sharing with global partners.

Public health includes activities that promote health and control disease, and which stand apart from laboratory and clinical bio-medicine. Public-health research is undertaken in national public health institutes (often directly responsible to the ministry of health) and in universities (both medical faculties and increasingly in behavioural and social sciences). The users of public-health research are both policy-makers and non-profit service providers.

In the first phase of STEPS, members of the principle partners have taken on the task of identifying lead organisations in the 12 new member states. These organisations were sought on the basis of giving varied perspectives, as national public health associations and civil society organisations. The Coordinator established new contacts with the national public health associations, with national officers responsible for research policy and with representatives from the health ministries. Visits were made and reports provide an initial assessment of structures and performance in public-health research. At the same time, lead for Skalbes and EUPHA identified and made contact with civil society organisations, determining which were interested and would be capable of providing leadership for the workshops. This led to agreement on national workshop leads for each of the countries.

The structure of the workshops was established. A Template was created which set out the objectives of the workshops, the format, expected attenders, products and reports, and financial basis. A single framework was welcomed by the national workshop leads as it provided clear goals for them, with sufficient flexibility for interpretation within national arrangements. Each workshop was a day event, with four morning speakers and broader discussion in the afternoon. One of the speakers was asked to address a specific field of civil society health organisation activity. The workshops were to be held in the national language so that it could more easily reflect national concerns, while the findings would then be translated and brought together for European interpretation in the second phase of STEPS.

Three associated activities have been developed. First, the workshop leads made surveys of national civil society organisations' perspectives on research. This is accompanied by a survey of European civil society organisations, gained through the European Health Policy Forum (organised by the European Commission's Directorate for Health). Second, technical development of a website, and a database of country research profiles was established. A template for national structures has been created, and initial information gained with the the EU 15 countries, to be supplemented by

drawing on the reports from the EU 12 workshops. Third, attention has been given to the opportunities for public-health research from the Structural Funds, in collecting relevant information from web sites and coordinating with initiatives of the European Commission.

In the second phase, from July 2010, STEPS will develop European partnerships through integrating the national reports, developing thematic analysis, bringing together participants and experts at the EUPHA public health conference in Amsterdam, November 2010 and promoting dissemination at international and national levels.