

Publishable summary description of the EuroREACH project

EuroREACH was a three year coordinated action with seven work packages within three main project phases. Its objective was to improve access to and use of healthcare data and to enhance cross-country comparisons of health system performance. The project was interactively designed to ensure linkages between the WP 1-4 which contributed to a coordinated outcome: the *“Handbook to access health care data for cross-country comparisons of efficiency and quality”*. The project started by developing an analytic framework for performance assessment that guided the work of all other WP's by specifying data domains and ensuring consistency of the resulting Handbook which in the second and third phase of the project was transformed into a digitised compendium: the Health Data Navigator (www.healthdatanavigator.eu). The project was coordinated by the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research (Vienna) with a consortium of 9 partners from 7 Member States (AT, DE, ES, F, FI, LUX, UK) and Israel.

During the first reporting period, the methodological framework and guidelines were developed and used for stocktaking and mapping existing data, initiatives and good practices in the respective fields. Specific criteria to review and evaluate the initiatives and data sources were established among all partners allowing consistency across WP 1-4. External Expert Panels (EEP) contributed to the development of the framework, criteria as well as data management issues including data protection, linkage and data governance.

In the second period the project's primary focus was on the development of the Handbook, the further elaboration and refinement of results of WP 1-4. For example, in WP 1 the methodological framework for performance assessment was revised and amended while WP 2 reviewed and appraised existing data and information systems at European and international level. WP 3 mapped how information systems across providers and health care settings work together and WP 4 reviewed internationally available data and information systems and assessed their relevance to comparative research. At the first Sounding Board Meeting (SBM) in November 2011 in Luxembourg, the experts and EuroREACH partners recommended setting up a digitised form of the Handbook in order to disseminate the outputs of EuroREACH to a wider research community. To make the *“Handbook”* accessible and to cater to a wide audience the project therefore developed a digitised version, the Health Data Navigator – HDN (www.healthdatanavigator.eu) which was developed by a Working Group Web Platform (WG WP) representing all involved WP's, led by the coordinator. WP 1 to WP 5 were supported by WP 6 on dissemination and impact monitoring, and WP 7 on overall project management.

The HDN was populated with outcomes from the coordinated work in the individual WP's. It required an intensive exchange between project partners and with a wide range of experts. In particular, guidance from External Expert Panel participants, Sounding Board Members and other high-level experts in the field of health information ensured close monitoring during preparation, refinements and validation of the Handbook. On the basis of the recommendations from these esteemed bodies and experts the intensity of work increased noticeably during the second and third phases of the project leading to more human resource input in some partner institutions and in particular at the level of the coordinator which was reflected in a corresponding budget shift.

The broad consultation process and various dissemination activities undertaken throughout the project, i.e. the Final Conference, Sounding Board meetings, presentations at conferences as well as participation in different fora to further develop health data management system and related performance issues, have contributed to spread and reflect project findings widely within the international health research community. Beyond this, the achievement of developing the Health Data Navigator ensures a continued dissemination of EuroREACH results and will warrant the HDN's further use and sustainability beyond the projects' end.