

IS THE EU READY FOR A GENERIC SET OF INDICATORS FOR HEALTH SYSTEM PERFORMANCE? A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Key Messages

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➤ The acceptance of an agreed core set of headline HSPA indicators across the EU is driven by:

🎯 existence of appropriately defined benchmarks

🏠 potential application in the 'European Semester'

🧠 improvement in building knowledge capacity

↔ flexibility in the adaptation to the national context

Background

- As part of the EU funded BRIDGE Health project, 23 headline indicators (core set) were proposed for assessing and comparing the performance of public health systems.
- The core set resulted from an EU-wide survey using a bottom-up participatory approach for indicator selection. European experts assessed a shortlist of 95 health system performance assessment (HSPA) indicators identified in an inventory of initiatives and organized in performance domains (see Perić et al., 2018).
- A headline indicator (HL)
 - is robust, widely used with high communicative and educational value, available for most EU Member States (MSs) for a minimum period of 5 years,
 - enables early warnings of policy impacts, highlights trends, indicates priorities for policy action, and promotes accountability.

Aims

We aimed at exploring the core sets' perceived usefulness, validity and general factors identified as affecting the potential uptake of an HSPA indicator hierarchy (headline, operational & explanatory levels) at MSs and EU levels among health policy makers and advisors.

Methods

- Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of 27 national-level policy makers (n=11) and policy advisors (n=16) from 15 EU MSs and one candidate country between Jul 2018 and Jan 2019.
- Transcribed and coded interviews were analyzed using directed content analysis in MAXQDA based on a coding framework to identify major themes and sub themes.
- 17 interviews were undertaken over skype, 6 over the phone and 3 face-to-face. One expert contributed in a written form without prior verbal communication.

Results

Fig 1: How is the pyramid concept (PYR), the headline concept (HL) and the core set of 23 headline HSPA indicators (core set) perceived?

Strengths:

- HL are useful for policy makers in high level decision making
- PYR provides a base for guidance & training on production & usage of indicators
- HL have high communicative value & are important for accountability

Limitations:

- HL pose a risk of misuse for sensationalism/political marketing
- Core set lacks context with clear narrative to the indicators

"(...) people live in an instant world. You know when you are reading an indicator today about the previous years it is too long and is not useful for policy." (policy maker)

Strengths:

- PYR is an understandable and familiar concept for prioritisation
- Core set is sufficient only as a diagnostic signal
- Core set is useful for cross-country comparison to benchmark and reflect

Limitations:

- HL lack a steering mechanism
- Core set lacks clarity on mechanism of policy making and indicator use
- Core set lacks level of innovation and flexibility
- Core set lacks clarity of measurement validity issues

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