PHIRE – Public Health Innovation and Research in Europe

Country Report

BULGARIA

October 2012

EUPHA
European Public Health Association
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The Netherlands
This report was written by Prof Mark McCarthy for PHIRE partner Faculty of Public Health (UK) following a country visit in October 2012.

Contacts were sought beforehand by email and telephone. Respondents were Ms Vladima Popova-Natova and Mrs Katya Ivkevo Gechova at the International Affairs and Protocol Directorate, Ministry of Health, Sofia, and Plamen Dimitrov and Petko Salchev at the National Centre for Public Health and Analysis, Sofia. Contacts but no responses included the Bulgaria Research Fund, expert members of the Medical Sciences Research Committee, and the Bulgaria National Association for Health Policy and Management.

This publication arises from the project ‘PHIRE - Public Health Innovation and Research in Europe’, Agreement Number 2009 12 14, which has received funding from the European Union, in the framework of the Health Programme.

PHIRE is implemented from 1 September 2010 until 28 February 2013.

PHIRE is coordinated by the European Public Health Association (EUPHA). Associated partners are: EHESP, School of Public Health (FR); Faculty of Public Health (FPH, UK); Institute of Hygiene (LIH, LT); Karolinska Institute (SE); Ministry of Health, the Elderly and Community Care (MHEC, MT); NIVEL – Institute for health services research (NL); Slovak Public Health Association (SAVEZ, SK).
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1. PHIRE Innovation Projects

Comments on the national report: impact, policy changes and lessons learned on account of the eight different innovation (tracer) projects.
There were Bulgarian informant responses for CHOB and ENHIS. The projects had been disseminated by four or five methods, including reports, conferences, media. ENHIS was considered to have reached central and regional authorities and professional organisations. Both projects were perceived to have had moderate impacts on knowledge, policies and projects, and CHOB had had high impact on laws and regulations. While limitations included finance, languages and lack of international networks, it was stated that existing national networks and infrastructures were beneficial factors for both projects, and the results of both projects were still being disseminated, to a limited extent.

Does the National Public Health Association (NPHA) have additional information on national impact, policy changes and lessons learned with these eight projects?
Bulgaria (which joined the EU in 2007) was involved in three of the projects.
ECHI: Respondent stated: "We tried to implement short list of ECHI by submitting projects to Ministry of Finance (to use European funds) and also made a second project proposal with Lithuanian counterpart. However, both proposals were rejected.”
URHIS: Cities of Plovdiv and Ruse both identified 32 comparable indicators.
VENICE: National Center of Infectious and Parasitic Diseases, Department Epidemiology and Surveillance of Communicable Diseases was an associate but not full project partner.

Table 1: PHIRE Innovation Projects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Innovation project</th>
<th>Project website</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VENICE - Vaccine European New Integrated Collaboration Effort</td>
<td><a href="http://venice.cineca.org">http://venice.cineca.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>EURO-URHIS I - European system of urban health indicators</td>
<td><a href="http://www.urhis.eu">www.urhis.eu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HA - Healthy Ageing</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
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<tr>
<td>EAAD - European Alliance Against Depression</td>
<td><a href="http://www.eaad.net">www.eaad.net</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENHIS - Environmental and Health Information Systems in Europe</td>
<td><a href="http://www.enhis.org">www.enhis.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUCID - European Core Indicators in Diabetes Mellitus</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
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</table>
Comments on other actions needed to assess impact, policy changes and lessons learned with these projects at national level.

There were country informants about two projects in which Bulgaria had not participated.
2. Public Health Research System in Bulgaria

Are there clear roles, responsibilities and collaboration between Ministry of Science, Ministry of Health and other funders - regions, universities, independent foundation?
Ministry of Health describes no channels of contact with Ministry of Science or other health research funders. Ministry of Health itself does not have funding for research, although it does have Structural Funds for health promotion - and these include the expectation of programme evaluation.

National Science Fund of Bulgaria (BNSF), under the 'Strategy for the Advancement of Science in Bulgaria to 2020' has activities including: competitive research projects; funding by scientific fields; support to young scientists; bilateral scientific cooperation; centres of excellence; support for SMEs; and support to 7th Framework Programme participants.

Is commissioning included within a national strategy for health / public health research?
In September 2010 the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science proposed a National Roadmap for Research Infrastructures for seven research fields: marine / agro; materials / biomedicine /environmental; biomics / drugs / biobanking; energy; computing; IT; astronomy.

In May 2012 a competitive call for 14.8m Lev (€7.5m) for:
- Competitive proposals in seven areas: Energy, energy efficiency and transport; Development of green and environmental technologies; Health and quality of life, biotechnology and organic food; New materials and technologies; Cultural - historical heritage; Information and communication technologies; Applied research in the teaching field.
- Funding for universities and research units of the Bulgarian Academies, businesses, nonprofit organizations and others;
- Strengthening the 'science-business'
- Projects can receive funding of 8,000 to 500,000 Lev, up to 24 months.

There are also EEA/Norwegian bilateral funds1, including for mental health and children orphanages – ('public health initiatives’ yet to be agreed2). Informants also said that some funding has been for research in mental health and rare diseases.

Was a full range of public health research fields (including health promotion, health services epidemiology, surveillance, management, wider determinants) commissioned in 2010?
No research was commissioned by open competition in 2010. The 2012 call potentially allows proposals in all these areas. The 2012 call review committees for biomedicine in chaired by a former University Rector, with a medical vice-chair.

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1 http://www.norvegia.bg/PageFiles/21366/Norway_katalog_01-96pgs_11_FEB_FINAL.pdf
2 http://www.eeagrants.org/asset/4797/1/4797_1.pdf
Is public health research open to wide range of researchers, and including civil society as stakeholders?
The 2012 competition is open to: research organizations, enterprises and nonprofit organizations.

Was the information provided (both the information on programs and calls in Public health research and the STEPS country profile) agreed or revised?
National Centre for Public Health and Analyses (NCPHA) has projects across public health fields, many with European funding. The Centre publishes the Bulgarian Journal of Public Health.

Researchers can receive funding internally from universities, though these may be rather small grants for junior researchers.

A conference held in Pleven in 2010 (J Biomed & Clin Res 2010, 3(1) supp1) illustrates the range of existing research in Bulgaria, includes healthcare quality, behaviours, occupational health, mental health, epidemiology, health services research...
3. National and European Research

Do national research programmes cover the areas of the PHIRE Innovation Projects?
There were no national research programmes identified in relation to the project subjects.

Is there a connection between national research and the European projects, in general?
The 2012 competitive call for projects was very general. However, NCPHA is engaged with European projects (not necessarily research) across a full range of public health.

Does the Ministry of Health have a position on the content of the European Union's Horizon 2020 (2014-2020) Research Programme?
The Ministry of Health is not directly engaged with the European research agenda.

How does the Ministry of Health discuss this with the Ministry of Science?
It was stated that the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science was currently circulating its proposal for Structural Funds for research to all ministries. No perspective from the Ministry of Health was identified. (It could be expected to be commented on at least by the NCPHA.)

Does the Ministry of Health have a position on the use of the European Union's Structural (Regional and Social) Funds programme for public health research in 2014-2020?
The Ministry was aware of the possibility of Structural Funds going to research, and therefore also for health research – the Structural Funds are an important funding mechanism in the country.

How does the Ministry of Health discuss this with the Ministry of Finance and/or other Ministries?
No discussion was identified.

Please provide details on Ministry of Health engagement in priorities and funding both at national and European level.
Ministry of Health is linked to Europe through European Commission's DG SANCO. The National Contact Point taking the role for international affairs at the Ministry of Health was an informant to PHIRE.