

2.C. Round table: Setting the research agenda on health systems and policy for small states in the European region

Organised by: EUPHA section on Health services research, Islands & Small States Institute, University of Malta, Department of International Health, CAPHRI School of Public Health and Primary Care, Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences, Maastricht University

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Chairperson(s): Francesco Zambon - Italy, Peter Groenewegen - The Netherlands

Reasons for the workshop:

There has been a renewed interest in research on small states in Europe in recent years. Most of this research has focussed on foreign policy and economic issues with particular scholarly interest in the impact of globalisation on small economies. Small states literature suggests that small states are often

exposed to the effects of environmental and economic change earlier and harsher than larger states. They can therefore act as a sentinel for future challenges also in the context of health systems future resilience. A series of opportunities have arisen in the past couple of years to place the topic of health systems in small states at the forefront of the European health policy agenda. Activities such as the launch of the Small countries initiative by the WHO European Region in 2014 to support small states in the implementation of the Health 2020 agenda, the setting up of the Small Countries Health information Network and the establishment of a Jean Monnet network on small states in the area of health are all meant to foster political commitment in small states and exchange information and advance collaboration among them. However, there is a research gap on small states when it comes to health systems and policy and the opportunities and challenges of small states' health systems in the context of European collaboration and integration. This gap emerged clearly in the SPHERE project carried out by EUPHA a few years ago. The round table offers an opportunity to reflect upon and develop a research agenda that addresses the specificities of small state health systems in the coming years.

Key messages:

- A small states' perspective on health research supports small states and international organisations to address the challenges and opportunities facing health systems from an innovative angle
- Potential opportunities to integrate a small state perspective in health systems research do exist therefore the identification of research priorities and capacity building is necessary

Challenges and opportunities for health systems in small states: What do we know to date?

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Background

Although there is neither common definition of "small" nor a typical type of a small state, they share common challenges and opportunities regarding their economies, public sector policies and the role in international affairs. Despite a growing research agenda on small states in general, the health systems domain in the context of small states research and the small states perspective in the context of health system research have both been largely overlooked to date. Recent research efforts have begun to assemble a picture of the challenges and opportunities faced by health systems in small states.

Methods

Initial research activities aimed at mapping and understanding better the small states' challenges and opportunities on health systems and policies and in the context of European integration processes. Literature reviews on international and national level have been conducted to understand the health policy priorities in European small states.

Results

Preliminary results indicate that small state health systems experience common challenges as a result of their lack of human and resource capacity as well as their small market size. This lack of capacity impinges on aspects of health system governance and constrains their ability to achieve self-sufficiency in the provision of highly specialised health services. Lack of capacity also impacts negatively upon implementation of reforms. On the other hand, small states are often agile and flexible and are in a position to link findings from health information to health policy development quite easily.

Conclusions

Small states are exposed to new policy environments more rapidly and more harshly than other states. Early recognition and investment in transnational policy solutions to benefit small states can introduce innovative concepts that can eventually offer benefits to larger states. This concept has important implications as European policy-makers grapple currently to strengthen health system resilience.

Panelists:

Tit Albreht, National Institute of Public Health of Slovenia, Slovenia

Natasha Azzopardi-Muscat, University of Malta, Malta

Hans Kluge, WHO Europe, Denmark

Johan Hansen, NIVEL, The Netherlands