Third BEN II-Steering Group Meeting  
University of Linz, Austria  
14th October 2005  
10:00 – 17:00

Attendees:  
Dr Helmut Brand, Institute of Public Health NRW  
Ixhel Escamilla, Institute of Public Health NRW  
Caroline Hall, University of Brighton  
Kieran Hickey, The Health Boards Executive  
Dr Eleni Jelastopulu, University of Patras  
Dr Reli Mechtler, University of Linz  
Rosana Peiró, Centro de Salud Pública de Alzira  
Dr Peter Schröder, Institute of Public Health NRW  
Wendy Tse Yared, WHO-RHN  
Dr Jaroslav Volf, National Institute of Public Health

1. Welcoming  
The session was opened by Dr Brand who welcomed the participants and introduced Rosana Peiró, co-author of the “Rapid Appraisal Methodology”, as a guest of the meeting.

2. Presentation by Ms Rosana Peiró  
The methodology of Ms Peiró et al. proposes a rapid approach for analyzing the formulation of health policies. According to Ms Peiró, it was developed because there was a gap in how to appraise and compare health plans. It is based on the selection of tracers and on the development of so-called gold standards to be completed with a literature review and the opinion of an expert panel. These gold standards provide the framework for an analysis constructed with three dimensions: timing (early or late intervention), action level (individuals or social perspective) and equity (social class, gender and ethnic groups). The tracers were HIV/AIDS, traffic injuries and ageing-related disabilities.

The methodology has been empirically applied to the health strategies of two Spanish regions: the Catalonia Community and Valencia. The health plans of the regions were compared with the gold standard.

The results were graphically represented by a coloured matrix. This graphic representation was used because:

- It is an easy way to map and categorize strategies and interventions.
- Politicians alike can easily understand the results of the analysis.
• By detecting empty or bright cells, lack of knowledge about relevant interventions can be identified.

The methodology proposed by Rosana Peiró et al. makes it possible then to map the formulation of health policies and strategies in health plans, comparing different geographical areas and administrative levels. It also permits a retrospective evaluation about how far the policies once formulated have been carried out in reality. Therefore, its simplicity together with the fact that it could be used as an evaluation tool in any of the phases of the public policy cycle are the major advantages of the method.

3. Reference Frameworks and Health Performance Indicators
The pre-tests of the Reference Frameworks conducted by Dr Volf and Dr Jelastopulu and the pre-tests of the Health Performance Indicators by Dr Volf and Ms Hall were presented.

Discussing the pre-test of the HPIs, the members of the meeting clarified for the indicators of measles that the term “coverage” will be used instead of “uptake” and that an age-definition will not be considered.

The members of the Steering Group adopted the Reference Frameworks and the Health Performance Indicators which will be sent to the 19 participant regions in order to begin the collection of data and information. Regarding the collection of data, the members thought that in the case of not obtaining official data for the construction of indicators one could consult the experts in exceptional cases where indeed no official data exist and ask them for estimated data.

Dr Schröder suggested to publish the Reference Frameworks as interim results of the project. It was proposed to publish them in the Central European Journal of Public Health or in the Public Health Newsletter of the University of Linz.

Dr Brand pointed out to the synergy effects of staying in touch with other institutions which are working with indicators such as the “National Institute for Public Health and the Environment” from the Netherlands, RIVM, which is working on the development of performance indicators.

4. Graphic Representation of the Reference Frameworks
The Steering Group aims to represent the results of the analysis of the Reference Frameworks graphically. They agreed to use a matrix with coloured cells as Peiró et al. proposed for the “Rapid Appraisal Methodology”.

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The health policies and interventions of the region will be compared with the Reference Frameworks. The policies and interventions which have already been implemented will be counted. For the appraisal, interventions and policies will be taken into account even if they are not implemented in the entire region but in parts of it.

Where the number of policies matches 100% of the number of policies in the frameworks, the cell will adopt the darkest shade. But in the case of fewer policies, the shade will be lighter according to the defined grading of shades assigned to percentages. A lighter shade would then be a signal that improvements could be made. Using this coloured matrix then, one can immediately see in which cell the region does well and in which there is potential for applying more policies and interventions.

Additionally, the members of the group agreed that by now no weighting of policies and/or interventions is possible. It would therefore be a disadvantage to apply absolute numbers to colours. Instead they proposed to use relative numbers assigning percentages to different shades of a colour.

It was also discussed to choose the levels of the percentages to be assigned to the colours of the matrixes after having obtained the results of the counting of policies and interventions in every region.

5. In-Depth Interviews
After reviewing the questionnaires for the in-depth interviews which had been sent to the members of the Steering Group by the secretariat before the meeting, it was discussed to add an open question for possible relevant information not considered by the questionnaire.

They also intended to send the questionnaires to two public health experts in order to pre-test them. Dr Reli Mechtler pointed out that she could pre-test the questionnaires. They will be sent to the regions in November or December.

6. Grouping of Regions
Given the socio-economic inequalities of the Ben II-regions, the members of the Steering Group discussed the necessity of forming groups with the regions based on structural indicators. They said that even it was not possible to develop a cluster or stratification analysis, the differences among the regions should be considered by forming groups. Because of that they will use the term “grouping” instead of “stratification” or “cluster”.

For the distribution of information to be used for the grouping Ms Escamilla presented a series of criteria which could be considered for that purpose. It
was discussed that the members will research into the best criteria and the most appropriate methodology for building the groups.

7. **General Matters**

It was said that the steering group had worked according to the agenda and that the tasks planned to be completed by October had been successfully fulfilled in accordance with the Ben II grant agreement. Dr Schröder announced that he would present the project at the EUPHA Conference and participate at the annual WHO-RHN Conference in Katowice, Poland.

The next meeting of Ben II will take place on 19\textsuperscript{th} May 2006 in Dublin, Ireland.

*Ixhel Escamilla*

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