

Evidence-informed Policy Network (EVIPNet) Europe
Country launch in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, 30 June to 2 July 2014

Introduction

EVIPNet Europe is an initiative of the WHO Regional Office for Europe. It aims to increase country capacity in developing health policies informed by the best available research evidence – in line with and support of "Health 2020" (1). EVIPNet Europe institutionalizes knowledge translation (KT) – the process of fostering research use in policy-making – through the establishment of national country teams (so-called knowledge translation platforms). These groups plan and implement KT activities at country level. The following summarizes the country launch of EVIPNet Europe in Tajikistan.

The country launch of EVIPNet Europe in Tajikistan

The Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of Tajikistan (referred to below as the Ministry of Health) renewed its strong support and interest in EVIPNet Europe and officially launched the EVIPNet pilot phase at a one-day workshop in July 2014. Participants included representatives from the Ministry of Health, WHO (regional and country offices representatives) and key stakeholders from major national health agencies.¹ International development partners were represented by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The event was crucial for:

- raising awareness and getting the support of national decision-makers and stakeholders for EVIPNet Europe and its future activities in Tajikistan;
- familiarizing national key stakeholders with EVIPNet Europe's pilot phase activities and evidence-informed policy-making (EIP) methods and tools as well as develop a national working plan; and
- learning about national EIP capacity and activities.

Outputs of the EVIPNet Europe pilot phase

The launch of the EVIPNet Europe pilot phase resulted in an initial assessment of the EIP context in Tajikistan including (i) a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis detailing core EIP driving forces and barriers and (ii) a first situation analysis of the health research landscape by the Health Policy Analysis Unit.

Stakeholders' responses

Stakeholders stressed the need to institutionalize the use of evidence in the policy-making process. EVIPNet Europe and the national country team are regarded as an essential foundation for building a sustainable national KT infrastructure and the capacity for systematic and transparent use of evidence. Country teams are the fundamental unit of EVIPNet, driving national agendas for fostering EIP. At the regional level, EVIPNet brings members of these platforms together to share common problems and exchange experiences and lessons learnt. In Tajikistan, stakeholders identified the following requirements to build a country team:

- strong commitment and support from national stakeholders (i.e. Ministry of Health);

¹ Health Policy Analysis Unit, the Academy of Medical Sciences and the Tajik Postgraduate Medical Education Institute.

- active participation and high ownership by relevant stakeholders at all levels (macro, meso, micro);
- systematized interaction and willingness for cooperation between researchers and policy-makers; and
- harmonized and unified databases to eliminate data inconsistencies.

The **Health Policy Analysis Unit** emerged as a potential focal point for EVIPNet Europe and the country team in Tajikistan. The Unit monitors and evaluates the progress of health sector reforms (e.g. in terms of effectiveness and impact), and acts as a "watch-dog" to ensure that policy-making takes place in a transparent and accountable manner.

Existing research and policy-making interfaces in Tajikistan

- The "National Health Strategy of the Republic of Tajikistan for 2010–2020" defines the use of evidence in the policy-making process as a key factor for its successful implementation and highlights the need to support EIP activities and tools.
- A situation analysis mapping of the health research context, commissioned by the Health Policy Analysis Unit, aims to identify gaps in research evidence. The results will be used to inform the EVIPNet Europe situation analysis.
- The Resource Centre of Evidence-Based Medicine (supported by USAID) within the Tajik State Medical University promotes the use of clinical evidence to improve medical practice. Its materials cover research-related issues such as organization and conducting of research, ethical aspects of clinical studies, appropriate formulation of research questions, searching and critical assessment of data, development of databases and statistical processing of data.

The way forward for KT for better health in Tajikistan

- Tajikistan will invest in EVIPNet Europe as a long-term national (change) process towards a sustainable EIP culture.
- Successful implementation of the EVIPNet Europe pilot phase activities is regarded as an essential facilitator of success for the national country team.
- National experts and stakeholders will lead the delivery of technical and administrative inputs and resources for the national country team.
- Technical support and guidance are available from the WHO Secretariat of EVIPNet Europe as well as the international organizations involved in health policy-making in Tajikistan (i.e. the European Union, USAID, UNICEF).
- Tajikistan's EIP activities and interventions will follow a systematic approach of institutionalization (e.g. the establishment of a KT standard for all research proposals and the establishment of a KT checklist for researchers) and build upon best practices from other (EVIPNet Europe pilot) countries.
- Tajikistan's efforts for national EIP capacity building and the implementation of the pilot phase will complement and strengthen the actions undertaken in the context of "Health 2020".

Reference

1. WHO Regional Office for Europe. Health 2020: a European policy framework and strategy for the 21st century. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2013 (<http://www.euro.who.int/en/publications/abstracts/health-2020-a-european-policy-framework-and-strategy-for-the-21st-century>, accessed 6 May 2015).