

Evidence-informed Policy Network (EVIPNet) Europe  
**First multicountry workshop on evidence briefs for policy in Central Asia**  
Astana, Kazakhstan, 29 June – 2 July 2015

### **Background**

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. These groups plan and implement KT activities at country level. This summary describes the first multicountry workshop on evidence briefs for policy (EBPs) in Central Asia.

EVIPNet Europe organized its first capacity-building workshop with simultaneous use of English and Russian for several countries in Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The objectives of the workshop were:

- to raise participants' awareness about tools and resources available to health system policy-makers and stakeholders to support their use of research evidence;
- to enhance participants' skills in acquiring, assessing, adapting and applying research evidence; and
- to teach the fundamentals of how to prepare EBPs.

An EBP is a key EVIPNet tool (2): it includes a systematic search and appraisal of the global, regional and local evidence to understand what is known about a specific high-priority health policy issue and which policy options effectively address the issue.

Representatives from the three countries who are involved in preparing EBPs relevant for health policy-making in their countries participated in the workshop. It was facilitated by experts in evidence-informed policy-making (EIP) and EVIPNet Europe country peers from Chile, Slovenia and Kazakhstan, guided by the WHO Secretariat of EVIPNet Europe. The WHO Country Office in Kazakhstan actively participated in the preparations and technical work.

### **Workshop design**

The workshop included introductory presentations on the EBP concept and process, and related challenges, and initiated the preparation process of a draft EBP in each country. In each workshop session, time was allocated to team work during which participants applied the various aspects of the EBP preparation to their specific contexts. Prior to the workshop, participants – jointly with local policy-makers who are the main users of EBPs – selected an EBP topic to be tackled during the workshop. To the extent possible, participants represented the country teams that would continue to develop the EBP beyond the workshop.

### **Outcomes**

For most participants, the workshop represented the first training in the context of EVIPNet Europe. The introductory presentations sparked lively discussions on the possibility of experts who are not decision-makers to foster EIP. It was recognized that major responsibilities lie with policy-making institutions and decision-makers but that researchers and other stakeholders play a crucial role in establishing an environment supportive of EIP.

Key messages from the workshop were as follows.

- Clarifying the problem is an iterative process involving different stakeholders.
- The formulation of three comprehensive solutions as recommended in the EBP typically does not happen early in the EBP preparation process; instead, the formulation of options often starts by brainstorming single potential changes and/or a small number of comprehensive solutions that could lead to those.
- Finding and assessing the evidence from systematic reviews requires a complex set of skills ranging from mastering database searching techniques to making judgements about the scientific quality of the studies included in a review. Websites and tools can provide valuable insights, while the full development of skills necessitates a considerable time commitment.



Discussions during the workshop © WHO

The immediate application of the recommendations on how to prepare an EBP revealed the complexity of the preparation process. Participants suggested to the facilitators that visualizing the process (e.g. by outlining it in a flow chart) would help.

Each country team identified the topics to be tackled in an EBP:

- low coverage of vaccination of children under 5 years of age (Tajikistan)
- long waiting time for scheduled hospitalizations (Kazakhstan)
- high mortality rates of children born with a congenital disorder (Kyrgyzstan)

The teams will continue the preparation of their first EBP after the end of the workshop with the support of facilitators and the EVIPNet Europe secretariat.

## References

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.
2. SURE Collaboration. The SURE guides for preparing and using evidence-based policy briefs.