ANNUAL REPORT 2019
EVIPNet Europe
Towards a world in which the best available research evidence informs policy-making

Evidence-informed Policy Network (EVIPNet) Europe
Abstract

This report summarizes the accomplishments of the Evidence-informed Policy Network (EVIPNet) Europe in 2019. During the year, several evidence briefs for policy, situation analyses and other reports were finalized and published, as well as multiple stakeholder meetings held. An addition, EVIPNet made available a customized online training to network members, which was complemented by a series of webinars facilitated by McMaster Health Forum. The sixth EVIPNet Europe multicountry meeting occurred in 2019, where member countries came together in Istanbul to highlight achievements across the network and learn from each other. EVIPNet Europe representatives participated and presented at different international conferences, further highlighting the importance of knowledge translation and closing the research–policy gap. The successful collaborations with McMaster Health Forum, Cochrane and Wellcome Trust continued to support the work of the WHO Secretariat of EVIPNet Europe.

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<tr>
<td>AMR</td>
<td>antimicrobial resistance</td>
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<td>EBP</td>
<td>evidence brief for policy</td>
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<td>EHRN</td>
<td>European Health Research Network</td>
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<td>EIP</td>
<td>evidence-informed policy-making</td>
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<td>Evidence-informed Policy Network</td>
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<td>KT</td>
<td>knowledge translation</td>
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<td>KTP</td>
<td>knowledge translation platform</td>
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Foreword

Last year, 2019, marked another eventful year for the Evidence-informed Policy Network (EVIPNet) Europe. The Network’s mission is to increase the evidence uptake in policy-making to improve public health, strengthen health systems and reduce inequalities. Consequently, network member countries have continued to remain active in building capacity, engaging with stakeholders and formulating and publishing evidence briefs for policy (EBP), situation analyses and other publications.

EVIPNet Europe’s EBPs from 2018 have been brought to a greater audience in 2019 through conference presentations, citations and undergraduate teaching. In addition, EVIPNet Europe is particularly excited about the policy impact their work has had. For instance, following the dissemination of the EBP in the Republic Moldova, changes to the country’s alcohol policies, including on taxation, have been implemented. This is highly encouraging to the ongoing work of EVIPNet Europe and helps to maintain momentum for the years to come.

The sixth multicountry meeting was another highlight of the year. Representatives of 12 member countries came together in Istanbul in September 2019 not only to learn about, and from, each other’s achievements but also to further strengthen their capacity in evidence-informed policy-making. This meeting had a specific focus on rapid synthesis and the interface between cultural contexts of health and knowledge translation.

EVIPNet Europe has also continued to build relationships with other regional EVIPNet networks for an improved knowledge and capacity exchange, as well as for greater support and collaboration beyond EVIPNet Europe’s borders. Efforts will be made to uphold, intensify and expand these newly established partnerships.

The achievements of EVIPNet Europe have only been possible through the close collaboration and commitment of various actors. The WHO Secretariat of EVIPNet Europe would like to thank all member countries for their hard work and commitment throughout the year. Further appreciation and thanks are also due to the members of the EVIPNet Global Steering Group for their dedicated support in achieving EVIPNet’s mission; the external partners who have contributed to EVIPNet Europe’s growth by sharing their invaluable expertise and funding resources; and our WHO colleagues across the world for their continued support.

The WHO Secretariat of EVIPNet Europe also wants to express their thanks and appreciation to the Wellcome Trust for their Secondment Fellowship programme, through which the Secretariat has continued to receive great support throughout the year. We would also like to thank our partners at the McMaster Health Forum and Cochrane for their continued collaboration in building capacity for evidence-informed policy-making.

WHO Secretariat of EVIPNet Europe
Objective

The objective of this report is to provide an overview of the Evidence-informed Policy Network (EVIPNet) Europe’s activities during 2019 and to demonstrate its progress and achievements during that period.

Background

EVIPNet is a WHO initiative promoting the systematic use of health-research evidence in policy-making. EVIPNet was established on a global level in 2005 in response to the World Health Assembly resolution 58.34 on health research, which urged Member States to improve the knowledge base for decision-making (1). In Europe, EVIPNet was launched by the WHO European Region under the umbrella of the WHO European Health Information Initiative in October 2012. It brings together stakeholders from different sectors to define policy questions, develop evidence briefs for policy (EBPs) and explore, create and strengthen ways to translate evidence into policy.

The Network establishes links between researchers, policy-makers and other stakeholders, including civil society actors, through knowledge translation platforms (KTPs). In order for each country to develop its own capacity in evidence-informed policy-making (EIP), EVIPNet Europe supports national stakeholders in gaining knowledge, skills and experience. A leader in EIP in each country is identified to serve as national champion, who is supported by country teams in developing EBPs, convene policy dialogues and engage in regional EVIPNet Europe capacity-building activities. Throughout these activities, member countries benefit from cross-network exchange of experience, guidance from international experts in the field of knowledge translation (KT) and EIP, and the support of the WHO Secretariat of EVIPNet Europe based at the WHO Regional Office for Europe in Copenhagen.

In working towards its goal, EVIPNet Europe contributes to the aim of the WHO European Health Information Initiative, namely "improving people’s health by enhancing the information that underpins policy". It further supports governments to implement the European policy framework Health 2020 (2) and advances the implementation of the Action plan to strengthen the use of evidence, information and research for policy-making in the WHO European Region (3). In 2019 EVIPNet Europe comprised 21 member countries.1

1 Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, North Macedonia, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Ukraine.
EVIPNet Europe’s activities in 2019

EVIPNet Europe has continued to make good progress in 2019, as its member countries remain highly engaged in their mission to support the translation of research evidence into policy. This report summarizes EVIPNet Europe’s achievements and illustrates the diverse contributions that have been made throughout the year.

Evidence briefs for policy

A key tool of EVIPNet Europe is the EBP, which synthesizes research evidence in a user-friendly and concise format to address a specific priority policy issue by offering evidence-informed policy options to policy-makers. As a result, EBPs have the potential to improve the likelihood of policy-makers reading, considering and applying its content in the policy-making process (4,5).

The Republic of Moldova has one of the highest alcohol consumption levels and related mortality rates in the world. In response, the country team developed an EBP entitled *Informing amendments to the alcohol control legislation directed at reducing harmful use of alcohol*, which was published in 2019 (6). This EBP calls attention to the high consumption of alcohol in the country and proposes different options to introduce stricter regulations on alcohol advertising, pricing or access. EVIPNet Europe is particularly excited about the policy impact this EBP has had during the past year, such as increased taxation on alcoholic beverages, including beer.

In addition to the finalization of this EBP, the country team in the Republic Moldova started work in 2019 on an EBP on combating antimicrobial resistance (AMR). On 27 December 2019, the Moldovan Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Protection organized a workshop on developing the EBP on AMR, focusing on defining and reframing the problem of overconsumption of antibiotics. The issue was discussed by about 30 participants from the Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Protection; medical institutions/hospitals; the National Agency for Public Health; the State Medical and Pharmacy University; and the Medicines and Medical Devices Agency. It was emphasized that all stakeholders need to work together to effectively address the issue. It is expected that, following this workshop, the EBP development process will continue.

AMR is a global priority issue threatening the effectiveness of medicines in combating diseases and infections and leading to the emergence of so-called super-bugs. For this reason, combating AMR was identified as a priority for a number of countries and, with support from the European Commission, has led to the formation of two EVIPNet Europe cohorts (launched 2017) aiming to inform policy-makers on AMR and the potential ways to tackle it. These

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2 The first cohort (launched 2017) encompasses six countries (Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Slovakia and Slovenia), while the second cohort (launched 2018) contains a further four countries (Bulgaria, the Republic of Moldova, Romania and Serbia).
cohorts have provided a supportive network for country teams to develop what has in some cases been their first EBP. Various EBPs on AMR are currently in progress, with some due for publication in 2020.

Following the finalization and publishing of the EBP on *Promoting the appropriate use of antibiotics to contain antibiotic resistance in human medicine in Hungary* in 2018 (7), this EBP was brought to a larger audience in 2019. During the World Antibiotic Awareness Week (18–24 November 2019), the EBP was referred to during several presentations in the country, and was cited in the European Commission report *State of health in the EU: Hungary* (8). Hungary has written and published the lessons they learned during this work to support other countries in similar activities (9). The report provides an overview of the steps involved in creating an EBP as well as their experience when undertaking it.

Slovenia has reported the successful distribution of their EBP on antibiotic prescribing in long-term care facilities for the elderly, published in 2018 (10). The EBP was presented at the Annual Meeting of the European Union–Joint Action on Antimicrobial Resistance and Healthcare-associated Infections in September 2019, when the National Champion of EVIPNet Slovenia was invited to share their experience for peer-learning on EIP. In addition, the EBP has been used in a training and teaching session at the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Ljubljana.

Romania and North Macedonia have also published EBPs on AMR.³ Romania identified three policy options to combat AMR, focusing on legal and financial measures, as well as a campaign of public education. North Macedonia also identified three potential avenues, though differing markedly in their focus, with two aimed at strengthening clinical guidelines around the use of antibiotics and one targeted at teaching these guidelines within educational settings.

Turkey has started work on a new EBP focusing on the consumption of trans-fats, which are responsible for increased incidence of heart disease, stroke and type 2 diabetes. The EBP is being prepared by experts within the Turkish Institute for Health Policies, supported by the WHO Country Office Turkey and the WHO Secretariat of EVIPNet Europe. The Turkish Institute team participated in a training workshop from 24 to 27 September in Ankara, as well another workshop from 11 to 13 December in Konya, Turkey, to build knowledge and capacity for the ongoing work in developing the EBP.

³ While these EBPs were technically published in 2020, the background research and reports were completed in 2019 and so they are included here.
Finally, Albania and the Republic of Moldova have initiated the development of EBPs focusing on policy options to reduce salt consumption. Online and in-person training and support was made available to the respective country teams for the process of developing EBPs, with the work set to continue in 2020.

In addition to the EBP, many EVIPNet Europe member countries conduct a situation analysis (SA). The SA is a systematically and transparently conducted approach to developing a deeper understanding of the major factors that may facilitate or hinder successful EIP, including the establishment of a KTP in a specific country context. An SA assesses a country’s status quo in terms of:

- the national political context
- the health system and health policy-making context
- the health information system
- the health research system
- the EIP landscape.

Countries conducting an SA are guided by the EVIPNet Europe’s Situation Analysis Manual (11).

**Situation analyses**

In Estonia, an SA was finalized by stakeholders from different departments of the Ministry of Social Affairs, aiming to identify strategies to improve and strengthen EIP in the country (12). The conclusion reached from the SA was that a KTP should be created to ensure research use among policy-makers in a continuous and systematic way; this was discussed during a stakeholder dialogue held in June 2019. Two options were presented with regard to the form taken by the KTP: either the Ministry of Social Affairs would take the lead as a permanent secretariat and communication unit (with experts and researchers contracted to develop EBPs dependent on policy needs) or the KTP would be formed within pre-existing structures and assured of stable funding. The discussions to institutionalize EIP are expected to continue in 2020.

Similarly, after the successful development of an SA in Poland (13), the conclusions were presented and discussed during a stakeholder consultation meeting in Warsaw in February. The aim of the stakeholder consultation was to seek input on the SA and on potential pathways to institutionalizing a KTP in Poland, as well as to encourage stakeholder interest and investment in the EVIPNet initiative to promote EIP in the country. Participants included policy-makers and researchers as well as other stakeholders and the meeting was seen as an important milestone towards building a collaborative relationship among these groups that would provide a foundation for institutionalizing a KTP. Following an appraisal of options,
stakeholders identified the most appropriate form of KTP to be a network of organizations with an administrative secretariat based within the Ministry of Health.

Kyrgyzstan has continued to develop its SA. The final report is currently under internal review and due to be published in 2020. The detailed and comprehensive report concluded that the secretariat of a new KTP would be best placed within a department of the Ministry of Health, while the KTP itself would comprise numerous stakeholders involved in EIP in the country. It is hoped that a workshop to discuss the findings of the SA and take the next steps of developing a formal KTP could take place in 2020.

Stakeholder meetings and workshops

EVIPNet Europe members participated in a variety of different meetings and workshops.

The sixth EVIPNet Europe multicountry meeting took place in Istanbul on 3–5 September. Austria and Turkey, who newly joined EVIPNet Europe during the biennium 2018/2019, were warmly welcomed to their first multicountry meeting. The meeting highlighted recent achievements across the Network, allowing members to learn from shared experiences. To further develop participants’ abilities in facilitating EIP, attendees engaged in a series of sessions hosted by the McMaster Health Forum that sought to guide and facilitate the production of rapid response syntheses.
Between 24 and 27 September 2019, a four-day workshop was organized by EVIPNet Turkey, bringing together participants from the Ministry of Health, health institutes of Turkey, Ankara City Hospital and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. Through a combination of plenary sessions and group work, the workshop sought to increase the knowledge and skills of the national team of EVIPNet Turkey in developing an EBP and organizing a related policy dialogue. A follow-up workshop was held in Konya from 11 to 13 December to build upon this work.

A capacity-building workshop was organized in Hungary between 5 and 6 November 2019. Participants came from different departments within the Ministry of Human Capacities, the National Institute of Pharmacy and Nutrition, the National Transfusion Service, the National Health Insurance Fund Administration, the National Public Health Centre and Cochrane Hungary. The objective of the workshop was to further expand knowledge and skills among key stakeholders in Hungary and create a solid foundation for future EIP activities.

**Conference and meetings**

Members of EVIPNet Europe and the WHO Secretariat of EVIPNet Europe continued to raise the profile of the Network and highlight the importance of EIP by participating in, and presenting at, international conferences and congresses.

The 23rd World Congress of Social Psychiatry was held in Bucharest, Romania on 25–28 October 2019. Keynote speakers included Dr Claudia Dima, from the Romanian National Institute of Public Health and EVIPNet Romania. During the masterclass on Health System Performance Assessment for Evidence-informed Policies: Improvement of Populations’ Health, she talked about health systems performance assessment and its contribution to EIP.

EVIPNet Europe was also represented at the European Public Health Conference on 20–23 November 2019 in Marseille, France. Tanja Kuchenmüller, unit leader of the Knowledge Management, Evidence and Research for Policy-making Unit (coordinating the WHO EVIPNet Europe Secretariat), was involved in a workshop on Behaviour Change and Knowledge Translation: The Unlocked Potential to Improve People’s Health. She also
presented on EVIPNet Europe and bridging the research-to-policy gap in a session entitled “How to Advocate Scientific Evidence to Decision-makers?”.

Professor Bojana Matejić, Faculty of Medicine at the University of Belgrade and the EVIPNet country team of Serbia, participated in the 48th Symposium on Striving and Novelties in Medicine, where she introduced the audience to the framework and methodology of EVIPNet Europe. Her lecture addressed the importance of using relevant and reliable evidence in the development of community-centred public health policies.

In November, The EVIPNet Europe Secretariat attended and presented at the second meeting of the European Health Research Network (EHRN) in Vilnius, Lithuania. The EHRN is a seven-member country knowledge network (hosted at Knowledge Management, Evidence and Research for Policy-making Unit at the WHO Regional Office for Europe) with the overall goal of pioneering national health research systems in the WHO European Region. To foster intra-unit synergies, plans are also in motion to synchronize the activities of EVIPNet Europe with those of the EHRN. The goal of this synergy is to identify strategies that are effective in simultaneously strengthening both knowledge production and KT systems.

Other EVIPNet Europe member country activities

EVIPNet Europe member countries have also been engaged in other activities that have raised awareness of EIP and the EVIPNet Europe initiative.

The Romanian EVIPNet team based at the National Institute of Public Health conducted and formulated a rapid response synthesis on increasing seasonal flu vaccination coverage among at-risk groups in Romania, answering an urgent request from the Ministry of Health. The report provided summarized evidence drawn from systematic reviews and research studies. The EVIPNet team also initiated an evidence synthesis on the health effects and risks of using e-cigarettes to inform both interested members of the Romanian Parliament and the public at large.

The Ministry of Health and the Institute of Hygiene in Lithuania received funding from the European Social Fund to deliver a project on the improvement of efficiency and capacity of public health authorities through the implementation of evidence-informed management tools. Project activities include the preparation of reviews of evidence as well as testing and implementing EVIPNet methodologies. In 2019 two reviews of evidence were prepared and different policy options proposed accordingly: the first on the need for development of nursing services and the second on mental health services for children. The projects were discussed with stakeholders and two events were organized to discuss the barriers and facilitators for implementing the proposed options.

Balázs Babarczy, National Champion of EVIPNet Hungary, participated in the Knowledge Management Workshop of the Tropical Diseases Research programme’s Structured Operational Research and Training Initiative (SORT IT), held in Geneva on 12 and 13 December 2019. He was selected as a consultant to support the development and
implementation of the initiative’s new knowledge management module based on his experience with EVIPNet Europe. Also in Hungary, following the EVIPNet multicountry meeting in Istanbul, the Ministry of Human Capacities has announced the establishment of a permanent structure for rapid response synthesis in Hungary.

In autumn 2019, EVIPNet Europe member countries Albania and the Republic of Moldova participated in an online course on finding and using research evidence to inform decision-making in health systems and organizations. This course was combined with a series of three two-hour interactive webinars to operationalize concepts and further build the capacity of participants. The course and webinars were developed and facilitated by the McMaster Health Forum in Canada. The three webinars aimed to strengthen countries’ capacities and support their EBP development process. As can be seen in the quotes from participants in the box, such a format was appreciated.

**Activities of the WHO Secretariat of EVIPNet Europe**

In an effort to continually learn from and improve the EBP process, EVIPNet Europe country members have expressed the desire to evaluate their experiences of developing EBPs. The WHO Secretariat of EVIPNet Europe has, therefore, commenced the development of a rapid assessment tool for EBP evaluations. The tool was developed and piloted in three countries (Estonia, Hungary and Slovenia), with revisions following this stage. The results of the pilot were presented at the multicountry meeting in Turkey, while a manuscript is being developed for submission to a peer-reviewed journal.

To support the ongoing development of EBPs in member countries, the WHO Secretariat of EVIPNet Europe has published a Guiding Manual for EBPs. The manual provides hands-on guidance on developing EBPs and the subsequent organizing of policy dialogues. Although the manual is contextualized to the WHO European Region, this tool nonetheless provides useful guidance to any institution or organization interested in developing EBPs.

EVIPNet Europe has also published a report on the lessons learned through its experiences of supporting EIP. In this report, the WHO Secretariat of EVIPNet Europe shares top tips from stakeholders and current member countries for those seeking to develop EIP at country level, using EVIPNet Europe approaches (14).
Collaborations

In 2019, EVIPNet Europe maintained its existing collaboration with McMaster Health Forum and fostered a new relationship with Cochrane Nordic, building on its wider collaboration with Cochrane centrally. Being experts in EIP and evidence synthesis, both collaborators contribute to the training and capacity-building of EVIPNet Europe members. The collaboration with McMaster Health Forum offered an opportunity for EVIPNet Europe members to participate in their online courses. Representatives of both collaborations participated in the multicountry meeting in Istanbul, which placed them in direct contact with EVIPNet Europe member countries.

EVIPNet Europe also continued to build relationships with other regional EVIPNet networks for an improved knowledge and capacity exchange, as well as greater support and collaboration across EVIPNet Europe borders. In particular, the partnership with EVIPNet Chile has been strengthened in 2019 through EVIPNet Europe representatives presenting their activities in Chile, and EVIPNet Chile supporting and facilitating workshops in Turkey and Hungary.

Plans are being made to further extend the network of EVIPNet Europe by establishing a collaborating centre within Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Israel.

EVIPNet Europe has continued its successful collaboration with the Wellcome Trust through the Secondment Fellowship programme. The programme enables researchers funded by the Trust to spend a period of six months seconded to the WHO Regional Office for Europe. This year, EVIPNet played host to two fellows, both of whom worked on a specific project in line with EVIPNet Europe’s strategic priorities. First, Dr Adrianna Murphy (London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine) developed, piloted and presented a tool for the rapid assessment of EBP processes, described above. Subsequently, Bobby Macaulay (Glasgow Caledonian University) undertook research to inform a future strategy on integrating citizen engagement into the EIP policies and practices of EVIPNet Europe member countries.

The opportunity to work within the EVIPNet Europe team has greatly enhanced my knowledge of the interface between research and policy. While this is useful with regard to evidence-informed health policy-making, it also helps me reflect upon my own research practice. With an ever-increasing emphasis on creating impact through research, understanding the ways in which this can inform public policy around health has never been more pertinent to those involved in academic research.

Bobby Macaulay, Wellcome Trust Secondment Fellow, 2019/2020
List of publications 2019

Evidence briefs for policy


English

Russian


English


English
Situation analyses


English


English
Other publications


English
Russian


English
Russian


English
Governance

The WHO Secretariat of EVIPNet Europe is located in the Knowledge Management, Evidence and Research for Policy-making Unit of the Division of Information, Evidence, Research and Innovation based at the WHO Regional Office for Europe in Copenhagen, Denmark. The WHO Secretariat of EVIPNet Europe continues to be supported by the EVIPNet Europe Steering Group, consisting of eight experts in KT, EIP and public health research. The WHO Secretariat of EVIPNet Europe remains actively engaged in the EVIPNet Global Steering Group.

Conclusions and outlook

Through the development and promotion of EIP tools, such as EBPs, SAs and rapid response syntheses, EVIPNet Europe has continued to make progress in the promotion of EIP in its member countries. The attendance and involvement of EVIPNet Europe members at workshops, meetings and conferences further contributed to capacity-building in EIP and KT.

Encouraged by the achievements of 2019, the Network looks forward to another active year in 2020.

In addition to continuing many of the above activities, specific goals for 2020 include:

- welcoming two new members to EVIPNet Europe (Azerbaijan and Greece);
- strengthening the Network’s focus on eastern European and central Asian countries, including initiating collaboration with Uzbekistan on the Health Information System in Uzbekistan project;
- initiating the development of a new strategy for the governance and support structure of EVIPNet Europe;
- continuing the work on AMR EBPs through launching the third cohort of member countries; and
- strengthening mutual support between EVIPNet Europe member countries, while seeking to expand and develop the network.
References


The WHO Regional Office for Europe

The World Health Organization (WHO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations created in 1948 with the primary responsibility for international health matters and public health. The WHO Regional Office for Europe is one of six regional offices throughout the world, each with its own programme geared to the particular health conditions of the countries it serves.

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