

Distr.
GENERAL

CES/AC.36/1998/43 (Summary)
EUR/ICP/INFO 020603/43

17 August 1998

Original: ENGLISH

STATISTICAL COMMISSION and
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR EUROPE

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Joint ECE-WHO Meeting on Health Statistics
(Rome, Italy, 14-16 October 1998)

SESSION I: Problems associated with the lack of coordination in national and international health statistics

HARMONISED SYSTEMS OF INDICATORS FOR INTERNATIONAL REPORTING

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Summary

The necessity of a harmonised system of indicators is becoming greater all the time, due to the growing convergence process of European Countries and the increasing number of common economic and social policies adopted by the Community. Thus it is necessary to develop a European Health Report based on a system of indicators to monitor health conditions of populations as well as the fulfilment degree of established targets.

For a European Health Report the statistical information should satisfy, apart from accuracy and timeliness requirements, also the *comparability* requirement. This in spite of social, cultural and normative differences which exist among countries and which often make a direct comparison between apparently similar phenomena quite difficult.

The indicators are the basic tool in establishing an international reporting system to monitor each state's progress in the fulfilment of common health goals. The aim of this paper is to analyse difficulties in building a harmonised system of health and health care indicators at the European level.

¹ Prepared by Viviana Egidi.

In this context the following points need to be discussed:

1. A European health report should be based on a harmonised system of indicators with the accurate definition of the health policy goals pursued at international levels and on the agreement of a shared conceptual framework.
2. A fundamental distinction must be made between objectives of *knowledge* and objectives of *political actions evaluation*.
3. The harmonisation process is a continuum starting from *harmonisation of the product* to the *harmonisation of method*.
4. The context become complicated because of the numerous sources of incomparability, for example, the differences in social, economic, cultural and normative contexts characterising European populations, or to the different methodological and organisational survey procedures, like sample factors (size, structure, method of stratification...) and methods of data collection (data collection network, reference period, proxy response acceptance).
5. The process of harmonisation must continue in the phase of reporting.

The reporting must be planned in all phases. International reports do not result from a direct imposition of national health reports: a specific project and an independent database of regularly updated indicators are required.

The first step for the health report is represented by making consistent the *methodologies* used to collect, to process and to control the information produced.

Informational systems for survey documentation can play an important role in supporting the harmonisation process and creating systems of indicators which allow the users to control comparability.

A further step for harmonisation and reporting is represented by the technical computer support. It can play an important role since imposing standard protocols for transmission can help states in preparing comparable databases.

Finally, recommendations play an important part, since they suggest common definitions and methodologies to countries. Therefore they can face the issue of international comparability without irremediable conflicts with national needs, represented by the continuity of time series data and by the specific importance of indicators. Recommendations have to be: complete, clear and precise. Three basic requirement which are not always respected in Community recommendations, directives and regulations because of the difficulty to reach formal agreement of member states, and which are essential to allow a real harmonisation.