

Recovery and Resilience Facility (2020-2024) – mid-term evaluation

- *EuroHealthNet's response to the European Commission's consultation*

EuroHealthNet is a not-for-profit European partnership working on public health, disease prevention, promoting health and well-being, and reducing health inequalities. Since 2011, EuroHealthNet has been engaged in comprehensive analyses of the European Semester process and its outcomes (see [overview](#) of our reports). We have carefully followed its evolving features and assessed its impact from a public health and healthy equity perspective. Since the creation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), EuroHealthNet has not only contributed with advocacy activities related to the design of the plans, but also analysed the plans as a component of the European Semester.

Most notably, EuroHealthNet has produced two reports dedicated to the assessment of the design (2021 report "[Recovery and Resilience Plans: drivers to promote health and wellbeing in the European Union?](#)") and implementation (2022 report "[The European Semester and Health Equity: Findings from the Recovery and Resilience Plans in eight EU Member States](#)") of national Recovery and Resilience Plans (RRP) in a number of EU countries. Our work has gathered data and insights through semi-structured interviews with high-level experts from public authorities, mainly national public health institutes, Ministries of Health and local health authorities. Following this, the results of our analyses have been disseminated and used to conduct evidence-based advocacy activities (see Open Letter: [National Recovery and Resilience Plans to support sustainable and fair health and social care systems](#)).

Through our analyses we have gained valuable insights on the design and implementation processes:

- We collect meaningful information to understand at which extent the RRF has been providing financial support to Member States for the implementation of reforms and how they instigated health system reforms while strengthening investments in public health, health promotion and disease prevention.
- We also look whether or not the RRF initiatives help address long-term challenges of our health and social systems, and how the reforms and investments supported by the RRF contribute to promote the Union's economic, social, and territorial cohesion.
- We briefly explore issues related to: governance over the implementation and coordination of the RRFs; communication and transparency related to the activities, and; synergy across sectors as well as other programmes.

Through our work we have put forward a number of recommendations, both country specific and transversal for better implementation of the plans over the coming years.

Key considerations from our experts

This represents a brief overview of the insights we gathered as part of the work described above. We invite the reading of the [full reports](#) for more details and insights.

- Our cross-country analyses identified the main themes of projects under the RRFs related to public health and health equity. This included strengthening primary and community care, digital tools to improve the provision of health and social care, early-year health and well-being, strengthening public health, health promotion, disease prevention, mental health, improving environmental conditions, and strengthening healthcare systems.
- The initiatives identified (see annex) serve as practical examples of funding that can be used to invest in people, and improve their resilience and quality of life.
 - The experts credited the RRF to boosting funding for both existing and new initiatives, many of which have potential to provide people with a basic sense of security, enhance capabilities and develop more efficient and effective ways to ‘pool’ risks related to health and dependency, across societies.
 - However, despite showing potential to advance public health policies and practice in various Member States, the long-term sustainability of these projects largely depends on the political engagement and willingness of governments to keep health -including health improvement - up on their agendas. This became evident in the interviews, whereby experts expressed concern for the longevity of projects once RRF funding expired.
 - Often experts also felt more consideration could be given to equity across RRF priority areas, to ensure that funds were spent in ways that were “fair”, and “just”. While many of the initiatives that were identified had a strong equity focus, it is not clear if and how equity and distributional impacts were and are being considered in the selection, design, implementation and monitoring phases across RRF initiatives as a whole.
- A number of experts indicated that, in order to impact significantly on health equity outcomes, these initiatives must be a part of broader strategies of health system reform. However, it was not always clear how to situate the initiatives in the broader context of other health, and more general resilience and reform efforts, taking place in their countries. It also became apparent that experts themselves lacked an understanding of the broader architecture of the RRF and that their awareness was limited to the specific projects they were involved in.

EuroHealthNet's Recommendations

Below you can find a few relevant recommendations that have been developed based on our work. We invite the reading of the [full reports](#) for more details suggestions.

On the Recovery and Resilience Facility:

- Carefully monitor the RRF implementation and ensure these are directed toward pre-agreed health and social targets. Reduce administrative burdens that may hamper the efficient surveillance of such implementation.
- Facilitate and encourage better and more transparent communication among policy makers, professionals and public about how RRF funds are being spent to
 - Help involved actors to develop a clearer understanding of what is being funded under what programmes, where synergies can be made, and what is missing in the broader 'architecture of change'
 - Allow for smooth and efficient implementation of the initiatives
 - Allow target groups and general population to better understand the EU added
- Foster better synergies within RRF initiatives as well as initiatives put forward under other EU funding programmes. This will allow stakeholders to:
 - draw out the "co-benefits" of different projects and initiatives, to maximise their potential to contribute to broader strategic reform.
 - better understand the distributional impacts of programmes and initiatives under the RRF across different demographic groups.
- Encourage policy dialogue at both national and EU level regarding the sustainability and long-term impact of successful initiatives developed and implemented under the RRFs.

On the European Semester:

- Recognize the value, and invest sustainably in the following initiatives as part of broader health, as well as resilience and reform strategies, to be monitored by the European Semester process:
 - Strengthen primary care systems, with particular attention to workforce shortages and access to care.
 - Support to public health, health promotion and disease prevention.
 - Foster early disease screening programmes and prevention models, particularly among pregnant women and children.
 - Strengthen integrated and community-based care.
 - Enhance collaboration between the health and social sector.
 - Foster equitable access to social and health services.
 - Improve the attractiveness of careers within the health sector, including primary care, nurses and public health careers.

- Improve digital and health literacy, particularly in vulnerable groups.
- Ensure an effective digital transition of health systems.
- Engrain the Economy of Wellbeing into governmental processes.
- Develop an overarching Strategy for the European Union, that follows up on the Europe2020 Strategy to integrate goals of all relevant EU strategies and serve as overarching guidance for the European Semester process:
 - Establish health, equity and wellbeing as transversal and intrinsic objectives of the European Union, alongside environmental and digital objectives. Health targets remain absent from key EU policy processes. As recently observed, the three [headline social targets to be achieved by 2030](#), as set by EU Member States, as well as the [European Pillar of Social Rights-linked Social Scoreboard](#) do not account for health-related targets.
 - Help national actors address the multiple crises in systemic ways, to better navigate EU policies and make synergies between the RRF and other EU funding programmes.
 - Shed light on how different components of strategies, programmes and action plans across the EU and at (sub)national level can come together to drive systemic change towards more socially and environmentally sustainable economies that generate wellbeing.

Relevant publications

- EuroHealthNet. (2022). The European Semester and Health Equity: Findings from the Recovery and Resilience Plans in eight EU Member States. <https://semester-health-equity.eurohealthnet.eu/>
- EuroHealthNet. (2021). Open Letter: National Recovery and Resilience Plans to support sustainable and fair health and social systems. <https://eurohealthnet.eu/publication/open-letter-national-recovery-and-resilience-plans-to-support-sustainable-and-fair-health-and-social-care-systems/>
- EuroHealthNet. Health and the European Semester (Reports 2017 – 2021). <https://eurohealthnet.eu/publication/health-and-the-european-semester/>
- EuroHealthNet. (2022). An Economy of Wellbeing for health equity. <https://eurohealthnet.eu/publication/an-economy-of-wellbeing-for-health-equity/>
- EuroHealthNet. (2020). Making the link: improving health and health equity through strong social protection systems. <https://eurohealthnet.eu/publication/making-the-link-improving-health-and-health-equity-through-strong-social-protection-systems/>
- EuroHealthNet website. <https://eurohealthnet.eu/>



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