

Strengthening Health Systems: A Practical Handbook for Resilience Testing

Workshop and Launch

Date: Tuesday 19 March 2024

Time: 9:00 - 14:00

In-person and online

Venue: The Hotel (Boulevard de Waterloo 38, 1000 Brussels, Belgium)

Aim

This workshop reflects on the importance of health system resilience in a post-pandemic context and will facilitate open and constructive dialogue on the challenges health systems face. It will explore the role of resilience testing in identifying and addressing weaknesses and as a tool for targeting investments to build stronger health systems.

Resilience and resilience testing

Health system resilience is the capacity of a health system to a) proactively foresee, b) absorb, and c) adapt to shocks and structural changes so that it can i) sustain core operations, ii) resume optimal performance as quickly as possible, iii) transform and strengthen its structure and functions and iv) reduce its vulnerability to similar shocks and structural changes in future.

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the importance of addressing resilience in preparing for future health crises. The current complex policy landscape – marked by challenges such as climate change, geopolitical conflicts, financial crises, and digital failures – highlights the need for robust and responsive health systems. Bolstering the overall capacity of health systems to manage significant shocks is more critical than ever.

DG SANTE, the OECD and the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies recognise that the window of opportunity for effective strategies that reinforce health system resilience may be diminishing. They also recognize that there is no standard methodology for resilience testing. A tool to help Member States review their own vulnerabilities and discuss, prioritise, and implement practical measures to enhance resilience is key to ensuring the devastating impacts of events like COVID-19 are mitigated in future.

A resilience testing handbook as a practical tool

The European Commission has responded to the absence of a practical resilience testing tool by asking the OECD and the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies to develop a clear, methodology. The joint work has created *Strengthening Health Systems: A Practical Handbook for Resilience Testing*. It draws on the experience of stress tests in the banking, critical infrastructure, and other sectors and builds on the work on health system resilience and on Health Systems Performance Assessment (HSPA) of the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, the OECD, and the European Union Expert Group on HSPA.

Strengthening Health Systems: A Practical Handbook for Resilience Testing was developed with the help of three pilot exercises with health authorities in Finland in April 2023, in Greece in May 2023, and in Spain in November 2023. It offers a structured approach to evaluating health system's resilience and will help pinpoint areas ripe for action. This workshop is designed to explain this vital tool for health policymakers and system planners and provide actionable insights and strategies for fortifying health systems against future challenges.

Agenda

19 March 2024

09:00 – 9:30: **Welcome coffee and registration**

09:30 – 10:10: **Health system resilience: why it matters, how Europe's health systems can respond and the role of testing**

This opening session aims to set the stage for understanding the connections between resilience testing and broader health system goals.

Opening and welcome remarks

Moderated by Suszy Lessof (OBS)

- **Why resilience should remain a priority:** Sandra Gallina, EC Director General for Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE)
- **Cross-sectoral shocks and their implications:** Francesca Colombo, OECD Head of the Health Division
- **What is special about health systems resilience:** Josep Figueras, Director of the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies
- **How resilience echoes Belgium's concerns as President of the Council of the EU:** Dirk Ramaekers, President of SPF Santé Publique - FOD Volksgezondheid Belgium
- **How health systems resilience underpins wider resilience:** Hans Kluge, WHO Regional Director for Europe

10:10-11:30: **Resilience testing: a practical tool and how to use it**

This session provides an overview of the Handbook and how it can be used for diagnostics and as a starting point for policy action to improve health system resilience.

A panel discussion with the countries that hosted the pilot exercises will reflect on how working through their respective "shock scenario" helped and the lessons learned. There will be follow-up discussion of the implications of the exercise for remedial action, health policy reform and investment.

Part 1: Presentation of the Handbook (10:10 – 10:30)

- **How the Handbook works:** Julia Zimmermann, OBS and Philip Haywood, OECD

10:30-11:00 – **Tea/Coffee break**

Part 2: Moderated panel discussion (11:00 to 11:50 - including questions from audience)

Co-moderated by Marina Karanikolos, OBS and Philip Haywood, OECD

- **Introduction to the pilots and shock scenarios**
 - **What is it like preparing for and running a resilience test?:** Elizabeth Diago (Barcelona Institute for Global Health (IS Global), Spain)
 - **Bringing together different stakeholders? Reflections a year after the pilot resilience test:** Lilian Vildiridi (Secretary General for Health Services, Ministry of Health, Greece)
 - **Phasing in resilience testing as a mechanism for policy discussions in Finland:** Liina-Kaisa Tynkkynen (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, Finland)

Q&A with the audience

- **The value of the resilience testing model - the scope for use in countries.** Reactions from the₃

audience (in person and via webinar)

11:50-12:40: **Lessons from prior shocks and preparing for future ones**

This session will draw on lessons from prior shocks, such as the financial crisis, and identify some of the ways in which health systems have been well-prepared, as well as the unforeseen ways in which health systems were challenged. Practical uses of health systems resilience testing will be discussed to show how EU and national level stakeholders can make best use of this new methodology.

Expert insights on strengthening resilience

- **Moderated panel discussion** (including questions from audience)

Co-moderated by Philip Haywood and Jonathan Cylus

- **Mitigating the impact of the financial crisis: lessons from Lithuania** Gintaras Kacevičius, Director of the National Health Insurance Fund, Lithuania
- **Is being well-prepared enough? Good governance, resilience to natural hazards and continuity of essential services:** Nestor Alfonzo Santamaria, Senior advisor at the OECD High Level Risk Forum
- **Using resilience testing in EU Member States: how can it contribute to monitoring, preparing for and improving responses to shocks:** Michael Stoto, Professor Emeritus in the Department of Health Management and Policy, Georgetown University
- **Supporting Member States before the next crisis: where does resilience testing fit in?:** Nathalie Berger, DG REFORM

Q&A with the audience

- **How can policymakers make good use of resilience testing as a tool to strengthen health systems: how the EU Commission might help.** Reactions from the audience (in person and via webinar)
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12:40-13:00

Resilience realised: Ideas and opportunities

This session will summarize the key insights from the workshop and highlight opportunities for continued engagement and policy action in national and European contexts.

- **Francesca Colombo, OECD**
- **Josep Figueras, OBS**

13:00-14:15 End of workshop and networking lunch to participants