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Why should we pay particular attention

to the issues of small states?

EPH Pre Conference Stockholm 2017

Dr. Natasha Azzopardi Muscat

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Background to the Study

- Work on small states traditionally focussed on political and economic affairs

- Recently increased attention is being given to environmental issues and small (islands)

- There is a gap when it comes to research on health systems and small states

- WHO EURO has set up a network for small countries to learn lessons for Health 2020

Added value of Small State Studies

the value of the small state perspective in the study of European integration processes is that it provides an opportunity to "*rethink the theoretical and practical implications of the integration processes*" and thereby allows the debate of the future role of the EU in certain policy areas to move beyond the traditional categories

(Thorhallsson and Wivel 2006)

What did we know at the start?

- Lack of capacity
- Weak health services research activity
- Lack of national guidelines, quality assurance systems and accreditation programmes
- Healthcare providers tend to follow standards and guidelines fixed at international levels, or by foreign bodies, frequently without adaptation at a national level
- Lack of self-sufficiency in health services provision
- Medical profession is a strong veto player in small health systems where decision-making often lacks the active participation of patients and public
- Outward mobility of health care professionals
- Difficulties in securing affordable innovative medicines

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SMSHealth.eu Project

- 3 year project co-funded by the Erasmus + Programme (September 2015 / August 2018).

- **Project network:** Malta, Estonia, Slovenia, Iceland and The Netherlands (Lead).

- **Technical coordinator:** The University of Malta (Institute for European Studies, with the support of the Department of Health Services Management and the Islands & Small States Institute)

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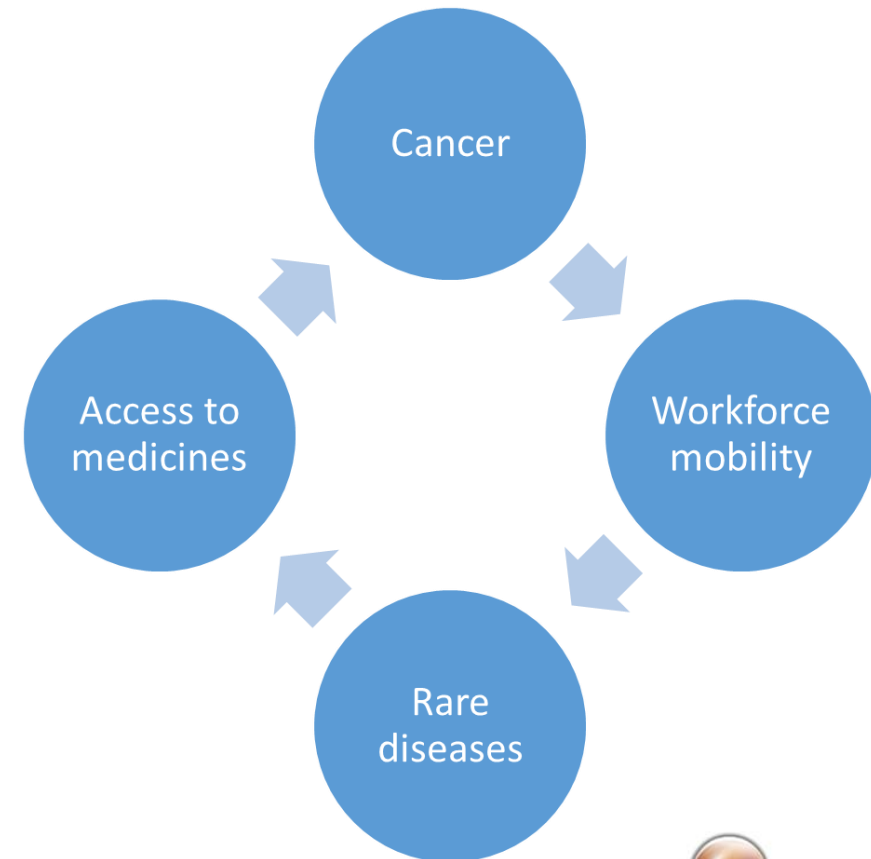European Integration, Small States and Health

SMSHealth.eu Project: why?

There is a gap when it comes to research on health systems and small states

The SMSHealth.eu Project aims therefore to fill this gap by providing a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities encountered by small states via European integration in the area of health policy and health systems.

Cancer

Workforce mobility

Rare diseases

Access to medicines

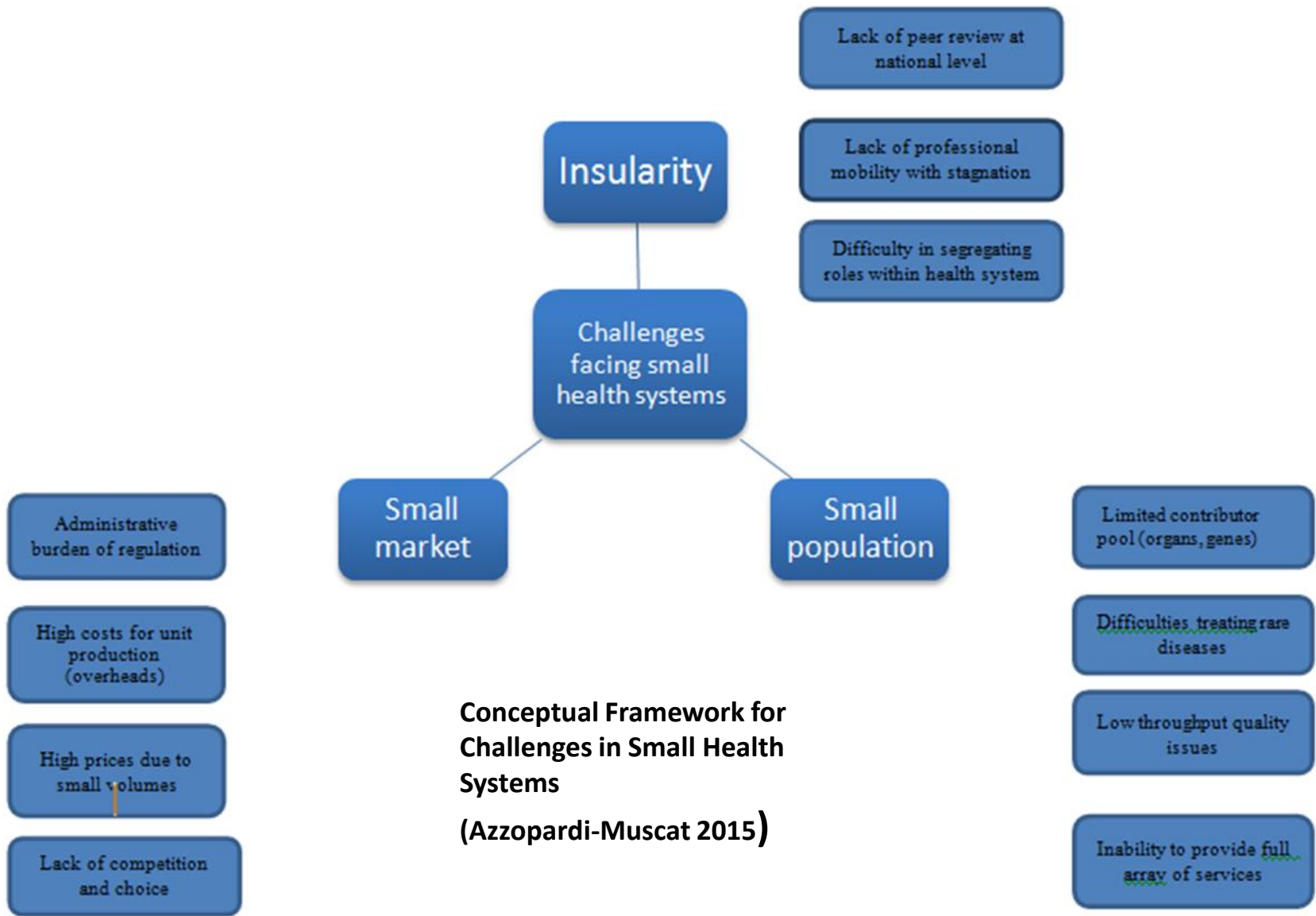SMSHealth.eu
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Aims of the SMSHealth.eu Project

- To develop and establish a Jean Monnet network of universities and public health institutes

- To map and understand better the small states' challenges and opportunities of European integration in health

- To translate findings into policy relevant messages and educational activities

Conceptual Framework for Challenges in Small Health Systems

(Azzopardi-Muscat 2015)

Research study

- Participants were recruited purposely in each country, considering their individual profile as renowned national experts on medicines policy in small states

- Written informed consent (ensuring confidentiality and anonymity) was obtained from all the experts before conducting the interviews.

- The procedure and methodology adopted were approved by the Maltese University Research Ethics Committee and by the medical ethical clearance committee of Maastricht University.

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Field work through expert interviews

- Qualitative and comparative study conducted in Malta, Estonia, Iceland and Slovenia according to a common study protocol

- Face-to-face semi-structured interviews with experts on medicines policy in small states (N=42)

- Interviews were fully transcribed and translated into English

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Where are we now?

- Updating of literature and domestic literature

- Fieldwork implemented

- Two workshops carried out (medicines, health workforce), two will be carried out in first half of 2018 (cancer, rare diseases)

- Papers and reports being written

- Full overall analysis being produced

- Teaching material

WHO Collaborating Centre has been set up

Developments at EU level

- Marginalisation of the public health agenda at EU level

- Impact of fiscal responsibility instruments

- Will small states be adversely affected if health is "pushed off" the EU agenda?

- Does EU policy recognise small state health system specificities?

Value of health policy for small states at EU level

- Several EU health policies and activities (e.g. ECDC, ERNs, Joint Procurement) are comparatively more important to small states

- Health is becoming more globalised and health policy can no longer be tackled by individual Member States alone

- European integration happens through people; health is a key concern for people and provides a tangible example of added value at European level

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The sentinel function of small states

'Smaller countries, especially the small island developing states are particularly vulnerable. Often these small islands play a useful sentinel role by experiencing the consequences of change and development more rapidly and more completely, therefore providing an early visible warning picture of what could happen in larger countries down the line unless pre-emptive measures are taken, when the scale of devastation would be on horrific e.g. the problem of obesity.'

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Way Forward

- Make the EU aware of the needs of Small States (opposing the idea that "one size fits all)

- Small states as laboratories for policy implementation

- Small states can inform work being carried out at regional / local levels

- Small states can inform SDG implementation

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