

Peer Review Health System Performance Assessment (Brussels, 19-20 May 2014)

Austria¹

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1. Please describe briefly your country's approach to Health System Performance Assessment (HSPA).

In 2010, the Austrian ministry of health mandated the Austrian Health Institute to compile a report on the performance of the Austrian health system in comparison to other – European and international – health systems. In order to safeguard the timeliness of the used data as well as in order to show trends and current evolvments over time, this report was by then published on an annual basis.

The reason for mandating this annual report was twofold: First, various international studies on health system performance (e.g. OECD, WHO, ...) ranked Austria's highly regarded health systems quite differently, which resulted in health politicians and representatives seeking for clarification of the different assessments (and the underlying approaches). Second, due to the fact that up to 2010 the only comprehensive publication of major indicators of the Austrian health system was the HiT country profile with updates coming up every 5 years, the ministry of health was seeking for a more recent way to publish performance figures of the Austrian health system.

Methodologically the Austrian HSPA report applies a rather narrow framework focusing on health services delivery. The approach distinguishes between 3 sets of indicators:

- Health expenditure and health care resources (representing "input" factors of the health system);
- Equity, access and health care utilisation (representing the "throughput" of the health system);
- Health related outcomes in terms of health status, life style and health care quality (representing the "outcome" of the health system).

As such the Austrian HSPA framework tries to assess both efficiency as well as effectiveness of health care delivery. It also includes public health aspect via the integration of a broad range of health related outcomes (in particular life styles). However, the framework does not include health determinants outside the scope of the health care system, which are usually addressed by Health in All Policies (HiAP) and public health frameworks.²

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² It has to be noted, that Austria has established a separate process for defining and monitoring broader public health goals based in HiAP as well. Currently, several workings groups are working on a conceptual framework integrating both, the narrow approach the HSPA focusing on health service delivery as well as the forthcoming assessment of public health goals.



2. What thematic priorities have been selected for HSPA in your country?

Since 2013, the Austrian HSPA also includes a section dealing with defined priority areas to be analysed. In 2013 this section tackled the issue of health equity in the Austrian health system. The emphasis of the focus section of the 2014 report has yet to be determined.

3. How do you choose your benchmarks for assessing what is good and what could be improved (e.g. comparison with other countries or groups of countries)?

How do you select the main indicators for drawing the key conclusions of the report?

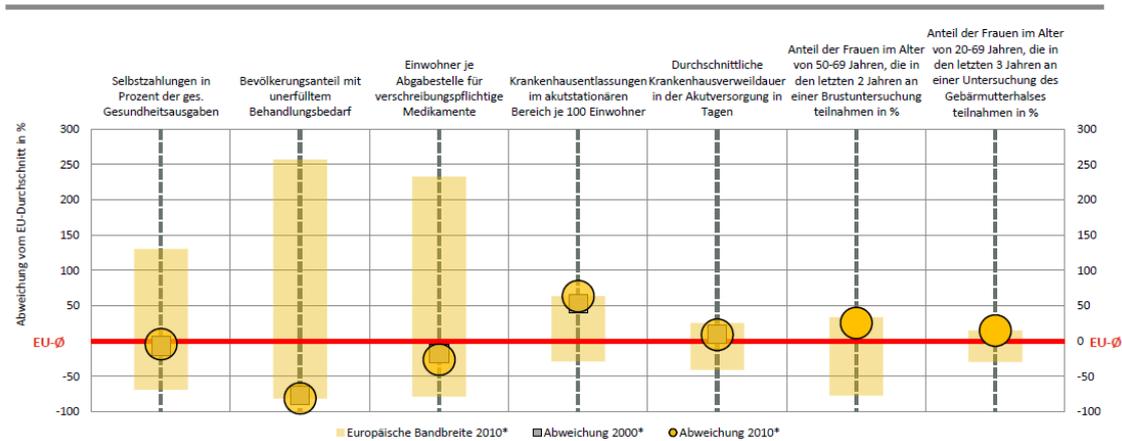
The Austrian HSPA report uses the unweighted average of the EU-15 countries of the respective indicator as point of reference. Deviation of these average scores is then shown in relative terms (%) both for the actual (most recent) Austrian score as well as Austria's 2000 scores in order to show the development of the subsequent indicators over time. Moreover, the illustration of the benchmark indicators includes a "box" indicating the range of the value of the respective indicators for the EU-15 countries (see example chart below).

Overall, the Austrian HSPA encompasses 8 European benchmarking indicators for the category "Health expenditure and health care resources", 7 indicators for the category "Equity, access and health care utilisation" and 14 indicators for the category "Health related outcomes in terms of health status, life style and health care quality". All these indicators are first discussed in terms of relevance, desired outcome and development over time in order to identify the major areas of action to be taken as well as recommendations to policy makers.



Example chart:

Abbildung 5.2:
Übersicht: Gerechtigkeit, Zugang, Inanspruchnahme – Abweichung Österreichs vom EU-15-Durchschnitt, 2000* und 2010*



	2000	2010	2004	2011	2000	2009	2000	2010	2000	2010	2000	2009	2000	2009
Österreich	15,31	15,94	0,60	0,40	3823	3732	24,36	26,10	7,60	6,60	n.a.	80,2	n.a.	81,60
EU-15	16,45	16,67	2,55	2,13	4626	5065	15,89	15,61	6,92	6,05	n.a.	57,0	n.a.	71,08

* Oder jüngstes verfügbares Jahr
Der gelbe Kreis wie auch das graue Quadrat zeigen die Abweichungen Österreichs vom EU-15 Durchschnitt in den Jahren 2010 bzw. 2000. Der orange Balken im Hintergrund veranschaulicht die Streuung der jeweiligen Ausprägungen in den Mitgliedstaaten der EU.

Berechnung und Darstellung: GÖG/ÖBIG

4. What targets do you use for improvement (e.g. best attainment amongst comparator countries; improvement from your country's previous levels of attainment)?

Is progress quantified using reliable metrics and associated analytic techniques?

The Austrian HSPA does currently not include formally set targets for health system performance. Rather, the chosen approach to present and compare the selected benchmarking indicators (as shown above) is used to monitor the performance of the Austrian health system in general.

The applied metrics are based on international – namely: OECD and EU – databases and are deemed to be reliable. Specific remarks indicating different definitions of indicators are taken in account as well in order to control statistic artefacts, especially when comparing trends over time.

5. (How) does HSPA impact on national policy making in your country? How are the main results of the report communicated to the general public? Is HSPA used in terms of policy changing?

The Austrian HSPA represents – amongst others – a relevant source for identifying areas of actions to be taken for policy makers. As such the Austrian HSPA also represented an analytic “backbone” for the target-setting within the current Austrian health reform (“Health System Governance by Objectives”) for policy makers. As the Austrian health reform progresses, the approach chosen by the HSPA will also be integrated into a wider evaluation framework, monitoring broader health targets and also including the (social) determinants of health (see footnote 2).



6. In your assessment: What are the strengths and weaknesses of your country's HSPA? What are the challenges you face? What are the priorities for improving your country's HSPA system?

Currently, the Austrian HSPA serves the purpose of monitoring the country's health system performance on a narrow approach (see also answer to question 1). The challenges the Austrian HSPA is facing are therefore twofold: (1) The current framework has to be integrated in a wider evaluation framework also encompassing public health targets based on HiAP. (2) The current HSPA framework has to be embedded more deeply in the policy making process in order to allow for the setting of health targets based on the analysis provided by HSPA.

Regarding the latter challenge, it has to be noted, that the Austrian government has provided a suitable regulatory framework when passing the current health reform. In this reform – in theory – defined health targets represent the starting point for improved governance of the different providers of health service and these targets should promote accountability in a fragmented health system. However, it appears to be difficult to achieve both the definition of specific HSPA targets as well as the integration of HSPA into a broader public health framework. The first (at least conceptually) presumes a rather one-dimensional matter-cause-relationship whereas the latter integrates various factors with mutual and overlying causalities.

7. What kind of EU level support, focusing on the areas of accessibility, equity and quality would be needed in your country to support you in (further) developing HSPA at a national level?

A set of current, homogenous performance indicators, which are also provided on a regional level could support the national efforts in developing the Austrian HSPA.

