Reviewer’s report

Title: Assessing the health workforce implications of health policy and programming: How a review of grey literature informed the development of a new impact assessment tool

Version: 0 Date: 15 Sep 2017

Reviewer: Maria Bertone

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for the opportunity of reviewing this manuscript, which I found well written and quite interesting. Although arguably not a strictly traditional academic paper, I believe the topic is important and the article and methodology as rigorous to merit publication. I have a general comment/suggestion and some minor comments, below.

General comment

My general comment concerns the structure of the manuscript. I think two are its main objectives, one to review the literature and summarize the key principles, elements, structures, etc. of an (any) IA, and the second (based on the findings of the literature) to develop the (specific) HRH IA that is needed. At the moment, in the manuscript you mix elements that refer to "a IA" in general and to the specific HRH one you are aiming to develop - for example, under General principles you describe the findings of the review which point to the need of a conceptual framework but also suggest one specific framework for the HRH IA - clearly this is not a result of the review (or doesn't seem to be).

I believe the manuscript would read better if you separate those two elements. You could have a first part of the Results sections in which you indicate the results of the literature review (the general principles for (any) IA that emerged from the documents, objectives, structure and content, process), and then a second part (which could keep the current title as "Applying the results of the review to the development of an HRH IA tool", but should be made of higher level, e.g., bold) where you focus specifically on the HRH IA tool that you have developed. This includes its conceptual framework (currently on page 7), objectives (page 9), the impacts and risks it aims to capture (page 11) as well as what is already included under the specific HRH IA section (page 12/bottom onwards). I believe this would make even clearer the steps that you took in your work, and also focus more attention on the specific HRH IA tool that you have developed. Even if it is in Annex now, it is not at all a secondary objective of the paper and (I believe) it deserves more focus in itself (among others, you could call it "HWIA" throughout the manuscript and not only in the Annex).
Minor comments

Abstract

* "This paper describes work to support .. etc.": this sentence is very general and doesn't seem to add much to your abstract. I would suggest deleting it.

* In the abstract (conclusion section), but also in other instances in the manuscript (e.g., in the background - page 3, page 4/bottom), you mention "decision-makers", sometimes specified as "global health decision makers", "bilateral and multilateral initiatives", "development partners", "global health initiatives". I think your exact audience could be better defined. Would it include only international decision-makers acting at global level, or also national decision-makers, or international partners working at country level?

Background

* Page 4, line 2: "these aspects": not clear which aspects you are referring to. Perhaps better to say "this approach"?

Methods

* The methods section discussing the data collection process is quite comprehensive and detailed. However, the part on the analysis is very brief. You could perhaps expand on the data extraction and analysis process (did you have predefined themes/elements to extract information on, or did you follow an inductive process collecting information on emerging themes as you went along?, etc.).

Results

* At the beginning of the results section, you refer to Table 1 and state that it "shows that literature and documentation about HRH assessment is lacking". However, in the table there is no line corresponding to HRH IA. Is that because there was actually no document at all retrieved on the subject? Or are they included under "health" but there are only a few (how many?)?

* Under "general principles" you mention that a number of potential frameworks were reviewed in order to decide which one would be best adapted for the HRH IA, before choosing the health labour market approach. I do not disagree with your decision (the labour market framework is indeed quite useful in this case), however some more information on
how the selection was made (it does not seem to be part of the broader lit review) and why it was chosen (for example, does this selection fit with any of the "principles" emerging on IAs in general?)

* When you discuss about "risks" (page 11/bottom), you could add also perverse or insufficient incentives for HRH - I think the notion of incentives is well adapted to the health labour market framework you have chosen.

* Personally (but this is very much a suggestion) I would not start the section on "Applying the results of the review to the development of the draft tool" (page 12/bottom) with the reference to the tool in Annex. I think it would be better for the reader to be "taken by hand" on a tour of the tool, providing information on its structure, rationale, etc. (and adding some information that is now in the previous pages, as per my general comment), before then referring to the full tool in Annex.

* When you describe the tool (page 13), you could refer to Part A and Part B also in the main text to make the link with the Table and the Annex more clear.

Conclusion

* I was surprised to read about the prevalence of EU and OECD documents in the discussion, as it was not mentioned before (it only emerges by looking closely to the references). If you believe it is an important issue, I would suggest that it is mentioned already in the Methods section when you present the search results (perhaps a table by organization and/or country?). Otherwise, it could be dropped.

Annex

* Page 2: there appears to be a typo as point (c) is missing. There is also a mention to a graph of the process which is not included.

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An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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