

## MAKING MEDICAL DESERTS BLOOM

### OASES Express Newsletter First edition



## Introduction

Dear reader,

My name is Paolo Michelutti, and I work as a project manager at Age.Na.S., the Italian National Agency for Regional Health Services, and it is my pleasure and honour to welcome you to this first release of OASES Express, the newsletter of the OASES project, of which I am the coordinator. "PrOmoting evidence-bASed rEformS on medical deserts" (OASES) is a three-year project, started on March 1st 2021, co-funded by the European Commission's Third Health Programme, which aims to shed light on an aspect that is still little studied and known but which constitutes a relevant criticality for most of our health systems: the so-called medical deserts.

The expression "medical desert", mostly used in the media, identifies those situations or areas where people have difficulty in accessing health services for a variety of causes, often concomitant: for example, long waiting times, long distances to the hospital, shortage or inadequate health workforce compared to demand. The effects of these multiple causes are evident: remote areas with poor health services, lack of medical specialists in poor urban areas, young health workers moving to cities and depleting rural areas, difficulty in replacing the retiring workforce with a young and well-trained workforce. This list is obviously illustrative but not exhaustive.

In this light, the OASES project aims at proposing and testing a methodology for the identification of such areas in the EU member states and, in parallel, at analysing and discussing the main antecedents and possible solutions to the medical deserts identified in the different contexts.

In order to achieve this goal **Age.Na.S.** - the coordinator of the OASES project - will collaborate with other 7 partners that together form the OASES consortium:

**EHESP, the School of Public Health**, together with **IRDES, Institute for Research and Information in Health Economics**, from France, will propose a methodology for measuring and identifying medical deserts focused on sparse accessibility to health services, applicable, given the available data, in different contexts; this methodology will be based on the long experience both institutes have gained on the topic of measuring accessibility to French health services;

**THL, the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare**, through the analysis of the literature and of the results of the pilot studies, will propose an overview of the possible causes of medical deserts and a list of possible solutions, evaluated also on the basis of their sustainability and scalability in other contexts;

**UBB, the Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca**, Romania together with **NPHA, National Public Health Agency in the Republic of Moldova**, will organize and manage 7 pilot studies in 7 European countries (Cyprus, Finland, France, Hungary, Italy, Moldova and Romania) in which the methodology proposed by EHESP and IRDES will be tested and discussed with local stakeholders including in the discussion an analysis of the most effective potential health workforce policies to mitigate the identified medical deserts;

**SU, the Semmelweis University in Budapest**, is in charge of the communication and dissemination activities of the OASES results while **INWHE, International Network for Health Workforce Education**, will manage the internal evaluation of the process and the results.

OASES is not restricted to 7 European countries. On the contrary, it aims to activate a collaboration and an exchange of knowledge with all the Member States of the European Union. The relevant authorities of the EU countries will be represented in a Policy Board that has the mission of analysing and discussing the results and key evidence produced by OASES, comparing them with the challenges and issues that each EU Member State is facing in identifying, mitigating or solving medical deserts in its own country. In addition, we will organise two online conferences (one at the end of this year, the second in 2023) where all policy makers and experts will be invited to participate to discuss and exchange their experiences and knowledge on the causes and possible solutions. We will also organise a series of webinars every six months on more specific topics.

In addition, we have just activated a web forum accessible through the [EU Health Policy Platform](#) where you can virtually meet the OASES expert community, exchange opinions, experiences, knowledge and good practices. Last but not least, you are reading the OASES Express newsletter with which we will keep you regularly posted about the progress of our work and the events we will organise.

I therefore invite you now to join the OASES project community and make your contribution to solving the problem of medical deserts in your country and in other European countries.

**Let's make the medical deserts bloom!**



## OASES partners shared their thoughts about the project



We love the OASES initiative because everyone shares the same dedication to the project's objective to tackle the challenges that the medical desert is posing at EU level. The INHWE team is proud to be part of this project, the aims of which take on particular relevance in the light of the unwelcome events that in recent years have severely affected our common desire for accessible, high quality health care services for all.

*- David Smith and Matteo Vezzosi, International Network for Health Workforce Education*



During our participation within the OASES project, we aim to obtain more accurate data on medical deserts and to gain extra skills from our experienced partners, all in order to fully deliver the necessary knowledge to national authorities and policy makers about this phenomenon.

- Dr. Liliana Buzdugan, National Agency for Public Health, Republic of Moldova



The shortage of professionals – medical desert - is a mutual phenomenon in all Europe. In THL we share this worry and we are delighted to be part of OASES. We look forward to learning of good practices in other countries and also want to share our experiences.

- Timo Sinervo, Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare



I always thought that the best way forward for our individual countries and at unional level is through education. But in order to provide high-end education the disseminated information needs to be constantly updated and new fields thoroughly researched. I am confident that our Consortium will be able to provide even a tiny fraction of the above mentioned education, that will help boost our communities. Being early in my career, I'm glad to be surrounded by such an extraordinary team that is always willing to share its experience with me.

- Andrei Rus, Babes-Bolyai University



## Actual focus of the activities



### Framework for data collection

As part of the OASES project, THL is responsible for conducting a literature review of medical desertification considering the following research questions: what are the determinants of medical deserts, which measures are effective in mitigating desertification, what are the main antecedents and outcomes of medical desertification in European countries, and what are the differences among countries, areas and service systems?

The literature review consists of two parts. The first part is a scoping review for which data is collected from scientific journals. The determinants and ways to mitigate medical deserts are described. Characteristics of the practice/organization; service system and; workforce planning and monitoring (dimensions related to changes in the service system and the ways to provide services in the practices) are analyzed in relation to the medical deserts. The review focuses on first contact care. The second part of the review consists of the determinants of country reports, ministry documents and national studies of medical deserts in OASES participating countries. The service systems (organization of services, funding and budget allocation) of the participating countries are described in order to understand different circumstances in European countries.

[Read the document](#)

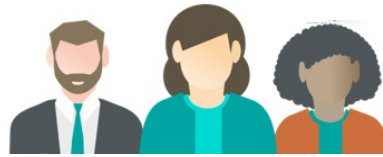


## Events



### HWF Projects Cluster

The **Official Launch webinar of the Health Workforce Projects Cluster** was held on the **20th September 2021** on the Webex platform of the European Commission. At this event experts could become familiar about the 5 new projects running in the field of health workforce and co-funded by the 3rd Health Programme of the European Union. The brief report of the webinar is available: [HERE](#)



### 1st Policy Board Meeting

On the **23rd of September 2021** we met the EU Member States' representatives in the frames of the first Policy Board meeting. This was the occasion to **present them the OASES project** and objectives and **start a dialogue** with them about the medical desertification in their own country, with specific focus on the methods in use to identify those areas characterized by lack or difficulties to access the health care services.

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