



eunethta
EUROPEAN NETWORK FOR HEALTH TECHNOLOGY ASSESSMENT

Task Group for Common Phrases and GRADE

Common Phrases

Sub-deliverable

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1 Purpose of this report

The final of three objectives of the Task Group on Common Phrases and GRADE is “to provide a scenario-based set of standardised formulations regarding the textual presentation of results and conclusions in PT & OT Joint [and Collaborative] Assessments for increased consistency (creation of a positive list of phrases)”.

The Task Group on Common Phrases and GRADE followed an iterative approach. The generation of a list of phrases that are to be avoided in REA’s (‘negative list’), because they may (unintentionally) imply or predetermine reimbursement decisions in some or all jurisdictions, was the first sub-deliverable of this Task Group.

The second sub-deliverable, the GRADE framework paper, presented a proposal on how to partially use GRADE in EUnetHTA context. Partial use of GRADE means that REA authors use the instrument (i.e. domains) of GRADE to assess certainty of evidence. However, they do not downgrade/upgrade the evidence per GRADE domain or provide any overall judgement of the certainty of the evidence per outcome taking into account all GRADE domains. This leaves the flexibility and adaptability to be modified locally to reflect the national contexts. This proposal was endorsed by the EUnetHTA Executive Board in November 2020.

After careful deliberation in the Task Group and learnings and insight from the previous two objectives, the current sub-deliverable focuses on providing recommendations for formulations rather than a strict set standardized sentences. This report serves to address this objective. Additionally, it provides an over-arching conclusion on the three objectives and the totality of the work of this Task Group.

2 Goal and use of common phrases

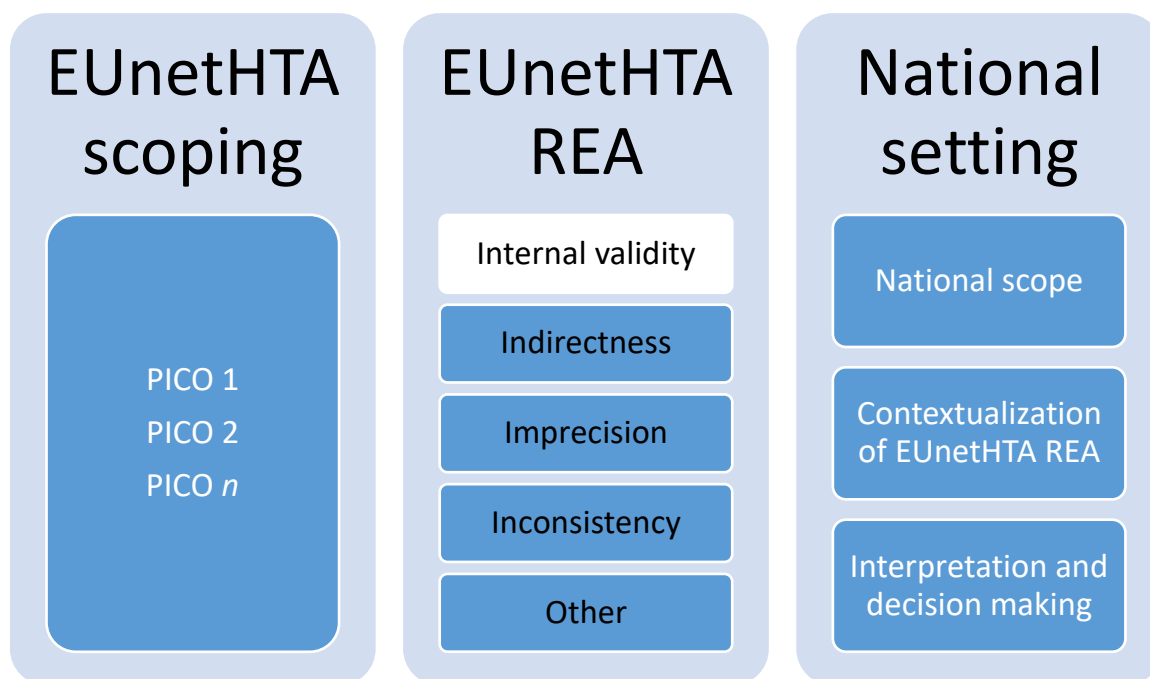
The EUnetHTA Relative Effectiveness Assessments (REA’s), comprising both Joint Assessments (JAs) and Collaborative Assessments (CAs), are part of a process that, ultimately, informs reimbursement and/or pricing decisions. Since those decisions are made on the national level, under consideration of national requirements, a EUnetHTA REA needs independent and additional national considerations in terms of both contextualization and conclusions. Contextualization can refer to both scope (operationalized in HTA by PICO), methodology and interpretation.

A key objective for EUnetHTA REA’s is that they are as informative as possible to reduce the workload of member states that implement them. However, this needs to be balanced out by the need for independent contextualization and decision making at the national level to comply with national legislation, policies, and settings. To be fit for purpose, therefore, authors of REA’s should be well aware of this positioning to prevent that REA’s inadvertently predetermine national reimbursement decisions or reduce the ability for proper national contextualization. Previously developed common phrases from different national settings or from international organizations like EPOC or the GRADE Working Group are built along the concepts of importance of outcomes and conclusions on the certainty of effect estimates in a given context. Since those are not warranted in EUnetHTA REA’s, a separate approach is needed.

It is important to realize that a EUnetHTA REA describes issues that affect certainty of the results. This is done based on different domains that vary in the degree of need for further national contextualization. For example, *internal validity* (or risk of bias) is rather context independent and therefore requires less national contextualization, while the question whether issues around *imprecision* are in fact affecting certainty for a given national setting, has a much stronger context dependency. This relates for example to countries’ own judgement on what they consider a relevant effect. The Task Group recognizes that it is not possible to provide examples for every conceivable situation. It is crucial that authors carefully consider to what degree a specific issue is context dependent, and this principle needs to be addressed in

each specific case. This is of course notwithstanding the principle that overall interpretation/judgement on each separate domain and also how the overall (un)certainty per outcome across domains is weighed and interpreted, always remains a national decision (figure 1).

“Common phrases” refers to (guidance on) formulation of results in REA’s to comply with the above.



Blue bars = may be context-dependent

White bars = context-independent

Figure 1: Degrees of contextualization in different phases of the REA process based on GRADE domains as described in the partial use of GRADE framework paper.

For optimal relevance for different health care systems, the European scope can address multiple research questions or variations, operationalized by ‘PICO’s’. A crucial step in national contextualization is to translate this broad European scope to the relevant scope of their health care system. In the EUnetHTA REA, when describing issues that may affect certainty of the results, some domains are relatively less context dependent (**white bars**) while **blue bars** indicate that those domains can contain elements that are considered relatively context independent, but also elements that are strongly context dependent.

3 Methods used by the Task Group

A hands-on group consisting from members from the Task Group worked to build on and extent the findings and recommendations from the first two sub-deliverables to this deliverable. The full Task Group has provided comments in two e-meetings and in a written round, as well as validated the final version.

4 Recommendations for presentation of results and conclusions in EUnetHTA REA's

Recommendation 1: context-independent judgements can be formulated more conclusively than context-dependent issues. The latter should be formulated in a factual rather than judgemental manner and thus in a way respecting national contextualization. In narrative text judgements should be marked as such, regardless of context dependency, and the rationale for making that judgement should always be stated. The framework paper on GRADE should always be used as a reference.

Explanation:

- The framework paper on partial use of GRADE specifies domains of potential uncertainty. Uncertainty can be divided into context-dependent issues and context-independent issues. Authors should carefully consider to what degree a specific issue is context dependent and this principle needs to be addressed in each specific case. Generally, fully context independent issues are comprised of risk of bias.

The other domains may be context dependent. The degree of context dependency depends on the case. These domains comprise the following (examples for potentially context dependent issues in brackets):

- Inconsistency
- Imprecision (e.g. consequences of statistical significance of effects or relevance of a given MID)
- Indirectness (e.g. relevance of indirect treatment comparisons or surrogate outcomes; 'fit' with European PICO or national PICO)
- Other (e.g. publication bias or large effects)

Examples of phrasing:

- Risk of Bias: "The Risk of Bias is judged to be High because of lack of blinding and issues concerning confounding by indication"
- Inconsistency: "Sizeable inconsistency may be present as indicated by an I^2 larger than 65%"
- Indirectness: "Intervention X was indirectly compared with Y through comparison via Z."
- Indirectness: "Intervention X was only studied in adults while children up to 18 years comprised the target population in PICO3"
- Imprecision: "CI crosses line of no effect" / "the effect is statistically significant"/ "Given an minimally important difference of [...], the effect estimate may be considered imprecise in a context for which this MID is relevant."/ "Optimal Information Size is reached"
- Outcome: The analysis for this outcome was not specified in the statistical analysis plan

Recommendation 2 for templates revision

Regarding the results section:

- The evidence table (as prepared in the second subdeliverable on the partial use of GRADE) should be added to the result sections without replacing existing structures
- The main issues described in the evidence table should be summarized in the text (see recommendation 1).

Regarding the discussion/conclusion sections:

- Repurpose discussion/conclusion sections with regard to:
- Final statements in the report should concisely summarize most important findings and strength/limitations/uncertainties of the evidence

- Separate discussion and conclusion section (as current) risks duplication, therefore:
 - o Strong recommendation from the Task Group for alternative (combined) section title. The title should not include the words conclusion or discussion, since the REA does not extend to conclusions and neither should a 'discussion'-section be interpreted as valuing the evidence.
 - o The title of the section could be e.g. "main findings" or "strength & limitations".
 - o A statement should be added to inform that it is not the 'final' conclusion or recommendation for decision making

Regarding the executive summary:

- Highlight issues affecting certainty per domain in the executive summary in a brief (non-detailed) manner.
- Concrete examples: Major issues are identified with regard to [domain], because of [issue].

5 Concluding remarks

A EUnetHTA REA is neither the starting product nor the end product. In informing decision-making, REAs should do so to the greatest extent possible without prejudicing it. A REA is to be considered an intermediate product that needs contextualization and adaptation at the national level. Conclusions should be developed by national HTA agencies before submitting the report to local/national decision-making.

The current paper presents the third and final output of the Task Group, recommendations for presentation of results and conclusions in EUnetHTA REA's, that builds on the GRADE framework paper. Context-independent GRADE domains can be formulated more conclusive than context-dependent issues. The latter should be formulated factual rather than judgemental and thus in a way respecting national contextualization. The discussion and conclusion sections in the current assessment report templates could be merged into 'Main findings'.

The outputs and recommendations of this Task Group will need to be transferred into relevant guidelines, SOPs and templates prior to implementation (post Joint Action 3).