The COVID-19 policy and strategic documents storm: a heartfelt request from the battlefield

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Issue:
The COVID-19 pandemic declared by WHO on 11 March 2020 brought not only a big threat to the global population but also a huge number of technical, policy and strategic documents with a very varied level of quality and accessibility. It has been a great challenge for frontline public health workers to surf the information wave, in order to effectively apply it in the context of crisis management.

Description:
COVID-19 related policy, strategic and operational documents analysed and implemented by our team -at a public health centre at health department level, in the Valencian Region (Spain)- during the pandemic were reviewed. Key elements considered were: length, quality of structure and content, validity period, as well as dissemination channel.

Results:
From February 2020 to date, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) alone has published 90 guidance and technical reports, representing 1,503 pages (mean length 16.7 pages, SD 14.0, range 3-92). As regards the Spain national COVID-19 strategy, i.e., a total of 26 versions have been issued so far, between 24 January 2020 and 26 February 2021. Mean length was 19.8 pages (SD 6.8, range 8-31) and average validity period of versions was 15.7 days (SD 16.4, range 1-70). They did not include a summary of recent changes. They were made publicly available through the official
Ministry of Health website. As for regional-level documents, 5.3% (21) did not have a date, and their main channel of dissemination was via email.

**Lessons:**
We strongly recommend that policy and strategic documents at all levels comply with a minimum set of quality standards - including essential elements such as organization, title, publication date, page numbers, table of contents, key messages, and summary of changes in comparison with previous versions - and are disseminated through internet or intranet knowledge management systems. This would efficiently save a large number of hours and headaches to frontline professionals.

**Key messages:**
- In the context of public health crisis management, timely and appropriate access of frontline public health professionals to updated and concise information is crucial.
- COVID-19 policy and strategic documents at all levels were reviewed. They should comply with a minimum set of quality standards, including a summary of recent changes, and be adequately disseminated.