The ASSET FINAL EVENT

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TO WHAT EXTENT IS ETHICS RECALLED IN NATIONAL PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS PLANS?

ETHICAL ISSUES
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Rome

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International recommendations

Influenza pandemics are unpredictable but recurring events that can have severe consequences on human health and socio-economic life to global level.

- **The World Health Organization (WHO) has recommended all countries to prepare a pandemic influenza plan and to keep them constantly updated, following its own guidelines, revised in 2009.**

- **In 2005 WHO published a checklist for influenza preparedness planning with a section on legal and ethical issues .**

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International recommendations

- **WHO has developed a framework of detailed ethical considerations.**

- **In 2008, WHO has published another document aimed at providing a more comprehensive analysis of the ethical and policy issues, according to the Siracusa Principles.**

→ **WHO has highlighted that any measure that limits the individual rights and the civil liberties (such as isolation and quarantine) must be necessary, reasonable, proportional, equitable, not discriminatory, and not in violation of the national and international laws.**

Semantic analysis

Zadig conducted a study on this issue, performing a semantic analysis of national pandemic plans developed by ten European Union/European Economic Area (EU/EEA) countries and by Switzerland, member of European Free Trade Association (EFTA), including EU and WHO documents.

All documents were taken from the ECDC official website (ecdc.europa.eu), whenever a translation in English was available.

Semantic analysis

The analysis has been based on two keyword lists:

- **in a first, generic, list, keywords represent areas of possible ethical interest;**

- **in a second, more specific, list, keywords are more precisely related to ethical issues actually addressed in each national pandemic plan.**

Semantic analysis

GENERIC KEYWORDS

borders, citizens, close, closing, closure, closures, communication, discrimination, discriminatory, distributed, distribution, distributions, ensure, groups, individual, isolation, legal, limit, limitation, movements, obligation, population, priority, professional, protection, quarantine, reduce, resources, restriction, restrictions, return, social, solidarity, staff, surveillance, suspension, values.

Semantic analysis

SPECIFIC KEYWORDS
civil rights, equity, ethical, ethically, ethics, fairness, freedom, human rights, liberty, minority, stigmatisation, transparency.

Aim of this analysis was to assess and compare the occurrence rates of each keyword within both lists, in order to evaluate the relevance of ethical issues and the application of ethical principles in the development of national preparedness and response plans.
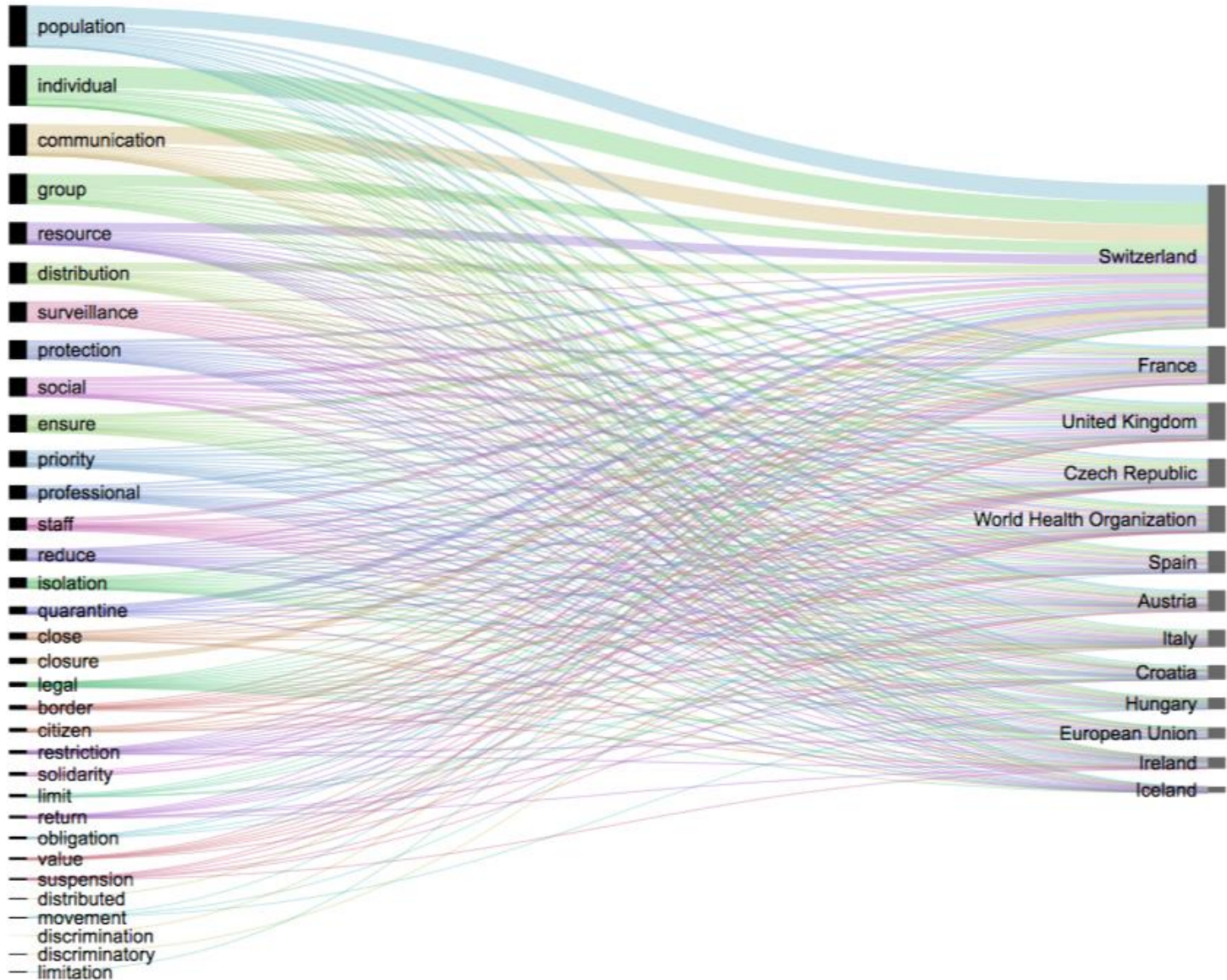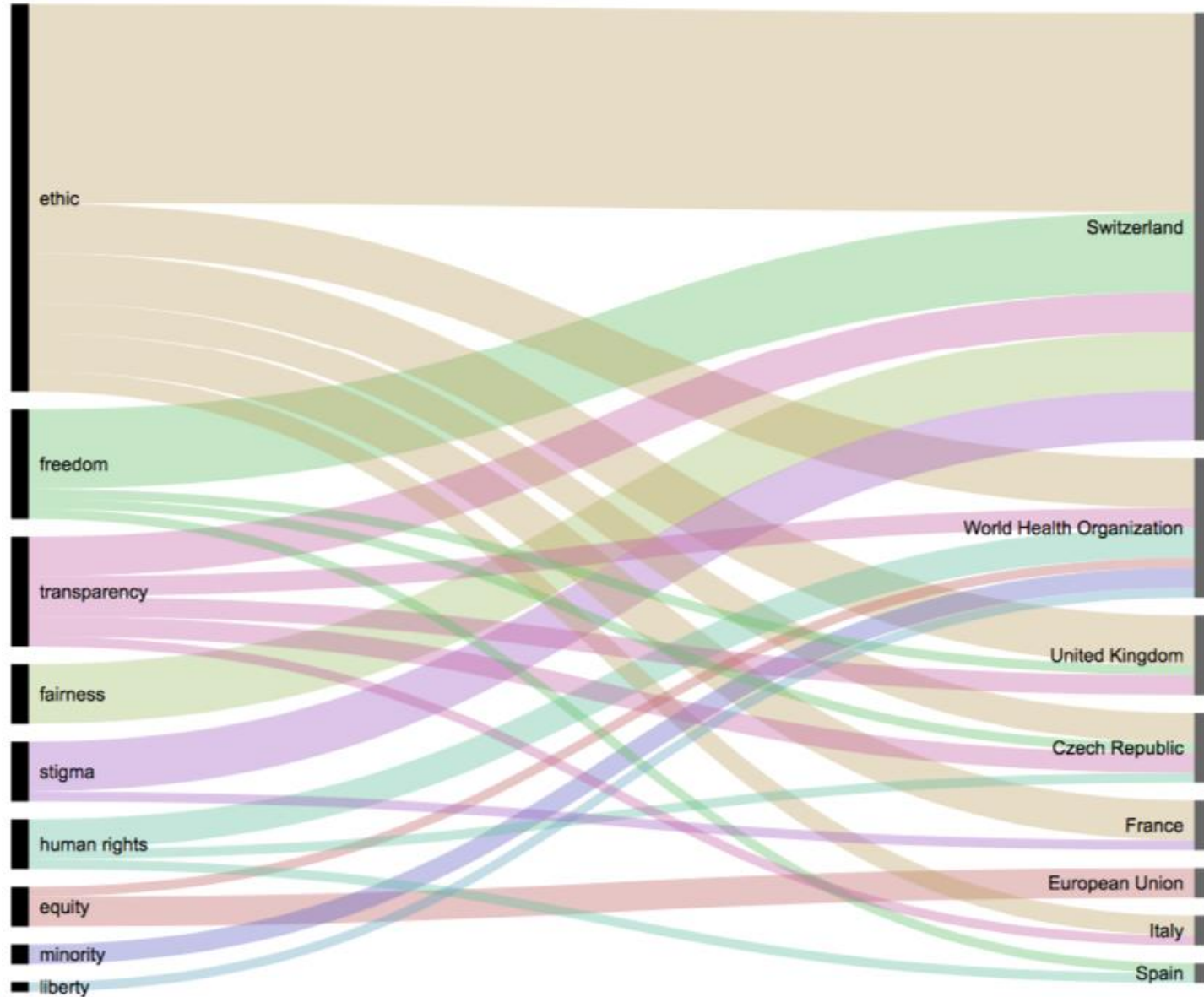
Data visualization

Data visualization is a visual communication and it refers to the techniques used to communicate data or information by encoding it as visual objects (e.g., points, lines or bars) contained in graphics. The goal is to communicate information clearly and efficiently to users.
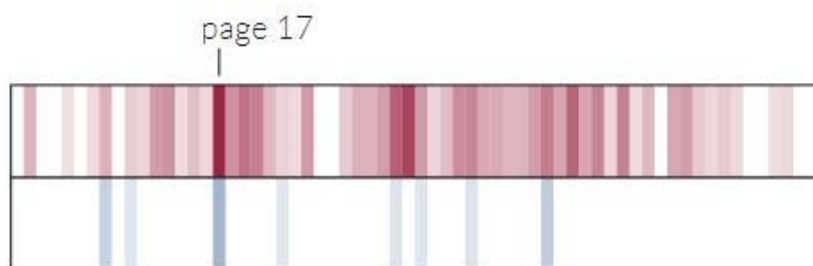
Data visualization: generic keywords

Data visualization: specific keywords

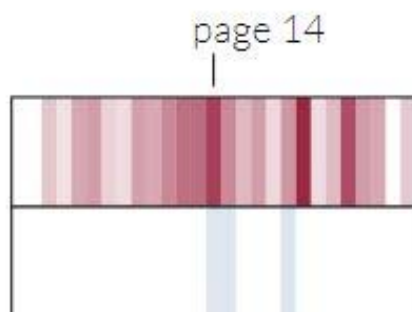# Data visualization: histograms

World Health Organization (64 pages)

page 17

Generic Keywords: communication, ensure, groups, individual, limit, limited, priorities, priority, resources, solidarity, surveillance, values, discriminatory

Specific Keywords: equity, ethical, liberty, minority, human rights

European Union (27 pages)

page 14

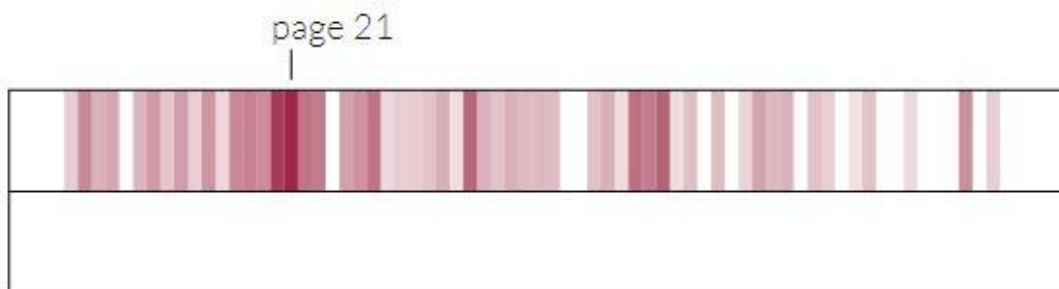**Generic Keywords:** ensure, groups, limited, prioritize, priority, protection, social

Specific Keywords: equity
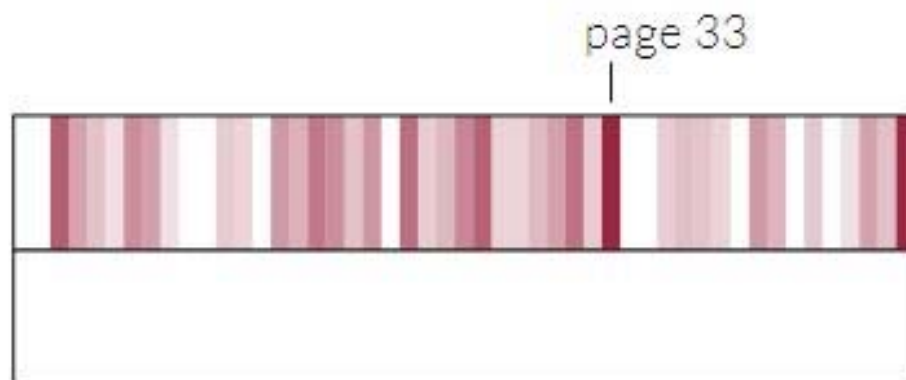
Data visualization: histograms

Austria (77 pages)

page 21

Generic Keywords: communication, distribution, isolation, limited, priorities, protection, surveillance

Specific Keywords: zero keywords

Data visualization: histograms
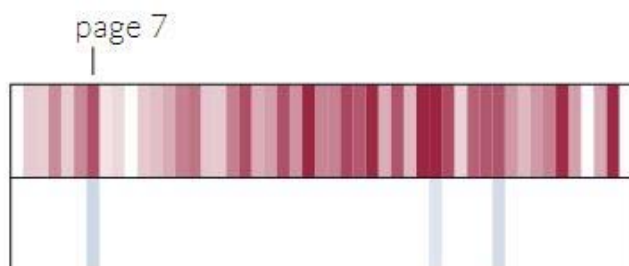
Croatia (49 pages)

page 33

Generic Keywords: distributed, distribution, individual, protection

Specific Keywords: zero keywords

Data visualization: histograms

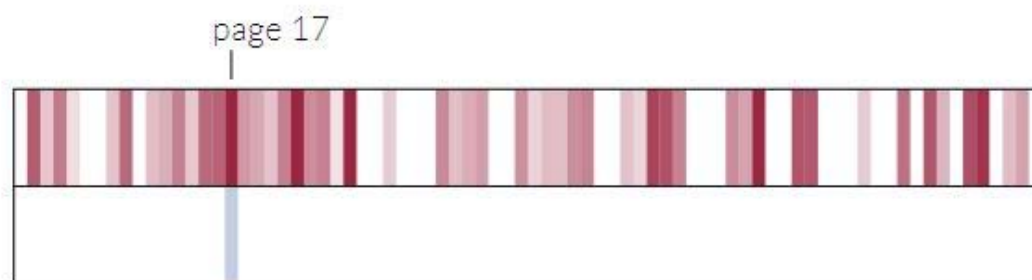Czech Republic (49 pages)

page 7

Generic Keywords: communication, ensure, groups, individuals, limit, limited, priorities, protection, resources, social, solidarity, surveillance, values

Specific Keywords: ethical, freedom, minority, human rights, ethicalness

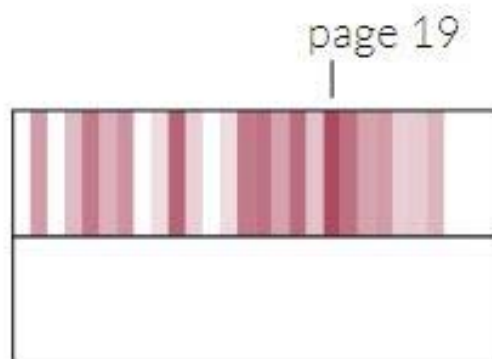# Data visualization: histograms

France (78 pages)

page 17

Generic Keywords: citizens, communication, ensure, population, priorities, priority, professionals, quarantine, resources, social, solidarity, values

Specific Keywords: ethical, stigmatisation

Data visualization: histograms
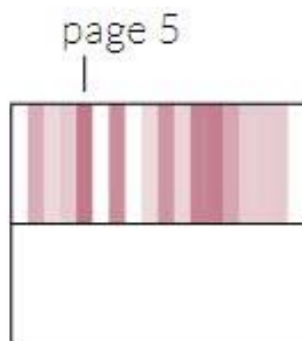

Hungary (28 pages)

page 19

Generic Keywords: ensure, isolation, population, protection, staff

Specific Keywords: zero keywords

Data visualization: histograms
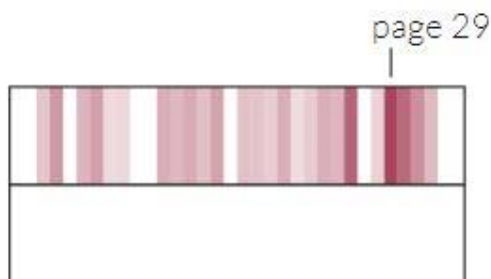
Iceland (18 pages)

page 5

Generic Keywords: legal, professional, professionals, protection, reduce, social

Specific Keywords: zero keywords

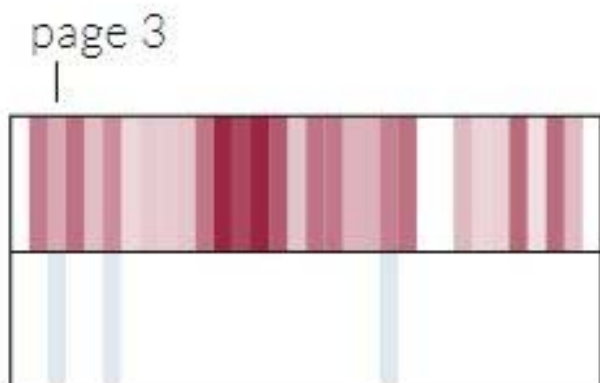# Data visualization: histograms

Ireland (34 pages)

page 29

Generic Keywords: borders, categories, closures, isolation, legal, reduce, resources, social

Specific Keywords: zero keywords
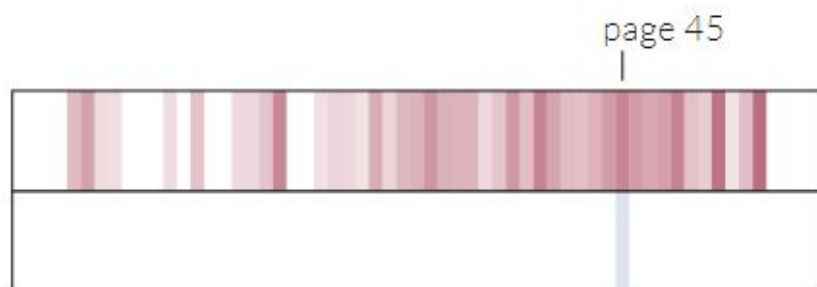
Data visualization: histograms

Italy (32 pages)

page 3

Generic Keywords: ensure, legal, limit, social, surveillance

Specific Keywords: ethical

Data visualization: histograms

Spain (59 pages)

page 45

Generic Keywords: ensure, individual, isolation, legal, limited, priority, protection, quarantine, reduce
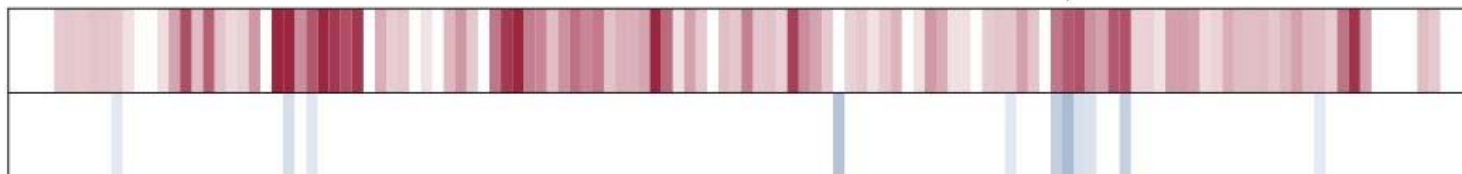
Specific Keywords: freedom, human rights

Data visualization: histograms

Switzerland (128 pages)

page 93
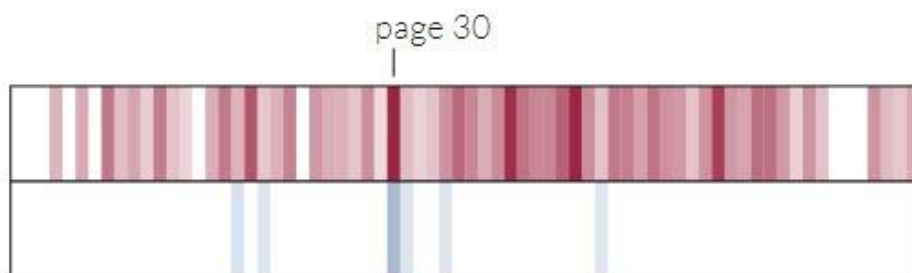

Generic Keywords: ensure, individual, population, priority, quarantine, resources

Specific Keywords: fairness, ethical, freedom, stigmatisation, transparency

Data visualization: histograms

United Kingdom (70 pages)

page 30

Generic Keywords: ensure, individual, individuals, limitations, professional, protection, resources, social, staff, values

Specific Keywords: ethical, freedom

Results

The semantic analysis showed:

- **little concern for ethical aspects**
- **lack of discussion on ethical issues**

in most pandemic plans developed from European countries, except for Switzerland, United Kingdom, Czech Republic and France.

Results

Ethical issues are:

- **just mentioned in some pandemic plans, like in the Italian and Spanish ones.**

- **are discussed more extensively in Swiss, English, Czech and French pandemic plans.**

- **Only Switzerland, UK and France dedicated a specific section – also included in the index – to ethical questions.**

Results

In all national pandemic plans examined there are contents which could be related to ethical issues.

For instance, the words "isolation" and "quarantine" are mentioned in all documents examined, but mostly as measures aimed at limiting the spread of the diseases. Only some plans consider the ethical implications of these measures which limit personal freedom.

Results

Similarly, the word "borders" would require ethical observations too.

Although the enjoyment of particular human rights may be limited in exceptional circumstances, the focus on the dignity of the human being must always be a priority in national pandemic influenza plans.

Final considerations

Ethical issues have a great impact also on the spread of diseases. Despite awareness of this relevance, this analysis clearly shows that they are still underestimated in pandemic plans.

Only 4 plans (Switzerland, United Kingdom, Czech Republic and France) among those available in English on the ECDC website, have a dedicated section to this topic, including ethical issues among the main principles of a pandemic plan.

This is even more relevant since the analysis revealed multiple areas of possible ethical interest within the different plans.

Final considerations

Despite this analysis has some limits, however, it may represent a useful tool to guide future drafters of pandemic plans.

It aims at encouraging debate on the necessity to update all national pandemic plans including ethical and other SiS issues, such as gender and participatory governance, which have proved to be of great relevance in case of epidemics and pandemics.

Thank you for your attention!