The French response to COVID-19: intrinsic difficulties at the interface of science, public health, and policy

Faced with criticisms, French authorities claim that their policy towards the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) pandemic has been evidence-based—they appointed an advisory board of 11 scientists to help manage the crisis. However, in situations where decision makers face radical uncertainty, sticking to conventional approaches might jeopardise the science-policy interface.

First, just looking at the evolution of confirmed cases does not allow drawing of real-time lessons for policy. Although the outbreak started concomitantly in South Korea, Italy, and France—on Feb 1, 2020, the number of confirmed cases of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) were 12 in South Korea, six in France. France did not have the logistic difficulties at the interface of science, public health, and policy.