

European Health Forum Gastein discusses new health and social needs in changing European societies

Bad Hofgastein, 30 September, 2016 —Today wraps up the European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG), which welcomed ministers, NGOs, patients, professors and healthcare professionals to explore solutions to Europe’s changing demographic landscape. *Demographics and Diversity in Europe - New Solutions for Health* was the theme of the 19th edition of the EHFG, and the programme created a unique opportunity for people from across the continent and beyond to discuss the European-wide phenomena of ageing populations and increased migration. In over 15 sessions and interactive workshops, covering 35 hours of debate by over 500 participants, the following themes took centre-stage.

The underlying sentiment conveyed in the plenary sessions was that Europe is at a time of change and of uncertainty. The way forward needs to be found in solutions that fully integrate health considerations into all areas of policy making, from employment and social services to cities and the refugee camps.

Diverse Europe. Today, 1 in 7 people is a migrant. Rather than a burden upon health systems, participants highlighted the opportunities that arise from increased diversity, and the potential to counteract many of the fears associated with ageing populations in Europe, as migrants tend to be young, healthy and at working age.

However, speakers including representatives from the World Health Organization Regional Office in Europe stressed that rebuilding trust in Europe and its political systems is of critical importance. Globalisation and increased diversity have enriched Europe, but people have been left behind. In the face of rising populist movements, and the fall-out from Brexit, improved social services and greater societal equity are necessary.

Healthy Europe. People may be living longer, but this does not always mean they are healthy. To combat the growing prevalence of non-communicable diseases like diabetes, cancer and cardiovascular disease in older people, as well as mental conditions, many EHFG participants agreed on the need for more holistic and calculated approaches to health care, better linked with social and welfare needs. Pointing at bringing a wide range of stakeholders (from politicians to patients, as well as mayors and even historians) to the table to set in place policies and roll out programmes.

Most EHFG participants rejected a doom-and-gloom vision of ageing populations in Europe. Rather, speakers from the European Commission and special guest Paul Krugman, Nobel Laureate in Economics, highlighted the opportunities arising from greying baby-boomers in Europe. The “silver economy” is the third largest economy in the world, and has the potential to drive growth and employment in the region. Healthcare, a service most used by the elderly, already accounts for nearly 10% of the European workforce, from highly skilled workers to manual labour.

Smart Europe. Older people means social needs will not be getting smaller, but they can get smarter. Workshops and panel discussions debated the best means to provide access to healthcare in a sustainable and affordable manner. Many highlighted the importance of public-private partnerships, new technologies and more innovative and effective policies to better meet social needs.

The 2017 edition of EHFG (4-6 October) will mark the forum's 20th anniversary, which will continue to create a platform for discussion and provide impetus for new thinking around creating a better future for Europe's health.

Photos can be found at: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/ehfg/collections/72157673152972352/>

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact:

press@ehfg.org

+ 32 2 321 90 16

Notes to the Editor

Please find below an annex of quotes from high-level speakers at the European Health Forum Gastein.

ZSUZSANNA JAKAB - Regional Director, WHO EUROPE

"I consider Gastein to be a very important place that brings together all the stakeholders and where we can discuss all major policies that impact health. We can't necessarily do this in the formal structures of the WHO."

"We need to regain the trust of European citizens. And in order to do that we need to address the problems that are of most concern to them. First of all, unemployment and youth unemployment. Secondly, the economic and social inequalities that starve the European society – this is a very important and very big issue. Also security, refugee and migration challenges. These are very complex issues, they need very strong leadership, unity and consensus. They need transparency in discussions and also clear communication to the public."

MARTIN SEYCHELL - Deputy Director General, DG SANTE, European Commission

"We need to invest more in health promotion and disease prevention as a first step, so that people can get old in good health and continue to stay active and productive for longer. We also need to develop new models of care that are tailored for new and evolving needs. Healthcare for the elderly needs to shift from reactive to proactive care, from in-hospital to community care, adopting person-centred and integrated care models, and digital solutions that are accessible to older users."

"Health should not only be seen as an expenditure which somehow needs to be kept under control. This would be a fatal mistake. Health, in the context of the European economic and social fabric, is a critical factor. It creates jobs. 10% of the European workforce is in health. These are not any jobs but

they are high-level jobs. We need an effective way of redistribution and avoiding exclusion from the job market.”

“There is a lot of inefficiency. We wait for people to become ill and then treat them. We could free up significant funding if we need to have a more proactive health system.”

PAMELA RENDI-WAGNER – Head of Department Public Health and Medical Affairs, Ministry of Health Austria

“While Austria has a high-quality health care system and enjoys a high absolute life expectancy, the number of healthy years of life are still lagging behind. We need to focus on reducing this gap by endorsing health and well-being. Determinants that have a decisive influence on health need to be given attention, i.e. education, employment, social security and environmental influences.”

“Austria is one of the most cost intense healthcare systems in Europe. But despite considerable investments, health outputs and life expectancy is still low in Austria. With Austria’s health policy reform, we are making progress; and while it’s not easy, we are getting health onto the agenda of the Ministry of social affairs and employment. Political leadership, multi-stakeholder engagement and bottom up approaches, as well as being able to grab opportunities when they arise and move quickly are all success factors in delivering on our health reform.”

PAUL KRUGMAN – Winner of Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences

“The growing ratio of older people to working people is serious but I would argue as not insurmountable. There are sufficient changes that we can make in healthcare and in retirement systems to make it doable.”

“The EU, as a whole, is already a zone of declining working age population.”

“I argue that the problem of healthcare, which is part of the broader problem of retirement in a demographically changing world, is solvable but it requires more flexible thinking, more disciplined thinking than what we have been seeing so far in our policy discussions”

HELMUT BRAND – President of EHFG

“Demography is not destiny. Costs are not set by values. The amount of money we have to spend for our social system is not determined by what values we have but by how we manage our services. There are different ways to financing the pension system. There is no right or wrong way – you have to adapt to the current situation. We are in a time of demographic change, let’s adapt and seize the opportunity.”

“The fundamental discussions taking place today around the future of European policy are a real opportunity. We have the chance to review the way the EU is engaged in health, social welfare, employment and beyond, for the better of our societies. This year’s Gastein Forum is about finding how we can seize what demographic change and increased diversity have to offer, and make sure no one is left behind.

MOJCA GOBEC – Director General, Ministry of Health, Slovenia

“It is crucial to plan carefully with the workforce. Migration is an opportunity but we have seen that it is difficult to communicate the positive aspects. It is important to discuss this in a European context.”

VYTENIS ANDRIUKAITIS – Commissioner for Health and Food Safety

“Demographic change is not only the responsibility of health ministers. Ministers of education, employment, transport, environment, urban planning, city mayors – all actors are facing the same issues of demographic change.”

“Definition of health means social, mental, physical well-being – not about sick people.”

TOMAS DRUCKER – Minister of Health, Slovakia

“One of our priorities is the availability and shortages of medicines. It is a crucial and very critically relevant for patients and the government. We are challenging how to promote new innovative tracks into the national systems to ensure affordability.”

“People who are older have a high probability of non-communicable diseases. We will have people who should be an active part of the economic system in 70 years but they will be unable to do so. Prevention is one of the most important part.”

CHRISTOPHER FEARNE – Minister of Health, Malta

“Diversity is intrinsic to medical practice. Every country has its own challenges in the health sector. Every region, city and family has their own different challenges but if you look across Europe there are a number of situations and challenges that are common for all Europeans”.

“We are proposing a voluntary framework [on food reformulations]. We are proposing guidelines which will serve as a point of reference for different communities. Eventually, we believe they will serve what the NGOs, communities, patients themselves need to lobby governments.”

KARIN KADENBACH – Member of the European Parliament

“Everyone has a right to good healthcare, so it is vital that medicines are available in the EU to all citizens at a fair, equitable and affordable price.”

“Better access to innovative medicines and treatments is something that is necessary. We feel that this is not guaranteed at the moment and much needs to be done.”

“This Gastein is really a place where engaged people come together with so much expertise.”

[On Brexit]

MARTIN MCKEE – Professor of European Public Health & Medical Director ECOHOST – The Centre for Health and Social Change



“The government has not thought things through. The British Government has totally failed to understand the complexity of the rights of EU citizens living in the UK.”

“In relation to health, it’s not just about the right of EU doctors to come to the UK, we risk losing all the protections that have been set up over the years to ensure their clinical competence, established with the Alert System.”

“Each day, each of the three Brexit ministers display their abject ignorance of the basics of international trade.”

“EU research funding is important, not just because of the amount it represents in the UK, but because the EU has supplied ¾ of the growth in funding in the last decade for UK universities.”

PHILIP HINES - Programme Assistant, European Policy Centre and Member of the Young Forum Gastein Network

“I despair if the Europe Commission, European Council, European Parliament are not there to promote Europe. Maybe they should be careful, and maybe they should not wait until there are referendums, as that runs the risk of being misinterpreted.”

SHADA ISLAM - Director of Policy, Friends of Europe

“It’s been built on lies, it’s a powerful narrative. It encourages fear. The narrative needs to be countered. Roadmaps and blue prints won’t do it. We need to bring passion and emotion into this emotional debate.”

“Brussels needs to connect with the citizen. Brussels has to engage with citizens. They need to go on TV, go to the schools, national parliaments. What are these commissioners doing? They need to go out there and engage. Europe is not lost - its leaders are lost.”

FABIO PAMMOLLI - Professor, IMT Institute for Advanced Studies, Lucca

“At the regulatory level, it has to be seen what will happen with the European Medical Agency and the regulatory practices in the UK and continental Europe in the future.”
