

## Event Summary

### European Parliament Interest Group on Innovation in Health & Social Care meeting

#### Strengthening the resilience and resource efficiency of EU health systems:

#### A call for an integrated approach

*The synergies between Horizon Europe, the EU4Health programme and Digital Europe will ensure a health transformation in Europe. — MEP István Ujhelyi*

The meeting of the European Parliament's Interest Group on Innovation in Health and Social Care entitled "**Strengthening the resilience and resource efficiency of EU health systems: A call for an integrated approach**" took place on 12 May 2021 via videoconference. Chaired by HFE Vice President Dr Neda Milevska-Kostova, the event intended to gather EU policymakers, academia, and representatives from healthcare associations and patients' groups to deliberate on how to improve European Health Systems to make it truly patient-centred, specifically to strengthen the capability of the European Union for prevention and preparedness to tackle future disease outbreaks. The debate was aimed at formulating concrete proposals and exchange of best practice for the future of a strong European Health Union.

The meeting was hosted by **MEP István Ujhelyi (Hungary, S&D)**, who started his presentation by reminding participants that the *EU4Health* programme offers better protection against crises while also improving health and fostering innovation. MEP Ujhelyi added that the epidemic has highlighted the need for resilience in Europe, given the rising tide of medicine shortages in the EU caused by Europe's dependency on outside countries. He highlighted the need for access to data, enhanced cooperation, and the digitalisation of the medical supply chain, as well as better cross-border training programmes. MEP Ujhelyi reminded the audience that the Conference of the Future of Europe will offer a good opportunity to enhance healthcare systems while not undermining member states' competencies.

The first part of the meeting focused on supporting integrated and coordinated work between EU Member States. The discussion was led by **Dr Loukianos Gatzoulis**, Policy Analyst at DG SANTE of the European Commission, who underlined what is coming out of the COVID-19 crisis; a debate, which is about reimagining public health, redesigning our health systems to be more resilient to future shocks, as well as a big opportunity for stronger collaboration between countries and across borders.

Dr. Gatzoulis put emphasis on strengthening primary care, integrating health and social care, and taking advantage of the potential of innovations. He added that the EU could be making better use of knowledge brokering, exchange of best practices, and offering hands on technical, and very importantly financial support from the European programmes.

The attendees then analysed some policy actions needed to reinforce the healthcare workforce. **Professor Maurizio Cecconi**, President of the European Society of Intensive Care Medicine (ESICM), welcomed the International Nursing Day 2021 and applauded the work being carried out by nurses across Europe. Prof. Cecconi stressed that the pandemic was a challenge, and that ICUs were operating at 150 to 200%, and thus required many extra shifts. He highlighted that a major issue was the lack of staff and resources in ICUs during the pandemic. He recommended further collaboration between research and practice, with further cooperation between healthcare systems and the enablement of free movement of intensivists and other specialists within the EU. **Maria Teresa Parisotto**, the Executive Director of the European Specialist Nurses Organisation (ESNO), followed this discussion and stated that an American survey showed that 87% of nurses feared going to work during the pandemic, anticipating an analogy in the European context. She noted that COVID-19 was not only responsible for the 'chaos', but also for the reduction of healthcare funding and salaries, as well as the increased workload, thus leading to a lack of morale. In her view, a new Health Vision 2030

should be developed with interprofessional teams, through the integration of health networks as well as a better data collection and predictive models.

The following panel provided a space to discuss actions on disease prevention, health promotion and how to address health determinants. **Dineke Zeegers Paget**, Executive Director of the European Public Health Association (EUPHA), highlighted the **importance of prevention in healthcare systems**. She stressed that the healthcare systems should better focus on lifestyle and health determinants, such as alcohol, tobacco, drugs, and gaming, as well as on tackling chronic diseases and health literacy. Ms Zeegers added that it would be the role of individuals but also of governments and the industry to truly change how healthcare operates for the better.

Ms **Hilkka Karkkainen**, President of GAMIAN-Europe, intervened and highlighted the need for the introduction of mental health skills curricula in schools and the development of free-access mental health centres that are open to the public. She stressed the need to stop treating mental health as any other chronic condition and highlighted the work of GAMIAN-Europe on a campaign to increase the awareness of mental health following the pandemic. She called on the EU to develop an EU Strategy on Mental Health.

The last panel addressed the implementation of best practices and promoting data sharing and the contribution was made by **Ray Pinto**, Policy Director for Digital Transformation at DIGITALEUROPE. He highlighted the importance of data will help understand the issues that occur in European healthcare systems, and how data from European citizens could fuel the development of many digital technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI). He suggested the development of electronic health records that could help healthcare accessibility across the EU, but he also noted the fragmented internal market that will prevent the full potential of the European Data Space, highlighting specifically the exceptions to Member States in the GDPR. He added that to reduce bias and error with machine learning requires large datasets, and that data rules applied in Member States is both protective as it is preventive of data flows, making smaller health AI companies look for data elsewhere to train algorithms. Moreover, he stressed that the European Parliament should aim at ensuring transborder data sharing and anticipate the negotiation between EU Member States and the institutions to ensure the full potential of the European Data Space is used for better health and wellbeing of all citizens.

**In the ensuing debate, panellists remarked that:**

- The Recovery and Resilience Facility will bring a more operational dimensions to the European Semester processes and the Country-Specific Recommendations, which refer also to healthcare workforce.
- Further investment in most health areas is needed, including more doctors in primary care, as well as enhanced support for multidisciplinary teams. Taking into consideration the resource limitations, where possible, to enable free movement of specialists across the European health Union.
- There is a need for interoperability of healthcare systems in Europe with further connection between members states, including enablement of free movement of specialists, based on standardised competence frameworks.
- As part of the resilience and preparedness of healthcare systems for future pandemics and emergencies, consideration should be given to reformulation of medical curricula and health education, including more comprehensive programs for training healthcare professionals as well as providing literacy programs for patients.
- Mental health is as important as physical health, and systems should reconsider the approaches, especially in providing community support and literacy/education to patients to enable them to recognise mental health problems at early stages as well as to act as expert patients skilled to help other mental health patients.
- Data and medical innovations will have a crucial role to play in tackling the current issues in healthcare, but also in integration of health and social care systems, in particular to help address acute situations and citizens' needs at community level.

- There is a need for openness of data and for reconsidering data protection policies so to enable rather than hamper data use. Digital transformation should not be perceived as merely digitalisation – IT technologies should be embraced as enablers for faster recovery from the current pandemic, as well as for building back better and more prepared health systems.