

CoR INTERREGIONAL GROUP ON HEALTH & WELL-BEING

Constitutive Meeting

Tuesday, 8 February, 11h00-12h00

Online meeting

Minutes

11.00 Welcome and introduction by the Chair, Birgitta Sacrédeus

The Chair, **Birgitta Sacrédeus**, welcomed all the participants and explained that the purpose of the constitutive meeting was to discuss topics for the upcoming meetings.

11.05 Open debate on topics for upcoming meetings

Valentina Polyas opened the discussion by presenting the calendar of the Interregional Group meeting for 2022. She explained that the next meeting will take place on 22 April. The other meetings will be organised tentatively in July, October (during the European Week of Regions and Cities) and November/December. Then, she gave an overview of the meetings held in 2021, which focused on the following topics: “Discussing the future opinions of CoR on strengthening the mandate of the ECDC and on Pharmaceutical Strategy” (2 March 2021), “The fight against cancer: a challenge for the European Health Union” (16 June 2021), “Healthy ageing in the EU: The potential of digital innovation for elderly health and social care” (12 October 2021), and “Supporting mental health in the EU in pandemic and post-pandemic.” (25 November 2021). Finally, she proposed the State of Health in the EU (published in December 2021) as the potential topic for the first meeting of the Group. It is a rich source of information about the Member States' healthcare systems performed and are performing in the face of health challenges.

Ms Sacrédeus agreed on the importance of this report, which provides an umbrella in which to reflect also on the responses to the post-pandemic, which, in her opinion, remains a crucial topic to consider. Then, she opened the floor to the Interregional Group's members.

Jelena Drenjanin drew attention to two topics. First, she stressed the importance of mental health as a tough challenge to address in pandemic and post-pandemic time for regional and local systems.

According to her, this topic should be combined and fed into the topic of inclusion, participation and democracy, as there is the need for people affected by mental health disorders to be taken back to society. Unlike physical diseases, whose prevention and treatment strategies are clearly known, mental health is a very sensitive issue and requires different approaches depending on the social category of reference (children, elderly, etc.) Secondly, she underlined the topic of the gender dimension in health.

Ms Sacrédeus agreed on emphasizing mental health, especially from a post-pandemic perspective. Concerning the gender issue, she stated that particular attention could be paid to drugs and treatments.

Jean Luc Vanraes seconded the idea to focus on mental health and added that an interesting insight could regard mental health and the use of social media. Moreover, he brought the topic of health expenditure and cost-effectiveness to the table. He emphasised that there are much data concerning health expenditure and all the Member States are committed to optimizing their interventions. In this respect, it could be interesting to look at the benchmarking between different countries and regions to explore how health authorities use the health budget efficiently.

Ms Sacrédeus linked the topic of cost-effectiveness to digitalisation, since the EU foresees many resources to improve the efficiency of healthcare systems. So, she proposed to combine the topic of digital health with cost-effectiveness. Concerning social media, she informed those presents that, in Sweden, private investors are very successful in delivering apps. Swedish citizens can use these apps and directly pay for conversations with private doctors. Even though public doctors have also started using apps, this situation leads to money losses for the public health system. She also pointed out the importance of digital tools also for mental health. She reminded those presents that, in the meeting of last November, one of the points emerged was the cost-effectiveness of having remote consultation.

Ms Drenjanin agreed with the relevance of the use of social media linked to the topic of mental health. To complement the discussion, she drew attention also to another point related to the mental health challenge: the exploding use of drugs.

After this first round of opinions, **Ms Polyas** gave an overview of the initiatives expected to be adopted in 2022 by the European Commission and some legislative files. In particular, she mentioned

the Update of the Cancer Screening Recommendation and the Communication on a European care strategy. In terms of the legislative process, she referred to the Pharmaceutical Strategy, the extension of the mandate of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), the European Health Data Space, and the Communication on Building a European Health Union: Reinforcing the EU's resilience for cross-border health threats.

Then, she expressed her support on the importance of gender topic and stressed that it could be placed under different perspectives, for example in the framework of Personalised Medicine. Moreover, cost-efficiency is a crucial topic on which EUREGHA is investing a lot of energy, especially concerning outcome measurement. It can be linked to the topic of value-based healthcare. She stated that this subject could be addressed with the support of OECD, which can give an overview on the allocation of different resources and health expenditures. She expressed her concerns regarding the availability of Member States in participating in the meeting, but OECD could contribute to the discussion with valuable inputs. The agenda of the meeting can be built around the topics of outcomes measurement and the efficiency of care delivery. She added that the debate could also follow a disease-focused approach (for example, efficiency in cancer). She concluded that many organizations are working on the gender issue at the EU level, and it could be a nice way for the Interregional Group to connect with this community.

Ms Sacrédeus asked when the European Week of Regions and Cities will take place and what are the topics for this year.

Mr Di Donato stressed that the European Week of Regions and Cities will focus on four main topics: green transition, territorial cohesion, digital transition, and youth empowerment. He informed those presents that this year marks the 20th anniversary of the EWRC, and the organisers highlighted the importance of using this event as a showcase for best practices, achievements and challenges in territorial cooperation in the last twenty years. The digital transition represents another umbrella to address health-related topics. The format will be online by default, and there will be the possibility of organising a standard workshop or a more institutional workshop (new category compared to the previous year), which will have broader visibility.

Ms Sacrédeus affirmed that the European Week could be the ideal setting to organise an event on digital health and cost-effectiveness.

Ms Drenjanin agreed with Ms Sacrédeus. In the EU, we are witnessing a fast-growing research on automatisisation and digitalisation, and there is a need for EU countries to discuss the opportunities and how to use the resources more wisely. Among the funding tools we have at our disposal, a lot of money goes to the development and empowerment of actors and companies in research and digitalisation. Investing wisely in this area would benefit both the whole society and the companies themselves. She expressed her hopes to see close and fruitful collaboration between public authorities and the private sectors and foster a debate on the private sector's role in improving the public sector and public solutions. She reported an example from her country (Sweden), where, a couple of years ago, private companies cooperated with the public sector in the development of solutions for elderly care.

Mr Vanraes supported the point on the public-private collaboration raised by Ms Drenjanin. Then, he came back on the gender issue, drawing attention to prevention. In his experience, ten years ago, they had a problem of low participation in the breast cancer screening campaign despite being totally free. Among the factors that influenced the choice of women was the cultural aspect. He pointed out that there is still a problem of awareness in Europe. In his opinion, it might be interesting to see how the different countries handled this issue.

Ms Drenjanin added the point on prostate cancer, which is one of the diseases in which the gender issue seems to be prevalent since men seem reluctant to go to the doctor to demonstrate masculinity.

On this point, **Ms Sacrédeus** informed those presents that she had a meeting with a pressure group on prostate cancer last year, where it was stressed that it is often women who asked men to go to the doctor. Men are less inclined to go to the doctor.

At the end of the debate, **Ms Sacrédeus** made her proposal for the upcoming meetings:

- First meeting (22 April) – State of Health in the EU
- Second meeting (tentatively in July) - Gender and health
- Third meeting (October, during the EWRC) - Digitalisation of healthcare systems, with a specific focus on cost-effectiveness
- Post-covid, with a specific focus on mental health

Ms Polylas stressed that focusing the last appointment of the year on post-covid and mental health would be very interesting as it would allow the Interregional Group to see how the debate around this theme evolved compared to the previous year (referring to the meeting of 25 November 2021).

Referring to this last meeting, **Ms Drenjanin** reflected on the possibility of having different focuses based on specific categories and dimensions (for example, children, workforce, or elderly).

Mr Vanraes made a last point on the cost-effectiveness, underlying that it is a cross-cutting topic. Concerning post-pandemic, he expressed his support to deal with it during the last meeting of 2022 and added that this meeting could be a window also to discuss the post-traumatic effects of COVID-19 from a physical point of view.

Ms Sacrédeus replied by saying that the topic of rehabilitation from COVID-19 could be addressed both from a mental and physical point of view.

The participants agreed on the programme proposed by the Chair. Then, she thanked all the participants for participating in the debate and closed the meeting.

11.40 End of the meeting