



# CONFERENCE REPORT

## Sustainable Societies: Health and Social Investment in the EU

Committee of the Regions, Brussels  
7 June 2016



This conference is supported by the European Commission, through the EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI 2014-2020)

*Sustainable societies do better. Investing in the wellbeing of people and communities, building resilience and preventing problems pay off.* This has been the baseline of our conference on ‘Sustainable Societies: Health and Social Investment in the EU’ hosted by the Committee of the Regions and supported by the European Commission EaSI programme in Brussels on 7 June 2016.

In order to take stock of the current UN instruments (SDGs<sup>1</sup> and WHO Health 2020<sup>2</sup>), EU and EU member state tools (the EU Semester, the Social Pillar<sup>3</sup> and the relevant funds and initiatives), and to see how the European Commission is able to advance investments for a sustainable society, we invited Dr Claudia Stein<sup>4</sup> from WHO Europe, Mr Karl-Friedrich Falkenberg<sup>5</sup> from the European Political Strategy Centre, Ms Manuela Geleng<sup>6</sup> and Mr Jurgen Scheftlein<sup>7</sup> from the European Commission, and Mr Thomas Dominique, Chair of the Social Protection Committee.



Presenting examples and good practices of investment from EU member states and regions, we were honoured to have Ms Cathy Weatherup<sup>8</sup> from Wales, UK, Ms Elena Andradás<sup>9</sup> from Spain, and Mr Frykman<sup>10</sup> and Ms Rahmberg<sup>11</sup> from Sweden with us.



Ms Nicoline Tamsma<sup>12</sup>, EuroHealthNet President and Ms Caroline Costongs, Managing Director of EuroHealthNet acted as chairs of the two sessions, and Mr Bosse Pettersson<sup>13</sup>, Vice-President of EuroHealthNet delivered the conclusions of the event.

The conference attracted a wide audience working at NGOs, EU member state governments, national and regional authorities, EU institutions, the academia and the media. 116 people attended from around 25 countries.

Nicoline Tamsma (EuroHealthNet), chair

<sup>1</sup> Information about the SDGs, i.e. the Sustainable Development Goals, can be found at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-policy/health-2020-the-european-policy-for-health-and-well-being/about-health-2020>

<sup>3</sup> You can read about the European Pillar of Social Rights at [http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/towards-european-pillar-social-rights\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/towards-european-pillar-social-rights_en)

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<sup>5</sup> Mr Falkenberg is Hors Class Senior Advisor for Sustainable Development at the European Political Strategy Centre of the European Commission

<sup>6</sup> Ms Geleng is Acting Director of Social Affairs and Head of Unit of the Social Investment Strategy Unit of DG EMPL, European Commission

<sup>7</sup> Mr Scheftlein is policy officer in the Health Determinants and Inequality Unit of DG SANTE, European Commission

<sup>8</sup> Ms Weatherup is Head of Health Inequalities and International Health in the Welsh Government

<sup>9</sup> Ms Andradás is Director General at the Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality of Spain

<sup>10</sup> Mr Frykman is Senior Advisor of the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions

<sup>11</sup> Ms Rahmberg is Public Health Director of the Region Västra Götaland in Sweden

<sup>12</sup> Ms Tamsma works as Coordinating Advisor for International Affairs at the National Institute of Public Health and the Environment (RIVM), the Netherlands

<sup>13</sup> Mr Pettersson is Senior Public Health Policy Advisor of the National Board of Health and Welfare in Sweden

# FINAL AGENDA



13:00 **Registration, networking and light lunch**

14:00 **Welcome by EuroHealthNet and Chair**, Mrs. Nicoline Tamsma, President of EuroHealthNet and Coordinating Advisor for International Affairs at the National Institute of Public Health and the Environment (RIVM), the Netherlands

## Setting the scene

- Dr Claudia Stein, Director of the Division of Information, Evidence, Research and Innovation, WHO Europe - Lessons from the European Health Report and implications for sustainable societies
- Mr Karl-Friedrich Falkenberg, Hors Class Senior Adviser for Sustainable Development, European Political Strategy Centre, European Commission – The Sustainable Development Goals - offering the prerequisites of a healthy life for everyone

14:40 **Policy Debate:** The EU landscape is changing. Is the EC able to advance investments for a sustainable society at national and local level? How?

- Ms Manuela Geleng, Acting Director / Head of Unit, DG EMPL, European Commission
- Mr Jürgen Scheftlein, Policy Officer, DG SANTE, European Commission
- Mr Thomas Dominique, Chair of the Social Protection Committee

15:40 **Coffee / tea break**

16:00 **Examples of investment from EU member states and regions** (Chair: Caroline Costongs, Managing Director of EuroHealthNet)

- Ms Cathy Weatherup, Head of Health Inequalities and International Health, Welsh Government, UK and a video message from Ms Sophie Howe, Future Generations Commissioner for Wales
- Ms Elena Andradas, Director General, Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality, Spain
- Mr Jonas Frykman, Senior Advisor, Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, and Ms Elisabeth Rahmberg, Public Health Director, Region Västra Götaland, Sweden

17:00 **Final debate**

17:20 **Conclusions**, Mr. Bosse Pettersson, Vice-President of EuroHealthNet, Senior Public Health Policy Advisor, National Board of Health and Welfare, Sweden

17:30 **End of conference**



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Committee of the Regions

## Setting the scene

How well is Europe doing? What are the areas where Europeans have achieved progress and where do we lag behind? These were the first questions answered by **Dr Stein** who delivered an alluring presentation starting by introducing the European Health Report. She cited W. Edwards Deming's words saying that "Without data, you're just another person with an opinion", and emphasized that what is not measured, will not get done.

She stated that on the basis of the data of WHO, Europeans live longer and healthier lives than ever; however, that there are still unacceptable inequalities in health status between and within European countries, which "is something we really need to work on". She also mentioned that our continent scores highest globally on alcohol drinking, tobacco use and obesity, which present major risk factors.



Claudia Stein (WHO/Europe)

After declaring that the SDGs and Health2020 are fully aligned, she talked about the cultural contexts of wellbeing, and the work of the Expert Group on Cultural Context of Health and Wellbeing, which investigates cultural contexts of health more systematically and uses a multisectoral and multidisciplinary integrated research approach in order to provide policy briefs and a tool kit for policy makers. In order to tackle the current health information challenges, she also invited participants to join WHO's European Health Information Initiative (EHII), a multi-partner network with the goal of creating an integrated health information system for Europe.

She then passed over to **Mr Falkenberg**, who started his inspirational speech by saying that Europe has been the engine of the adoption of the SDGs; however, they have to be implemented universally, which presents a major challenge and "a major agenda for change, even for Europe". To achieve the Goals and to see the trends and progress, we need data and measurements.



Karl Falkenberg (European Political Strategy Centre)

He emphasized the need to get out of silos, take into account all the three pillars of sustainability<sup>14</sup> and bring together different dimensions, such as health and demographic change, ecology, environment, and the economic and social dimension. He added that cultural differences will become a challenge in the EU, and quoted Willy Brandt saying, "Europe will not survive as an island of wealth in a sea of poverty". A sustainable society is one that continues to live in peace, for which cultural integration is very important. We also need to tackle inequalities, as they are destabilizing our societies.

He then stated that our biggest challenge is that we have never lived in a period when we have had so much knowledge about the happenings of our world, yet we are not capable of converting this knowledge into preventive policies. We need new forms of governance, new rule of law and

<sup>14</sup> The UN 2005 World Summit on Social Development identified sustainable development goals, such as economic development, social development and environmental protection.

strengthen stakeholder participation. It is an immense and urgent task to achieve full association of all EU citizens, as, in order to implement the SDGs, we need the people to be on board.

The contributions of the keynote speakers generated a lot of comments and a wide variety of questions in the audience, who asked, among others, about the recommended measures of the European Political Strategy Centre based on its report on global challenges, whether we have the capacity to get out of the silos, and about the different approaches of Member States compared to international goals.

## The EU landscape

**Manuela Geleng** opened the first panel discussion by saying that “good health is not just a human right of the individual but it is also a necessity”. She described the shift brought about by the Social Investment Package in 2013 in putting emphasis on prevention and active inclusion, on investing in health, and on investing in children and young people in order to break the cycle of poverty and social exclusion.



Manuela Geleng (DG EMPL)

Then she talked about European Commission President Juncker’s plan regarding ‘the social triple A rating’ of the EU and the objectives of launching the consultations on the European Pillar of Social Rights<sup>15</sup> to take stock of our currently unmet social and employment-related challenges and the shortcomings of the present social acquis<sup>16</sup>.

She finished by mentioning the relevant EU funds, such as the European Structural and Investment Funds, to strengthen social and public health investments and to prevent poverty and social exclusion in the Member States.

**Jürgen Scheftlein** gave an insight into the work of DG SANTE’s Health Determinants and Inequality Unit to create better equity in health, which has been done in close collaboration with DG EMPL since 2009, when they developed a joint strategy to reduce health inequalities.

He then talked about developments of reducing health inequalities in several EU Member States, their former Joint Action programme with Member States, called Equity Action, to improve health equity, and how DG SANTE supports and encourages countries through diverse programmes and collaborations.

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<sup>15</sup> The initiative about the Social Pillar was announced by President Juncker in his State of the Union address on 9 September 2015, when he said that “We have to step up the work for a fair and truly pan-European labour market. (...) As part of these efforts, I will want to develop a European pillar of social rights, which takes account of the changing realities of the world of work. And which can serve as a compass for the renewed convergence within the euro area. The European pillar of social rights should complement what we have already jointly achieved when it comes to the protection of workers in the EU. I will expect social partners to play a central role in this process. I believe we do well to start with this initiative within the euro area, while allowing other EU Member States to join in if they want to do so.” The Pillar is planned to identify a number of essential principles common to euro area Member States, focusing on their needs and challenges in the field of employment and social policies.

<sup>16</sup> The EU social “acquis” is the binding and non-binding EU laws, treaties, regulations, directives, decisions and other declarations, resolutions, etc. defining the social policy of the EU.

He highlighted the severe challenges relating to health inequalities in the EU member states by giving examples of the health outcomes of several social groups, among others people with low education and people having low income, and talked about the financial burden to health and social welfare systems. He finished by stressing the importance of prevention programmes, e. g. a housing programme for homeless people, and how they contribute to the financial sustainability of support systems.



Jürgen Scheftlein (DG SANTE)

In his speech, **Thomas Dominique** stressed the importance of having the relevant indicators and data to monitor progress. He said that “we have to come out of our silos” and

consider all the dimensions of sustainability, not just the financial one. He added that the goals have to be accepted by the citizens as well and that in order to help implementation, we need good governance tools, such as the EU semester, which should monitor health and wellbeing and environmental aspects more thoroughly.



Thomas Dominique (SPC)

Speaking about the Open Method of Coordination, Mr Dominique said that more and more EU member states are taking ownership of the process in the area of social policy; however, regarding changing their health systems, they still remain quite reluctant.

After the presentations of the speakers, members of the audience were eager to know how balance could be achieved between the need of an increasing pension age and the stagnating employment environment for the school leavers, and whether the European Commission can successfully influence change in the Member States.

## Examples of investment from EU member states and regions



Caroline Costongs (EuroHealthNet), chair, and the speakers of the second panel, Cathy Weatherup (Wales) in the middle

The second panel discussion was opened by **Cathy Weatherup**, who talked about their year-long National Conversation called ‘the Wales We Want’ involving over 7000 stakeholders and resulting in passing the ‘Well-being of Future Generations Act’ in 2015. The way in which they developed the legislation was an important factor in achieving ‘buy in’ from both the public and politicians alike.

The Act sets out seven ambitious, cross-portfolio goals for a “prosperous, resilient, healthier, more equal and globally responsible Wales”, designates 44 public bodies in Wales to work together with people and communities to prevent problems in a more joined-up approach, and sets national indicators and milestones to measure progress.

Ms Weatherup’s speech was complemented by the video message of **Sophie Howe**, Future Generations Commissioner of Wales, saying that Wales is one of the first countries to embed sustainability in its constitution, to link SDGs to national legislation and make them legally binding.



Elena Andradas (Spain)

She was followed by the presentation of **Elena Andradas**, who explained the Spanish health promotion and prevention strategy and introduced the intersectoral system built around it. The objective of the Spanish strategy is to promote the health and wellbeing of the population by fostering healthy environments and lifestyles, and strengthening safety to prevent injuries.

Ms Andradas continued by mentioning Spain’s focus on children and the comprehensive approach of their related policies and interventions, such as life-style counselling through the primary healthcare system, positive parenting and reinforcing healthy nutrition, physical activity and life skills through education.

As one of the speakers representing Sweden, **Jonas Frykman** mentioned that sustainability in Sweden has been inspired by crucial documents, such as the work by Professor Sir Michael Marmot and the WHO Health 2020<sup>17</sup>.

He gave concrete examples on how SALAR has contributed to social sustainability, such as by setting up the National Social Sustainability Forum in 2014 to promote welfare development, to achieve more equity and sustainability, strategic cooperation and identify opportunities and challenges in this particular field.

Mr. Frykman has stated that social sustainability as a concept is more recognised at local and regional level in Sweden, but not so much at national level yet.

**Elisabeth Rahmberg** from the Västra Götaland region of Sweden stated that the main responsibilities of their public body are health care and regional development.

She indicated that Västra Götaland shares the same goals and indicators as the EU2020 strategy, and that school failures were highlighted as common concerns, for which two actions were implemented, those relating to early interventions that foster cognitive functions and those concerning developing and spreading methods to prevent school dropouts.



Jonas Frykman and Elisabeth Rahmberg (Sweden)

Ms Rahmberg stressed that in their approach, health and wellbeing are seen as a resource for children, and there is the need for arguments for comprehensive approaches that include all the relevant stakeholders. Likewise, she highlighted the interest of Västra Götaland in collecting views from other regions, stating that not many healthcare stakeholders see their immediate role in the work towards education for all children and youth.

Presentations delivered in the second panel prompted comments and questions in the audience as well. Participants wanted to know how collaboration between municipalities had been realized in Wales, how shift from cure to prevention had been achieved in Spain, what the different ways of achieving participatory engagement of target populations and stakeholders had been in Sweden, and what the biggest challenges regarding the transformative investments and the different proofs of their success had been in the different countries. There were further comments about the diverse ways of preventing school drop-outs, the successful methods of teaching interdisciplinary approach to people, and the realities of working across sectors against financial pressures.

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-policy/health-2020-the-european-policy-for-health-and-well-being/about-health-2020>

## Conclusions



Bosse Pettersson (Sweden), Elena Andradas and Caroline Costongs

In his conclusions, **Bosse Pettersson** talked about the challenge for public health professionals posed by the SDGs, which offer an invitation to renew public health in a wider political and social context, and might open up intersectoral collaboration.

He then made reference to the ideas board filled in by participants upon their arrival answering the question about the meaning and prerequisites of 'Sustainable Societies' and stated that the words "equity" and "solidarity" were frequently mentioned, which notions should also be adopted in the field of health. As for equity, he acknowledged that inequalities are growing, which shows that we have to rethink the way we have been working so far.

He emphasized that SDGs offer "an agenda of change", an agenda of transformation, which the sooner we start, the earlier we will achieve.



Ideas board: Answers to the question, *What does 'sustainable societies' mean to you?*

## Further information

For more information, please visit our website, where you can also find the PowerPoint presentations of the speakers and the video message of Ms Sophie Howe: [www.eurohealthnet.eu](http://www.eurohealthnet.eu)

The website on *health inequalities* of EuroHealthNet is: [http://www.health-inequalities.eu/HEALTHY/EN/about\\_hi/health\\_inequalities/in\\_the\\_eu/](http://www.health-inequalities.eu/HEALTHY/EN/about_hi/health_inequalities/in_the_eu/)

Information about the *SDGs*, i.e. the Sustainable Development Goals, can be found at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>

The website of *WHO Europe*: <http://www.euro.who.int/en/home>

You can read about *WHO's Health2020 policy framework* at: <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-policy/health-2020-the-european-policy-for-health-and-well-being/about-health-2020>

The website of the *European Political Strategy Centre*: [http://ec.europa.eu/epsc/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/epsc/index_en.htm)

The detailed activities of *DG EMPL* are listed at: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1>

You can read about the *European Pillar of Social Rights* at: [http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/towards-european-pillar-social-rights\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/towards-european-pillar-social-rights_en)

The website of *DG SANTE on health inequalities* can be found here: [http://ec.europa.eu/health/social\\_determinants/policy/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/health/social_determinants/policy/index_en.htm)

If you are interested in the work of the *Social Protection Committee*, you can find relevant information at: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=758>

For the *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015*, visit the following website: <http://gov.wales/topics/people-and-communities/people/future-generations-act/?lang=en>

About the *Health Promotion and Prevention Strategy of the Spanish National Health System*: <http://www.mssi.gob.es/profesionales/saludPublica/prevPromocion/Estrategia/docs/ExecutiveSummary.pdf>

The website of the *Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions* can be found here: <http://skl.se/tjanster/englishpages.411.html>

You can read about *Västra Götaland* at: <http://www.vgregion.se/en/Vastra-Gotalandsregionen/Home/>