

Ukraine crisis: Supporting neighbouring EU Member States and Moldova (health-related matters)



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Meeting Report

Tuesday, 12 April 2022 | 14:00 – 15:00 CET

Hosted by EuroHealthNet and the South-Eastern Europe Health Network (SEEHN).

Introduction

This report provides a summary of a virtual meeting that took place on Tuesday, 12 April 2022 from 14:00 – 15:00 CET hosted by EuroHealthNet and the South-Eastern Europe Health Network (SEEHN).

Objective

The purpose of this meeting was two-fold:

1. to discuss common and specific challenges that are currently being faced by those members of EuroHealthNet and SEEHN that border Ukraine in respect of public health.
2. to discuss what additional support is needed and how this support can be given, in terms of connections, information, joint advocacy and/or proposals for joint implementation measures of the public health institutes (such as in the area of mental health, etc). This meeting gathered national health institutes and authorities in the neighbouring Ukraine countries: Poland, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia and Moldova.

Participant representatives:

- **Svetlana Nicolescu**, Secretary of State of the Ministry of Health, Moldova.
- **Ion Chesov**, Head Department of Anaesthesia/Intensive Care, Chisinau Clinical Hospital, Moldova.
- **Tiberius Marius Bradatan**, Secretary of State of the Ministry of Health, Romania.
- **István Kovács**, Deputy Secretary of State of the Ministry of Health, Hungary.
- **Ágnes Dánélisz**, Head of Department, National Institute of Public Health, Hungary.
- **Ágnes Galgóczi**, Head of Unit, National Institute of Public Health, Hungary.
- **Péter Csizmadia**, Consultant at National Institute of Public Health, Hungary.
- **Ewa Nowacka**, Deputy Director of Department of International Cooperation, Ministry of Health, Poland.
- **Daniela Kállayová**, Senior Officer at Department of Public Health of the Ministry of Health and member of the Executive Board EuroHealthNet, Slovakia.
- **Plamen Dimitrov**, Deputy Director, National Center of Public Health and Analyses, member Executive Board EuroHealthNet and SEEHN Alternate National Coordinator, Bulgaria.
- **Dunja Gruntar Golanda**, Senior Expert, Ministry of Health and SEEHN National Coordinator, Slovenia.
- **Mojca Gabrijelčič Blenkuš**, Senior Expert at the National Institute of Public Health and President of EuroHealthNet, Slovenia.

Apologies:

- **Angel Kunchev**, Chief State Health Inspector, Ministry of Health SEEHN national coordinator, Bulgaria.

Organisation representatives:

- **Caroline Costongs (chair)**, **Dorota Sienkiewicz** and **Vania Putatti**, EuroHealthNet.
- **Mira Dasic (chair)** and **Vesna Arsova**, SEEHN Secretariat.

1. Opening

Mira Dasic, Director SEEHN Secretariat.

- SEEHN is a network that was established more than 20 years ago. It is an organisation based on solidarity and cooperation across the Southeast Europe (SEE) region. It represents an interregional platform for governments, with forums periodically organised at ministerial level.
- As the war in Ukraine began in February 2022, SEEHN sought to find modalities that were within the competence of the organisation. These modalities primarily supported its Member States (MSs) which were directly affected by the crisis with particular focus on public health.
- SEEHN and EuroHealthNet's partnership fosters dialogue and cooperation, putting forward common public health goals that improve the delivery of preventive solutions in such settings.
- SEEHN expresses gratitude to the countries that host refugees.



Caroline Costongs, Director EuroHealthNet.

- EuroHealthNet stresses the importance of enhancing cross-border collaboration on health, equity and wellbeing, especially in the context of the crisis.
- The organisation is based in Brussels and liaises with policymakers who share valued learning from each other whilst providing a space for dialogue.
- The purpose of this meeting was to discuss how EuroHealthNet and SEEHN can be of any added value to the work of those countries who are on the frontline of welcoming refugees. Both organisations have the potential to provide additional support from within the European Union (EU) and further international settings.

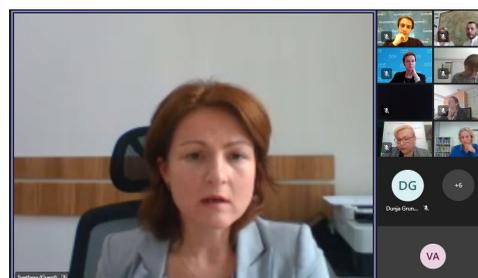


2. Roundtable

MOLDOVA

Svetlana Nicolescu, Secretary of State of the Ministry of Health, Moldova.

- Since the beginning of the conflict, over 400 thousand Ukrainians have crossed the border with Moldova, many transiting to EU countries. However, it is likely that many will now stay in Moldova.
- Many refugees are currently in accommodation centres across the country.



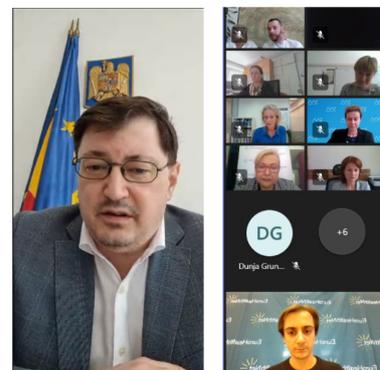
- As in many other countries, most of the refugees are women, children and the elderly, all of whom are often in need of care and protection.
- All refugees are currently entitled to free healthcare, especially to ensure continuity for chronic and maternity care.
- Medical care is provided as refugees enter the countries: medical teams are readily available to set up and provide care to those showing needs (e.g., COVID, injuries, etc.)
- The most acute medical needs (e.g., chronic conditions such as diabetes, CVDs, etc.) are addressed through the primary/community health care system as well as at hospital level. Although Moldova is experiencing challenges in providing highly specialised medical care (especially for oncology patients, radiotherapy, hemodialysis, pregnancy care, etc.)
- Medical education needs to still be identified. The refugees can easily communicate in Russian and are thankful to Romania who activated their EU civilian protection mechanisms – for oncology patients (Slovakia has also helped).
- Interagency Health Working group has been established.

ROMANIA

Tiberius Marius Bradatan, Secretary of State of the Ministry of Health, Romania.

Over 700 thousand refugees crossed the border to date, mostly moving to other EU countries.

- The Government as well as NGOs provided a swift response to the crisis, however, sustainable financial support is now needed.
- The following four issues need to be addressed:
 1. Public health safety: vaccination coverage should be tackled as adults and children are often not fully vaccinated with the regular package that we have in the EU. However, there are limitations in this regard due to regulations for example in Romania vaccination is still voluntary.
 2. Increase access to the medical health care systems – primary, secondary and tertiary health care services. The aim is to provide Romanian citizens with full access to such services, but this will also need adjusting within the legislation.
 3. There are language barriers to be addressed, especially when concerned with the provision of mental health and child health control.
 4. Better digitalization in order to keep track of health records of people entering the healthcare systems.
- More funding needs to be obtained in order to guarantee the sustainability of services in the long-term.



HUNGARY

István Kovács, Deputy Secretary of State of the Ministry of Health, Hungary.

- More than 841 thousand refugees have crossed the border into Hungary.
- The country guarantees care to refugees both in terms of general and specialised care.
- Hungary is more than happy to engage in further collaboration.



POLAND

Ewa Nowacka, Deputy Director of Department of International Cooperation, Ministry of Health, Poland.

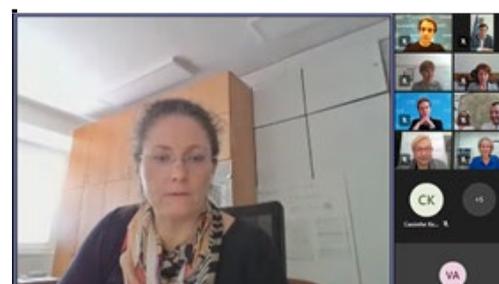
- Poland has been facing similar challenges to the other countries. Over 2,7 million refugees crossed the border with Poland, all of whom have access to medical care at the same level as a regular Polish citizen.
- Poland also launched a special medical helpline which is provided in the Ukrainian language.
- Poland implemented a special procedure to recognise health care professionals from Ukraine in order to strengthen the capacity of the Polish healthcare system especially regarding specialised care.
- Poland is experiencing shortages of medicinal products, vaccines, and drugs for illness that are not seen or are in fact rare in Poland (e.g., polio, diphtheria, tuberculosis, hepatitis, HIV). The country is cooperating with the World Health Organization (WHO) to acquire those medicines which are currently unavailable on the EU market.
- Poland strongly opposes the Russian invasion on Ukraine and calls on the international community to work together to stop this war. Poland sincerely thanks the EU, the international community and NGOs for all the help provided.



SLOVAKIA

Daniela Kállayová, Senior Officer at the Department of Public Health of the Ministry of Health and member of the Executive Board EuroHealthNet, Slovakia.

- Since the beginning of the war over 311 thousand refugees crossed the border into Slovakia.
- We are currently working on:
 1. Developing specific material for Ukrainian refugees.
 2. Facilitating access to health services.
 3. Providing administrative support to allow access to the welfare system.
 4. Fostering the integration into the healthcare system.



- There are needs to facilitate access to oncology, dialysis, and maternal care.
- Also, there is a communication issue to be worked on i.e., how to properly communicate all actions to the general public.

BULGARIA

Plamen Dimitrov, Deputy Director, National Centre of Public Health and Analyses, member Executive Board EuroHealthNet and SEEHN alternate national coordinator, Bulgaria.



- More than 150 thousand refugees entered Bulgaria, although most of them are in transition, many of them will stay in the country.
- Bulgaria set up a website for Ukrainian people with information available in various languages.
- Bulgaria guarantees access to healthcare for Ukrainian refugees on the same level as Bulgarian citizens, with particular attention to children immunisation. In this regard, a strategic plan is in development to ensure that those children entering the educational system will be vaccinated against threatening diseases.
- We are also exploring how to integrate Ukrainians into the labour market.
- We consider the Russian invasion unacceptable.

SLOVENIA

Mojca Gabrijelčič Blenkuš, Senior Expert at the National Institute of Public Health and President of EuroHealthNet.



- As president of EuroHealthNet, I welcome the collaboration between EuroHealthNet and SEEHN, based on the signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). SEEHN is an inspiring promising practice. It dates to the Dubrovnik pledge, when public health actions were a supportive bridge to peace and collaboration for the health and wellbeing of all people in the conflict SEE region. We might all learn and benefit from such a practice in the present situation.
- In Slovenia, we are facing similar challenges to the other countries. To summarise what was presented by different participating countries: challenges in providing access to health care, shortages of staff and drugs, vaccination problems, vulnerable groups and chronic diseases, and limited funding opportunities.
- EuroHealthNet can help identify what funding opportunities are available at EU level.
- Regarding the language barrier – it might partly be resolved by unified use of the Ukrainian public health platforms with different public health e-materials which Ukrainian people are used to.
- We have three population groups being exposed to mental health and other public health challenges – refugees, domestic populations in neighboring countries. I would

also like to stress that many Russian citizens are highly frustrated by the decisions taken by their government; all three would benefit from mental health actions.

- It is also important to note that several additional challenges linked to social determinants of health are likely to arise and should be taken into consideration: unemployment, food shortages and prices – all themes that will become more important very soon in the mid and long-term.

3. EU initiatives in response to the Ukraine crisis

Presented by Vania Putatti, Policy Coordinator EuroHealthNet. T



The [presentation](#) consisted of a quick overview of recent EU initiatives focused on supporting neighboring EU member states and Moldova in the provision of health and social related services.

- Funding Programmes:
 - ✓ Cohesion's Action for Refugees in Europe - 7.5 billion allocated

- ✓ Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe – 9.5 billion
- ✓ Stand Up for Ukraine - €9.1 billion euro so far
- ✓ Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) - €9.9 billion (2021-2027)
- ✓ Macro-Financial Assistance - €600 million
- Temporary Protection Directive: ease of regulatory barriers to integrate refugees.
- European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) – published a guideline on medical support, assessment on the health of refugees and how to deal with immunisation issues.

Related resources:

[Download](#) the presentation slides.

EuroHealthNet Policy brief: [An overview of EU funding and tools available to deal with consequences of the war in Ukraine.](#)

EuroHealthNet Statement: [EuroHealthNet calls for more integrated, coordinated European action to ensure the fundamentals of good health in the face of conflict.](#)

For more information click [this link](#).

4. Comments and closing remarks

Svetlana Nicolescu, Secretary of State of the Ministry of Health, Moldova.

- I echo all the interventions undertaken by colleagues and identify many commonalities and similar challenges.
- The issue of immunisation is very important. Whilst we welcome the ECDC guidelines, it would be good to have a common approach across the countries as this will be key for people in transition, both for children and adults, including COVID-19 prevention.
- Immunisation is particularly crucial for children entering educational settings
- We wish to explore more on the funding mechanisms available for Moldova.

Mira Dasic, Director SEEHN

- Today we talked about imminent consequences of this war, but in the long run many more issues will arise. For example, mental health issues. Another meeting will potentially be useful to review where we stand.

Caroline Costongs, Director EuroHealthNet

- We would like to thank you all for sharing the insights with each other and with us and we would appreciate working together in the future.
- For a potential second meeting we can consider what challenges arise at medium and longer-term and how we can cooperate to address them.
- At this meeting we heard the following cross-cutting topics or areas for further joint actions:
 - Mental Health
 - Immunisation
 - Digitalisation
- EuroHealthNet will draft a short report of this meeting. Thank you for all the great work you are doing to support the people from Ukraine in health-related matters.