

26th annual meeting of the Regions for Health Network (25 – 28 October 2021)

SUMMARY DAY 1

Objective of the meeting

The objective of the meeting was to discuss the priorities of the RHN member countries regarding COVID-19 response and climate-related action for better health and well-being, and to share lessons learned in these areas.

Summary of discussions

In opening the meeting, Dr Hans Kluge, WHO Regional Director for Europe, emphasized the immense value of cross-border collaboration in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic and the troubled relationship between humans and nature, which has an enormous impact on the well-being and security of society.

Dr Natasha Azzopardi-Muscat, Director of the Division of Country Health Policies and Systems, highlighted the importance of the Network in the framework of the WHO European Programme of Work (2020–2025) (EPW).

Mr Petr Biryukov, Deputy Mayor of Moscow, underlined the commitment of the Government of Moscow to the Network, which it joined in 2019. He outlined the significant steps taken by the city in recent years towards the implementation of green policies to improve citizens' health in a number of areas, such as healthy sustainable transport, public green space and emission reduction, among others.

During **Session 1 – united for health, what can regions do?**, key challenges and success stories were discussed. These included the long-term consequences of COVID-19 on health systems, primary health care and social care. Based on RHN experience and knowledge gathered since the eruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of intersectoral collaboration for health, with the involvement of all departments working in the areas of health, environment, social care/protection and transport, was found to be a lesson learned, which all of the participants shared.

Discussion also touched on longer-term priorities, such as health equity and the further development of understanding about the link between climate change and health. For many regions, collaboration through RHN and WHO, as well as cross-fertilization and multisectoral approaches that encompass all areas of work affecting people's health, would help them to adapt and respond to the above-mentioned challenges. In addition, based on experience gained in recent years, the regions highlighted the importance of ensuring citizens' participation at all levels and continuous engagement with the public.

The regions also presented their long-term goals to put the well-being of future generations at the centre of the planning process for health and social policies. These included designing frameworks (with objectives, indicators, milestones, etc.) for national well-being, aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, and developing accountability mechanisms and advocacy/outreach activities.

The regions proposed that the Network should become more operational and formalized, invest in strengthening leadership and governance competences in and across regions, as well as in developing new outreach/communication activities and capacity. RHN could also strengthen its evidence-based approach, further integrating scientific evidence and research into practice.