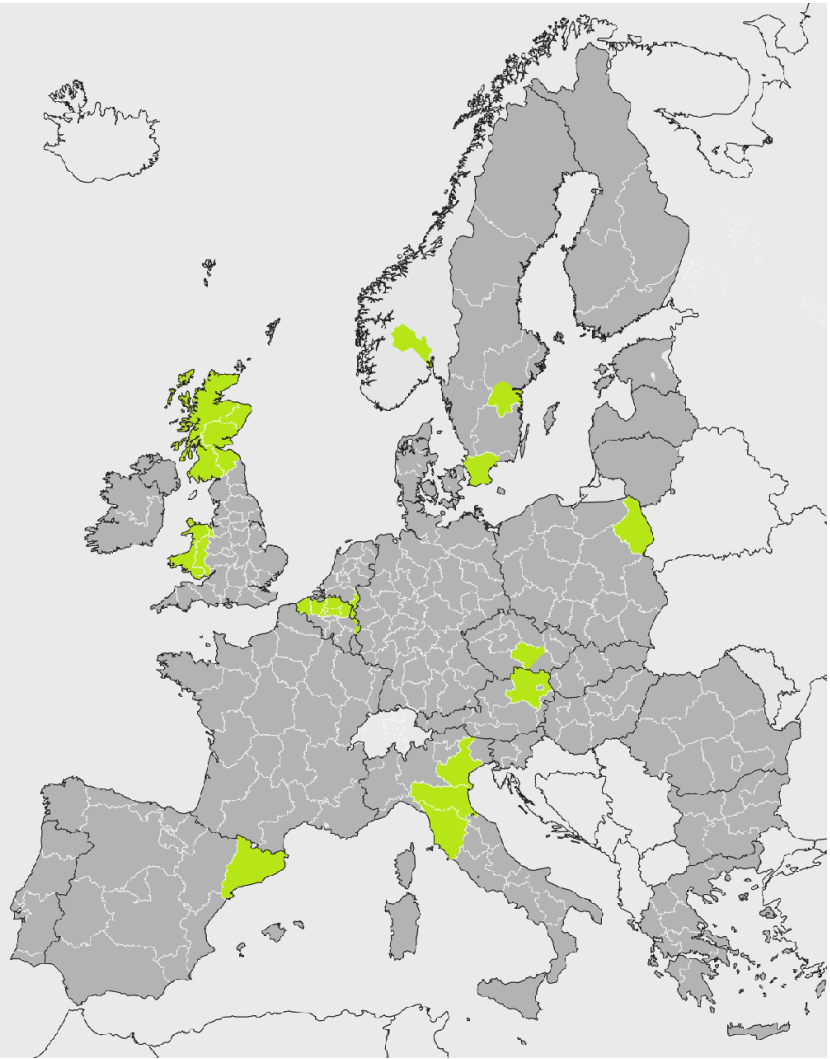


EUREGHA'S RESPONSE TO THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON THE CONCLUSIONS OF THE 5TH REPORT ON ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COHESION

2011



In response to DG Health and Consumers public consultation on “**on the Conclusions of the Fifth Report on Economic and Social Cohesion**” published on 12 November 2010, the European Regional and Local Health Authorities Network, hereafter referred as EUREGHA, will outline in this paper its reflections. Regional and local authorities represent the natural interface between citizens, national and European institutions and exert a pivotal role in improving the efficiency and quality of healthcare systems and services. In these difficult financial times, regions are challenged and confronted in their role of *health enablers* and *healthcare providers* by global issues such as:

- demographic change and prolongation of years lived with chronic conditions;
- climate change and its consequences on vulnerable groups;
- pandemics and health threats;
- increasing health inequalities between and within Member States and Regions;

For these reasons, EUREGHA intends to give its contribution to the consultation by emphasising the importance of health as a means to sustainable, inclusive and smart growth. The response will be articulated on three questions excerpted by the questionnaire available on the Directorate-General Regional Policy’s website.

The recommendations included in the response do not reflect individual regional responses but common observations on the importance of health as a means of territorial and social cohesion.

ANSWERS

1. SHOULD THE SCOPE OF THE DEVELOPMENT AND INVESTMENT PARTNERSHIP CONTRACT GO BEYOND COHESION POLICY AND, IF SO, WHAT SHOULD IT BE? HOW COULD COHESION POLICY BE MADE MORE RESULT-ORIENTED? WHICH PRIORITIES SHOULD BE OBLIGATORY?

The unprecedented global financial crisis is having an increased impact on regional and local health systems

in Europe and across the world. This critical financial situation is looming on local and regional health systems that are already under strain due to demographic change and increase of share of older people that will lift the demand for health and related services. In this context, Member States and Regions are urged to introduce reforms to respond to the crisis whilst considering their effect on economic, social and territorial cohesion. Representing the EU's main instrument for pursuing socio-economic development across the EU, Cohesion Policy plays a crucial role in the fine-tuning of EU guidelines in regional and local investment plans. EUREGHA supports the idea of concentrating resources on the Europe 2020 objectives inasmuch as public health and the healthcare sector are considered in the priority setting of local, regional and national plans. In this regard, it is important to remember that the healthcare sector represents in many countries the biggest employer and therefore investments in this sector are crucial for the local and regional economic growth. To improve productivity it is crucial to invest both on education, training and life long learning and health of the population as well as investments in technology and innovation. Regarding the latter, e-government services, in particular e-health services, are fundamental to increase the transparency and efficiency of public administration and empower patients.

To improve the efficacy of Cohesion Policy, EUREGHA encourages evidence-based policies and intersectoral and coordinated approaches that take into account the impact on health and environment. In line with the Fifth Report on Economic and Social Cohesion, EUREGHA recommends that Cohesion Policy focuses on performance by identifying few priorities and focusing on the impact of projects on territories.

In this regard, EUREGHA strongly supports the draft opinion on policy challenges and budgetary resources for a sustainable European Union discussed and voted in the ENVI Committee last 25th January 2011, notably amendments 31 and 33 referring to the need to secure long-term financial provision in the next MFF for public health priorities and health promotion as well as the need to maintain and strengthen structural funds dedicated to health infrastructures, thus supporting adaptation and innovation of health systems for growth and sustainability.

EUREGHA believes that Europe 2020 objectives can be met only with strong national and regional Participation and ownership on the ground. EUREGHA stresses the importance of supporting initiatives aiming at reducing health inequalities through tailored actions addressed to vulnerable groups such as migrants and the poor. Regions and inclusion initiatives are closely linked, climate

change will affect the most vulnerable. Identification of vulnerable groups, setting up indicators to identify them, and sharing of experiences on initiatives of adaptation will become important.

Health inequalities play a role in spurring inclusive growth. The work to overcome health inequalities requires that bodies, including national health centres, medical and social research institutes, continue to invest resources in addressing the social determinants of health with a particular focus on multi- and interdisciplinary research. The structural funds, such as the European Regional Development Fund and European Social Fund can really help to reduce health inequalities by financing infrastructures and equipment to renovate hospitals and health care units as well as “soft” investment in health such as the training of health professionals, the exchange of best practices and the definition of financial models to increase the efficiency of health systems. Regional and Local Health Authorities, with the support of the European Commission, should improve the use of Structural Funds in the field of health and assist regional authorities in simplifying the administrative procedures and overcoming the existing barriers in using ESF funds. Finally, in order to measure the reduction of healthy inequalities over time, we recommend to include the Healthy Life Years Indicator into the benchmarking of the EU 2020 Strategy.

2. HOW CAN THE PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLE AND INVOLVEMENT OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL STAKEHOLDERS, SOCIAL PARTNERS AND CIVIL SOCIETY BE IMPROVED?

EUREGHA emphasises the need to support and share experiences on interventions put in place by local and regional authorities aiming at promoting healthy and active ageing with a particular focus on promotion of healthy lifestyles and preventive measures to tackle chronic diseases. In this regard, EUREGHA supports further investments in knowledge-sharing and peer reviews between regions. Thus, we recommend that the future Cohesion Policy promotes communication and cooperation at all levels of governance and across relevant sectors. This is particularly important in the health sector given that Civil Society Organisations (CVOs) and patients’ organisations are bound to exert a more important role in the design and delivery of health and social services. To incentive the creation of multi-stakeholder partnerships, we recommend that the inclusion of CVOs or social partners in projects is incorporated as an award criterium.

EUREGHA is the reference network for European Regional and Local Health Authorities. We bring together a critical mass of knowledge and expertise and encourage diversity with the purpose of helping our members to improve the efficiency and quality of health systems and services in Europe.

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