

CoR INTERREGIONAL GROUP ON HEALTH & WELL-BEING

Thursday, 1 February 2024, 13h30-14h30

Constitutive meeting

Minutes

13.30 Welcome, 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.

13:35 Start of the round-table discussion on possible topics for 2024 meetings

Ms Erika Von Kalben, Member of the State Parliament of Schleswig-Holstein and CoR Member, expressed her interest in discussing the topic of medicines shortages in the EU as appointed Rapporteur for the CoR Opinion on “Medicines shortages”. She brought up the example of Germany, where the medicines got by the patients depend on the insurance company to which they are affiliated, with consequent shortages in the stocks.

Mr Jean-Luc Vanraes, Alternate Member of a Local Assembly: Municipal Council of Uccle and CoR Member, agreed on the importance of the topic and proposed to have a general overview of the situation in Europe.

Mr Michele Calabro', EUREGHA's Director, informed the members that EUREGHA can facilitate the connection of Interregional Group Members with EU stakeholders active and experts on the topic, like pharmacists or industry associations.

Followed a discussion between **Ms Von Kalben, Ms Sacredeus and Mr Vanraes** on the organisation of the work for the Opinion.

Ms Sacredeus agreed on the importance of discussing EU self-sufficiency in medicinal products and the dependence on other third countries. She expressed her interest in also deepening the topic with a particular focus on rare diseases.

Ms Dorota Tomalak, Deputy Head of Unit at the CoR's NAT Commission, added that procurement is one of the solutions that the European Commission is currently exploring, following the experience of COVID-19. But there is still no legal document in that respect, and the discussion revolves around compatibility with the EU treaties. HERA is responsible for the procurement of equipment and certain medicines needed (like rare vaccines) and is an example of common purchasing at the EU level.

Concerning examples in Europe, she stressed that Denmark can be an interesting country to hear from since it has a strong connection with pharma.

Mr Vanraes suggested that a question that can guide the discussion around the topic of procurement could be which authority (Member States or EU) should take the initiative and trigger the procurement procedure.

Ms Von Kalben stressed the importance of learning from the COVID-19 experience. In this respect, AMR can be another potential interesting angle to be addressed during upcoming Interregional Group's meeting.

Mr Calabro' proposed dedicating the first Interregional Group public meeting on 18 April to the topic of medicines shortages.

The Interregional Group's members agreed on the proposal.

Another topic raised was mental health, in the light of the CoR's Opinion on mental health.

The Interregional Group members proposed to have an angle on children's mental health.

Mr Vanraes proposed to look into the issue of mental health for children living with parents affected by drug abuse, a topic that is getting more attention in his municipality hospital.

Ms Von Kalben brought up the long-lasting effects of the pandemic on children's mental health and the problem of suicides among children and young people.

Ms Sacredeus raised the point of mental health and digitalization.

Ms Tomalak mentioned an OECD recent publication with data on mental health and youth and some of the key learnings from it. For example, half of the people interviewed have unmet medical needs. She also mentioned a recent collection of data from EUROSTAT concerning suicide attempts. She highlighted the importance of the regional and local dimension when it comes to mental health problems in children since stressors can be different depending on the place where the children live. For example, for Polish kids, the war in Ukraine acts as a huge stressor.

Ms Von Kalben agreed with the points raised and added that mental health and social media could be a potential topic, as well as the linkage between environment and mental health.

Mr Vanraes stated that, as a politician, it is key to build a vision around prevention. This can be the underlying approach and message for the topic.

Mr Calabro' proposed to take the mental health topic into consideration either for the Interregional Group meeting in June or the event during the European Week of Regions and Cities. For this latter,

the relevance of the topic will depend on the overarching topics of the week.

Talking about the latest EU health priorities, **Ms Tomalak** mentioned the recently published Recommendations on vaccine-preventable cancers, the discussion around the Recommendations on tobacco (which may happen early next mandate), and the Belgian EU Presidency's work on the health workforce.

Ms Von Kalben proposed to focus a meeting on the health workforce, with some potential focuses: migration and retention, and recognition of certifications and skills.

Mr Vanraes agreed with Ms Von Kalben proposal. The improvement of the quality of working and living could be an interesting angle.

Ms Sacredeus brought up the point of the professional education and development of workers coming from third countries.

Ms Tomalak stressed the topic of brain drain and the impact on more disadvantaged countries and regions.

Mr Calabro' suggested planning a session on the health workforce for the June meeting or for the European Week of Regions and Cities, depending on the compatibility with the overarching topics of the Week. The last meeting of the year in November could be dedicated to the topic of AMR.

All the Interregional Group's members agreed on the proposal

Mr Calabro' and Ms Sacredues closed the meeting by sharing the Calendar of the next Interregional Group meeting:

1. **18 April, 13:30-14:30** – Medicines shortages
2. **20 June, 13:30-14:30** – Mental health and young people or health workforce
3. European Week of Regions and Cities (October) – Mental health of young people or health workforce
4. **21 November, 13:30-14:30** – AMR

14.30 End of the meeting