

Highlights of the first Press Point at the EHFG 2020

Recovering from the pandemic – A wake-up call for a well-being society?

Wednesday, 30 September 2020

Today's EHFG press point was themed "Recovering from the pandemic: A wake-up call for a well-being society?" It set out to explore models, concepts and visions that could help us rethink priorities and build a coherent framework that facilitates a come-back as stronger societies and systems after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Maggie De Block, Minister for Social Affairs & Public Health and of Asylum & Migration, Belgium

In this press point Maggie De Block highlighted the world's fragility, the possible instalment of a coronavirus commissioner in Belgium, and the need for a holistic multi-sectoral response to COVID-19:

"We have all been taking health for granted for many years, and now a virus has shown us how fragile our lives are, how fragile our economy is, how fragile our well-being is, how fragile our social life and our family life are. Our economy is important and all countries around the world were really surprised by the virus, but they have shown an extraordinary capacity to take measures [against COVID-19]."

"In Belgium we have a very complicated political system, so in the new [Belgian] government a coronavirus commissioner will have to bridge the interfederal level in Belgium. This commissioner will not be a political figure but a crisis manager, so that the entire country and its regions will fight the coronavirus pandemic at the same speed."

"[During the COVID-19 crisis] we could not take action alone. As policymakers we had to do this alongside the care sector, alongside patients and with all those who could help us, all citizens. We asked a lot from citizens. We have to learn that other factors are important, not only GDP is important in a person's life."

Hans Kluge, WHO Regional Director for Europe

In this press point Hans Kluge highlighted the need for more solidarity, clear political leadership and new partnership models to ensure access to medicines:

"Solidarity is the only way forward. If it does not come from the heart, it has to come from the brain. There is a proper relationship between health and the economy, which is characterised by the notion of the economy of wellbeing, and calls for people to be at the centre of the system."

"We need to ensure affordable access to innovative medicines. This means redefining the social contract with the pharmaceutical industry to make medicines affordable to the people while still providing the essential incentives for the industry to come up with innovations".

"In order to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, we need to address the issue of the pandemic fatigue and develop clear political leadership. The COVID-19 response should also embrace the work of sociologists, anthropologists and behavioral scientists. Finally, we need to engage with the

youth. That is very important and I am very optimistic about this. They are so creative when it comes to finding new ways of being social and we need the youth to speak to the youth."

"I would like to express appreciation to the President of the European Commission and in particular to my counterpart, Health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides. We are going to take our cooperation further because ultimately, we are talking about the EU's health security. The EU can never be safe, without the Balkans being safe or Eastern Europe being safe. In my views there are three priorities we will need to collectively tackle: universal healthcare coverage, health security and health & wellbeing."

Colin Crouch, External Scientific Member, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies

In this press point Colin Crouch highlighted the need for increased scientific cooperation at the European level and talked about how strengthening the healthcare systems and economic growth can go hand in hand:

"One of the things that we have seen in several countries during this crisis is how people have acknowledged the importance of the situation. People realised that they needed to take an interest in what was going on in their country and take an interest in what governments were doing. It's quite remarkable how the social consciousness of civil society has been activated."

"This pandemic has destroyed many lives. But it has also destroyed millions of jobs. So rather than pitting the economy against wellbeing I think we have to look for ways in which these can be combined. We need to look at examples of how the need to create jobs and to move on to a different kind of economy and society can actually go together. This is exactly what has already been done with the green agenda, by saying that the green economy is also a growth economy."

"On the one hand there is political pressure for governments to keep scientific developments for their people first, but on the other hand there is strong scientific pressure for cooperation because science is universal. COVID has shown that we need cooperation because nobody will benefit from getting the vaccine alone."

"Europe is a very good place for sharing ideas and resources and we have seen how it has done it over a number of policy areas. The opportunity to pool resources across a wide number of countries with different capacities should be pushed right to the front of the agenda."