

Main Theme - European Health Forum Gastein 2022

A moonshot for a true European Health Union – if not now, when?

In 2022, the European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG) will celebrate its 25th anniversary and take stock of the substantial accomplishments in public health over the last quarter century. At the same time, we will look forward and discuss the challenges and policy options for action urgently needed across sectors, borders, and disciplines at this watershed moment for health, security, and solidarity. This is the window of opportunity to co-create a true European Health Union. Only by shooting for the moon and leaving “business as usual” firmly in the past do we stand a chance of succeeding in our mission to build a healthier, more equitable, and sustainable future for all.

Over the last two years, health has experienced a rare moment in the political spotlight. Crucial legislative initiatives are underway buoyed by the urgency of crisis – from global negotiations towards a new international pandemic agreement, to the establishment of the European Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA), the European Green Deal, and the realisation of a European Health Union. The vision of a European Health Union presented by the European Commission is to be commended, yet more must be done. At a country level, Member States must develop new strategies to build resilient and agile health systems – from primary care reforms to digital transformation to universal coverage - and foster a well-resourced health workforce better equipped and supported to cope with the ongoing pandemic and to respond to the next crisis when it arises.

The shocks created by the COVID-19 pandemic can serve as triggers to leverage alternative approaches to our most pressing challenges. More than ever before, stakeholders in health must reach beyond traditional spheres of health policy and towards the co-creation of wellbeing societies, based on new socio-economic models and a “One Health for One Planet” approach. “Building forward better” requires fundamental transformation of the way our societies operate – and this can only be achieved through peace in Europe, supported by political will, collaboration, and unity.

What happens next will be crucial. Only through rigorous implementation of concrete and sustainable new approaches at all policy levels – local, regional, national, European, global – can the current momentum for health be realised. Can the European and international community come together to transform the hard lessons learned into equitable strategies for a better tomorrow? Join us for the 25th anniversary edition of the EHFG from 27-29 September to chart a bold course for realising a European Health Union! If not us, who? If not now, when?