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Special interest session
Health impact assessment: an opportunity for
considering policy options in Europe
Speaker: Dr. Anna Ritsatakis

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First an explanation of the key terms of this session:

Health impact(s) are overall effects, direct or indirect, of policy, strategy, programme or project on the health of a population.

Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is a combination of procedures, methods and tools by which a policy, program or project may be judged as to its potential effects on the health of a population, and the distribution of those effects on the health of a population, and the distribution of those effects within the population.

The elements of HIA are the following:

- Consideration of evidence about the anticipated relationships between a policy, programme or project and the health of a population (this is understood to include both the health of the population and of groups within the population)
- Consideration of the opinions, experience and expectations of those who are affected by the proposed policy, programme or project
- Provisions of more informed understanding by decision makers and the public regarding the effects of the policy, programme or project on health

- Proposals for adjustments/potions to maximize the plosive and minimize the negative health impacts

Values are very important for reaching policy goals and they have to be taken into account, otherwise HIA for example runs the danger of being an artificial process, divorced from reality. The speaker named for major values that are important for HIA:

- Democracy
- Equity
- Sustainable development
- Ethical use of evidence

The challenges for HIA are:

- Where to focus scare resources? There is the need for rapid and reliable screening tools.
- Timing: catchword “institutionalising HIA”
- Information gap
- Resources (they are very scare at the present moment)
- Avoiding impact assessment overload, consultation fatigue and unrealistic expectations

HIA has to get in contact with other areas; everyone has to made trade-offs to get benefits on the other side.

“Road to success \Rightarrow mutual benefits” (Zitat Dr. Anna Ritsatakis)

During the subsequent discussion the pros and cons of HIA and the problems that HIA faces were raised. For more than one participant it was important to distinguish between an HIA project and an HIA policy.

For the majority of participants it was also clear that HIA measures have to be kept simple.