



Immigrants are Stepchildren of Health Care Systems

- **Above-average strain due to life circumstances causing illness**
- **Health of immigrants as indicator of successful integration**
- **Only Europe-wide standards assure prospects for sustainable improvement**

Immigrants have become the most important problem group in European health care systems. Poor social position, under-average income, a substantial share of individuals working in health-endangering occupations, and not least a lack of health awareness all shape the situation of this population group. “Immigrants and persons belonging to an ethnic minority are ill disproportionately often,” stated Istvan Szilard of the International Organization for Migration at the European Health Forum Gastein. The life circumstances of immigrants are just one part of the problem. Frequently, there is also no access to health-related information or services as a result of bureaucracy and language barriers.

“Immigrants often have another, culturally-determined perception of health which and have to live with a great deal of psychosocial stress caused by lacking family networks, cultural exclusion and stigmatisation.” The consequence: immigrants and individuals who belong to an ethnic group become ill disproportionately often.

As the flow of immigrants is not going to let up in the near future and as this group of individuals is playing an increasingly important role on the European labour market, from an economic perspective it is also necessary for health care policy to finally implement targeted measures to counter this inequality in health care. “At present there is still no Europe-wide health policy which responds to the special needs of immigrants,” criticised Szilard. “Target-oriented efforts must finally be undertaken to harmonise European immigration policy,” Szilard insists.

Early investments and determined political steps for the health of immigrants pay off in the long run economically because the workforce from foreign countries is productive. It is also economically beneficial in terms of health because the risks of infectious disease are limited. Finally, it is also worthwhile socially: “Access to health care services and insurances is a crucial prerequisite for successful integration, while the health of immigrants is an indicator of the extent to which integration has actually been implemented,” says Szilard.

***Further information and abstracts of the lectures
at the Risk / Benefits Communication workshop:***

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