

The 2021 European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG) closes with strong calls to level up to fairer social standards and move away from the old normal

- *From 27 September to 1 October 2021, the second fully virtual edition of the Forum featured over 175 speakers, spanning the World Health Organization (WHO), European Union (EU) and country officials, industry representatives, healthcare professionals, civil society actors and social rights activists.*
- *Multilateralism, European Health Union and a new social contract were the buzz words of this year's edition, which saw very diverse stakeholder panels engage in lively and challenging discussions on the role of resilient healthcare systems in the renewal and rebirth of fairer societies.*

1 October 2021, Bad Hofgastein, Austria – Today concludes the last day of this year's virtual edition of the [European Health Forum Gastein](#) (EHFG 2021) with a plenary on “A new social contract for resilient recovery”, which truly challenged stakeholders' perception of what the new normal should look like. Over the last five days, speakers and participants from Europe and the global South came together to call for new platforms for strengthened multi-stakeholder dialogue to be set up. This ask was at the core of the Oslo Medicines Initiative session organised by the WHO Regional Office for Europe, the Norwegian Ministry of Health and Care Services, and the Norwegian Medicines Agency, all highlighting the need for a new vision for collaboration between the public and private sectors to improve patient access to novel medicines across Europe.

In the third plenary, Mario Monti, Chair of the Pan-European Commission on Health and Sustainable Development, called on heads of states to create a Pan-European network for Disease Control, convened by the WHO Regional Office for Europe, to maintain the momentum of health in the spotlight and streamline the One Health approach in all policies before new crises occur. The role of civil society was also highlighted throughout the Forum, with key stakeholders such as Sharan Burrow, General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation and Colombe Cahen-Salvador, Co-founder of the Atlas movement, challenging traditional perspectives on global health governance. Both urged policymakers to ensure the access of excluded populations such as women and younger generations to democratic institutions in order to rebuild trust and pave the way for a new social contract. Setting these examples of collaboration in motion, the EHFG 2021 held a discussion in the frame of the Conference on the Future of Europe to explore new visions for a European Health Union, which places citizen engagement at its heart.

Further discussions also made clear that future health policies need to be supported by strengthened public institutions and financing mechanisms. Such structures must be powered by fairer and more inclusive multilateralism, aiming to close the gaps between the 'Global North and South'. Speakers also often pointed to the fact that Europe's actions should go beyond regionalism and set the tone for exemplary leadership in the rest of the world. Above all, Europe's action should always have the ambition to leave no one behind and to reflect core values of inclusivity, equity, and sustainability.

Reflecting on the Forum, Clemens Martin Auer, President of the EHFG declared that he was “*hopeful to see the multi-faceted discussions started at Gastein go beyond the Forum and feed into ongoing policy health files at the regional, national, European and global levels in order to ensure that we never*

go back to the old normal but level up to more ambitious and inclusive social standards for all, with health being the backbone of resilient societies”.

Dorli Kahr-Gottlieb, Secretary General of the EHFG concluded that it was specifically important for the Forum to engage in discussions beyond health this year. The future-looking focus of this year’s main theme triggered discussions

spanning economic, democratic and ecological dimensions influencing health. Many inspiring discussions, some provoking thought experiments, and lots of food for thought to keep health on political agendas.

For any questions, please contact the press office at press@ehfg.org or +32 2 321 90 16.

About European Health Forum Gastein

The European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG) was founded in 1998 as a European health policy conference. It aims to provide a platform for all stakeholders from the fields of public health and beyond. Over the past decade, the EHFG has established itself as an indispensable institution in the scope of European health policy. It has made a decisive contribution to the development of guidelines and above all the cross-border exchange of experience, information, and cooperation. Leading experts traditionally participate in the annual conference held in the Gastein Valley in the Austrian Alps in late September/early October. Since 2020 and due to COVID-19, the conference is being held in a fully virtual format and has been extended from three to five days in its 2021 edition.