

EPHA PROGRESS REPORT

PUBLIC HEALTH CAPACITY
BUILDING

2019

About EPHA

EPHA is a change agent – Europe’s leading NGO alliance advocating for better health. We are a dynamic member-led organisation, made up of public health civil society, patient groups, health professionals, and disease groups working together to improve health and strengthen the voice of public health in Europe.



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Introduction

This progress report provides an overview of EPHA's capacity building, outreach and training activities in 2019. These activities represent an important element of EPHA's work with member organisations and external partners in support of inclusive civil society engagement in public health related policy areas at the European and/or national level.

An additional aim is to create the most effective synergies between European and national advocacy activities to ensure that EPHA members and partner organisations understand the added value of European health policy and can become actively involved in EPHA activities including by producing evidence, collecting best practices and ensuring that EPHA's advocacy in thematic priority areas can be supported at national, regional or local level.

Focus on Eastern Europe

Since 2010 Eastern Europe has been a key focus region of EPHA's capacity building work, including Member States of the first (e.g., Slovenia, Slovakia, Hungary) and second (Romania, Bulgaria) waves of EU accession that took place in 2003 and 2007, where EPHA's membership is already quite strong and EPHA also operates associated networks or groups such as the "Roma Health Network" which arose out of our project work on mainstreaming Roma health and training Roma health advocates funded by the Open Society Foundations .

In addition, EPHA is also working with members based in non-EU countries located in the WHO European Region (e.g. Azerbaijan), some of which are EU applicant countries such as North Macedonia and Turkey.

Romania

Given EPHA's project work on underserved groups including Roma communities, EPHA's emphasis has been on countries with significant Roma populations, with Romania at the forefront as the country with the largest Roma population in Europe.

Out of a project funded by the OSF, which created a network of active "Roma health fellows" arose a Roma Health Network that has been linked up with EPHA's broader work on tackling health inequalities focusing also on other disadvantaged groups such as homeless people, undocumented migrants, people subject to gender or age discrimination, LGBTQ+ communities, drug users, sex workers, people suffering from mental health problems, etc. Following a series of events in Romania in 2018, in 2019 EPHA organised an event calling for access to quality Early Childhood Development (ECD) services in Romania and Europe-wide. The event, linked to EPHA's Roma work, provided a "reality check" in the sense that EPHA invited local Roma leaders from across the country who revealed their difficulties – as parents and grandparents - in accessing healthcare, education and children's services. They reminded policymakers and civil society stakeholders that well-intended European and national policies and projects often fail to work in practice as their implementation does not take into account the specific needs of underserved communities and the systemic barriers they encounter (including institutional racism in the form of antigypsyism), especially in rural and ethnically segregated areas which still exist.

At the same time, the event provided ordinary people and Romanian civil society representatives with an opportunity to learn about European ECD developments, and it encouraged the participants to become involved in a new European ECD campaign led by EPHA members Eurochild.

Also in Romania, EPHA spoke at the high-level Presidency conference on antimicrobial resistance and provided the Romanian Presidency with policy recommendations for tackling AMR through a comprehensive, multi-stakeholder “One Health” approach.

Hungary

In Hungary EPHA worked with its members BEMOSZ (Hungarian Alliance for Patients’ Rights) who organised an event in Budapest on 7 May that brought together leading patient groups and civil society organisations advocating public health and Hungarian government officials.

At the event participants called for the revival of the “National Patient Forum” – a consultative forum between CSOs and Ministry officials legally established by the law CLIV.1997 and the EMMI decree 50/2012 (Xii.19) – which had not been implemented effectively. The State Secretary of Health was present as a speaker and following dialogue with the participants, the government decided to allocate substantial financial support (about 5 million HUF) for projects carried out by the members of the National Patient Forum. The calls were published in December 2019.

EPHA’s involvement was significant as the media attention generated by the presence of a representative of Europe’s leading public health umbrella network was very high, which arguably contributed to the government’s positive funding decision.

EPHA remains in contact with some of the event participants to explore the options for EPHA membership.

North Macedonia

EPHA also visited North Macedonia at the end of 2019 (5-6 December) upon invitation by members STUDIORUM and Macedonian Roma Health Network member KHAM, who organised a joint event to create a small public health network composed of civil society organisations (e.g. the Macedonian consumer organisation) in order to reach government officials receptive to dialogue with civil society.

Although the event was small and meant to represent a first step towards creating a more stable future network spanning public health organisations in Brussels and Skopje, it allowed the participants to share knowledge about current health system challenges in the country (e.g. the ongoing out-migration of qualified healthcare workers to Germany and other countries) and voice key concerns to a member of the North Macedonian Ministry of Health.

As a concrete result of the event, a Facebook group will be set up to ensure interactive exchanges and EPHA is exploring membership with Macedonian organisations.

Other activities in Eastern Europe

EPHA continued to support the alumni of its former OSF-Roma health fellowship programme and encouraged them to link up their own work with relevant European projects and other activities to ensure maximum impact of their advocacy.

This included supporting the production and dissemination of the results of two case studies compiled in Slovakia and Hungary by local Roma health advocates, the former presenting the work of Roma health mediators and the latter the Sure Start housing programme. In North Macedonia, EPHA supported the work of another Roma health activist advocating for free dental health services for children.

In addition, EPHA provided individual mentorship to the group of fellows, some of whom also active as part of the Roma Health Network and EPHA's dedicated new Working Group on Health Inequalities established in early 2019.

EPHA contributed to major health conferences organised in Slovenia (1st NCD Youth Conference held by the Youth Health Organization) and in Croatia ("Healthcare as a public space" conference at the University of Rijeka), as well as a high-level WHO Europe conference on NCDs that took place in Turkmenistan.

Raising awareness among health professional groups

More than 20% of EPHA members represent the interests of the healthcare professions, including those of physicians, nurses, pharmacists, physiotherapists, students and medical residents, as well as practitioners of complementary medicine.

Under the banner of EPHA's "Professional Development Programme", EPHA organised a number of workshops and presentations for the benefit of its members and would-be members. This included an annual presentation given to French students of Hospital Management (based at Rennes University, France), presentations given to public health students at University of Maastricht and University of Oslo, and a training session for a group of "precarious nurses" from Spain.

EPHA also raised awareness of Peripheral Artery Disease (PAD) supporting Italy-based member VAS who asked for support in creating an informal network of organisations wishing to scale up the issue on the political agenda. This involved a joint session at the European Angiology Days organised by VAS on an annual basis in Milan.

Webinars and member support

EPHA organised a webinar on the potential health implications of Brexit / the future trade relationship between the UK and Europe in December, which was open to both EPHA members and external parties. Apart from members of EPHA's trade team (including Scientific Advisor Gabriel Siles-Brügge and public health registrar May van Schalkwyk) the webinar also featured a representative of the NHS Europe Confederation Office with which EPHA is collaborating on the issue of Brexit and health.

Given the importance of UK organisations among EPHA's membership (currently six UK members, the largest national contingent) EPHA will continue to support its UK organisations in the best

possible way, also taking into account the importance of international policy developments instigated by international organisations such as the World Health Organization, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), UN agencies, etc.

All of EPHA's bi-monthly Policy Coordination Meetings (PCMs) and ad hoc Working Groups are open to the entire EPHA membership (and/or their own members) and participation is possible in person or via teleconference / webinar.

Conclusion

EPHA continues to make progress with its outreach activities in underrepresented countries, especially in Eastern Europe. However, engagement as EPHA members is not always easy or possible for organisations in less affluent Member States given the fact that their funding is often very limited or completely earmarked for other activities, which causes both problems in terms of being able to pay a membership fee and being able to actively participate in Working Groups and other activities.

Given that there are many different notions of public health across Europe, it is also not always obvious to identify organisations that could provide a good "fit" for EPHA, including in large Member States like Germany or France where public health activities are often undertaken by charitable organisations, arm's-length agencies of the government or specialised professional bodies.

However, membership is not the only avenue for successful collaboration and ensuring a healthy Europe-wide public health network and EPHA strongly feels that its outreach activities contribute to raising awareness of the importance of public health and fostering a more active dialogue between governments and civil society, including members of underserved groups.

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