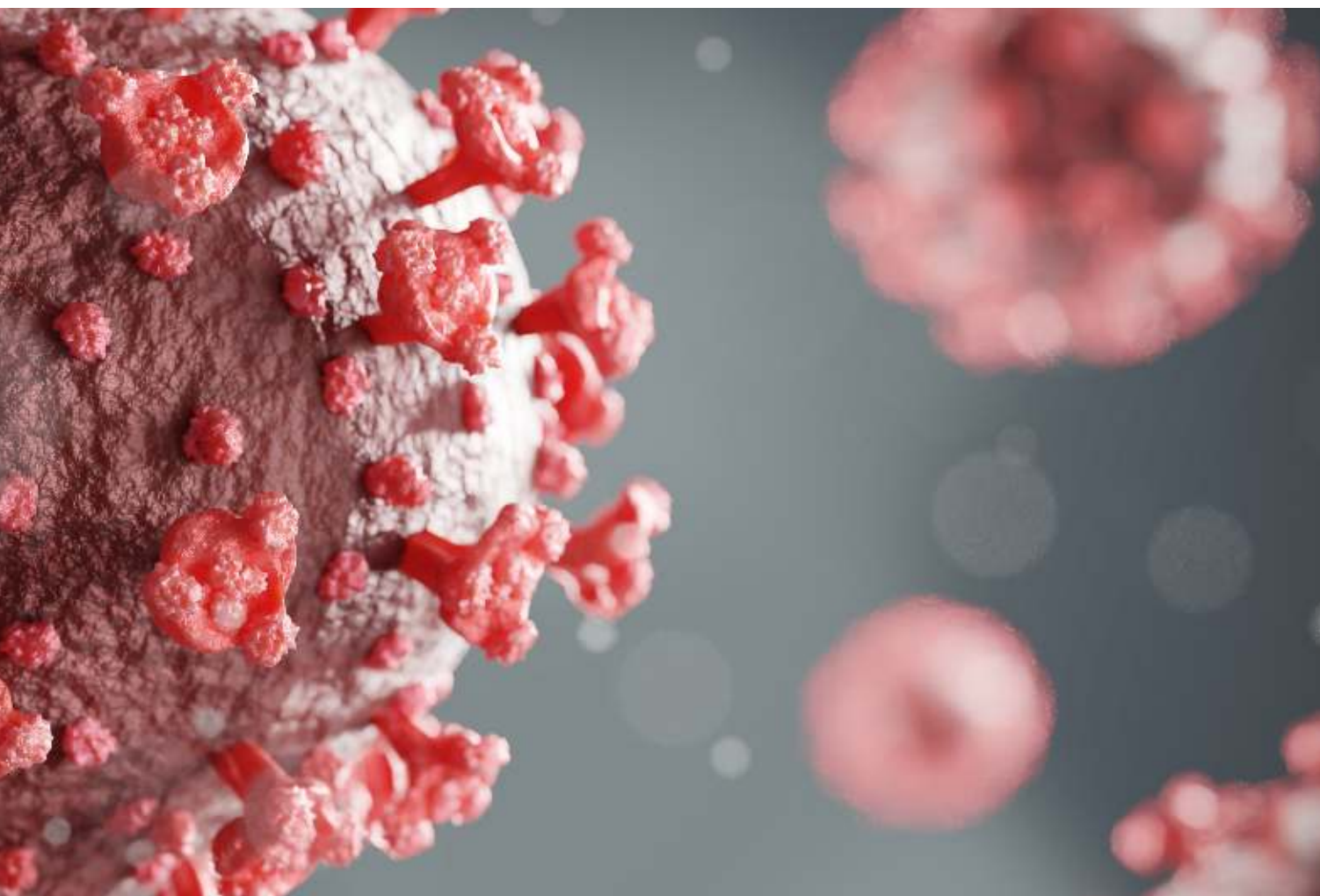


7 December 2021

How can we build back better civil society involvement in public health?

Event Report

Moderated Policy Dialogue in the frame of the
EPHA 2021 Annual General Assembly



About the European Public Health Alliance

The European Public Health Alliance (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

On Tuesday 7 December 2021, the European Public Health Alliance (EPHA) hosted an online discussion on working in partnership with civil society in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in the frame of the EPHA 2021 Annual General Assembly.

Following the keynote speech by Dr. David Nabarro, WHO's Special Envoy for COVID-19, a policy dialogue took place between Christine Brown (Head of Investment for Health and Development, WHO Europe), Francesca Colombo (Head of the Health Division, OECD), Valeria Setti (Coordinator for the Rights of the Child, European Commission), Freek Spinnewijn (Director, FEANTSA), and Dr. Milka Sokolović (Director-General, EPHA). The policy dialogue also included interventions from John Middleton (OXFAM), Jana Hainsworth (Secretary General, Eurochild), and Dr. Wendy Yared (Director, ECL).

The discussion was moderated by EPHA President, Alice Chapman-Hatchett.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

From pandemic to syndemic: a new vision for people, health & equity

Dr. David Nabarro

World Health Organization Special Envoy for COVID-19



During his international career, David Nabarro worked for both the Secretary General at the UN and for the Director General of WHO. He is a global leader in the fields of climate change and food security. While working as a MD, he has worked in a community in the world's most challenging places. In January 2020, he has been appointed WHO Special Envoy for -19.

In his speech, he expressed his opinion that public health is key to functioning economies, societies, and the planet. However, Dr. Nabarro pointed out the lack of conversations between leaders across the world when it comes to current COVID-19 situation and the lack of common public health vision to support the global situation. According to him, the pandemic cannot be compared to any other pandemics experienced so far. There is a lot to learn and understand about this virus itself. Yet, despite knowledge gaps, the principles of infectious disease control, such as case finding, contact tracing and isolation, should apply, and while it was indeed applied in many countries at the beginning of the pandemic, it is not talked about as often now.

Instead, we now observe a dichotomy between preserving public health and saving economy. WHO suggests that the economy, societies and humanity can only be strong when the pandemic is considered a public health challenge that needs to be dealt with first in a fair and equal manner across the world. The pandemic should be approached as a global challenge, not only a challenge that is dealt with at national levels, which currently seems to be the case. Additionally, there should be equality in access to vaccinations and healthcare for all the populations.

Next, Dr. Nabarro acknowledged that the pandemic is caused by a virus that is here to stay and will continue to mutate over the coming months and years. The virus is increasing challenges, especially across poor people in poor countries, and vaccination strategies at national level are not enough to stop the pandemic at the global level. The role of public health in the response is not being recognised and talked about widely.

He also emphasized that it is essential to be clear that a good public health response enables societies to continue contributing to the economy, society, and humanity. Good public health response is key, giving all the unknowns about the virus. We should not be relying on vaccines alone to stop the pandemic. Instead, we should combine efforts to reduce the transmission, through masking, distancing, and isolation. This is the time, more than ever, for public health to be visible.

When it comes to the role of politicians and civil society representatives in combating the pandemic and increasing awareness of public health, Dr. Nabarro explained that there is often a lack of knowledge about disease control among the politicians, therefore they should be briefed and reminded by public health experts of the importance of public health and the role of people in it to create strong societies.

Q&A

The first question asked to elaborate on the views of WHO on indoor ventilation and filtration systems considering that COVID-19 is known to be an airborne disease.

Dr. Nabarro confirmed that there have been ongoing discussions about the mode of transmission, but there is no doubt that it is being transmitted via droplets and sprays. WHO recognised the need to look and position on the topic of ventilation and air quality. Nevertheless, good quality masks, physical distancing, ventilation, hygiene on top of vaccines are necessary to combat COVID-19 transmission.

The second question inquired how public health could help with the COVAX efforts to ensure that the vaccines delivered around the world are of good quality and have an adequate shelf life.

He stressed that the only way is for everyone involved in the management of the immunisation programmes to be very clear about how complex it is everywhere in the world. Everyone donating vaccines with a short expiry date must be very mindful of this situation and avoid putting people working in a low-income setting in such a difficult situation.

Lastly, he was asked about COVAX and the ability to negotiate prices.

Dr. Nabarro explained that COVAX was set up so all countries could access vaccines and negotiate the price. However, due to the fact, some governments felt anxious about letting down their citizens. They offered more money to companies producing vaccines, therefore received bigger and faster supplies. That caused a delay in COVAX and access to vaccines in low-income countries.

Full speech available [here](#).

ROUNDTABLE & INTERACTIVE DISCUSSION

Economy, equity, and health in the (post) COVID reality: is there a win-win?

Christine Brown

Head of Investment for Health and Development, WHO Europe

Christine Brown discussed the aspects of health equity, and she pointed out that firstly, we need to understand the sentiment towards inequalities. Christine indicated that prior to the pandemic, 84% of the public in Europe believed that tackling inequalities should be a priority of the governmental agendas, as health and wellbeing are critical to our societies. Secondly, we need to understand the lives and realities of communities experiencing inequalities. A variety of tools and methods are available to understand the situation of those left behind.



Intervention available [here](#).

Health & wellbeing in the money-speaking world: turning an oxymoron into prospect

Francesca Colombo

Head of the Health Division, OECD



Francesca Colombo started by highlighting that to be serious about people and health, we need to look at the broader framework and interactions between health and different dimensions of people's life and wellbeings, such as differences in socioeconomic status, work-life balance, safety, environmental quality, social connections, and engagements. On top of that, we also need to look at ways of measuring success and how this impacts policies. She emphasised that collaborating, broadening out, and talking to different groups is critical.

Intervention available [here](#).

The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child Strategy: how it will contribute to a more equitable health for children and young people

Valeria Setti

Coordinator for the Rights of the Child, European Commission

Valeria Setti brought the perspective of the rights of the child and started with highlighting a specific set of rights that children are entitled to including the highest attainable standard of health. Children, especially those from disadvantaged or minority backgrounds, often do not see those rights fulfilled. When it comes to healthcare specifically, the system and policies are often designed for adults and by adults, without children's involvement. Therefore, a participatory approach should be considered

especially for areas like healthcare, as shown in the extensive survey with children conducted by the European Commission, Eurochild, UNICEF, and other organisations representing children. Valeria concluded that the dimension of healthcare in the fulfillment of child rights at the EU level is very strong and is one of the priorities for the European Commission.



Intervention available [here](#).

What role for people?

Freek Spinnewijn

Director, FEANTSA



Freek Spinnewijn followed up with a perspective of homeless people. He started with a stark realisation that almost all homeless people are ill - physically, mentally, or both. However, often, health is not a primary reason for interventions when it comes to the homeless. This could change in the light of the pandemic. Freek noted that shelter conditions improved during the pandemic (which was not observed for decades prior), with all the changes due to the power of public health interventions. The risk is that the conditions will return to their pre-pandemic states when the virus stops spreading.

Intervention available [here](#).

EPHA's Health Inequalities cluster: the time is ripe

Dr. Milka Sokolović
Director-General, EPHA

Milka Sokolović concluded the panel by explaining how EPHA will address the topic of health inequalities. EPHA will be taking a pragmatic approach in establishing short-term goals and a visionary approach for the long-term objectives for its policy work. The relevant topics will be identified by taking into account EPHA's internal skills, competencies and capacity, the current policy landscape, the members' interests, priorities, and capacity to collaborate, as well as with funders' priorities. After thorough brainstorming and planning with various stakeholders, members and scientific



advisors, the health inequalities members cluster is launched. To ensure the voices of all members on the topic are heard, Dr. Sokolović invited AGA participants to complete the upcoming survey where they can highlight their priorities on health inequalities so these can be integrated into the cluster's work and to get in touch with questions, suggestions and feedback on the topic.

Intervention available [here](#).

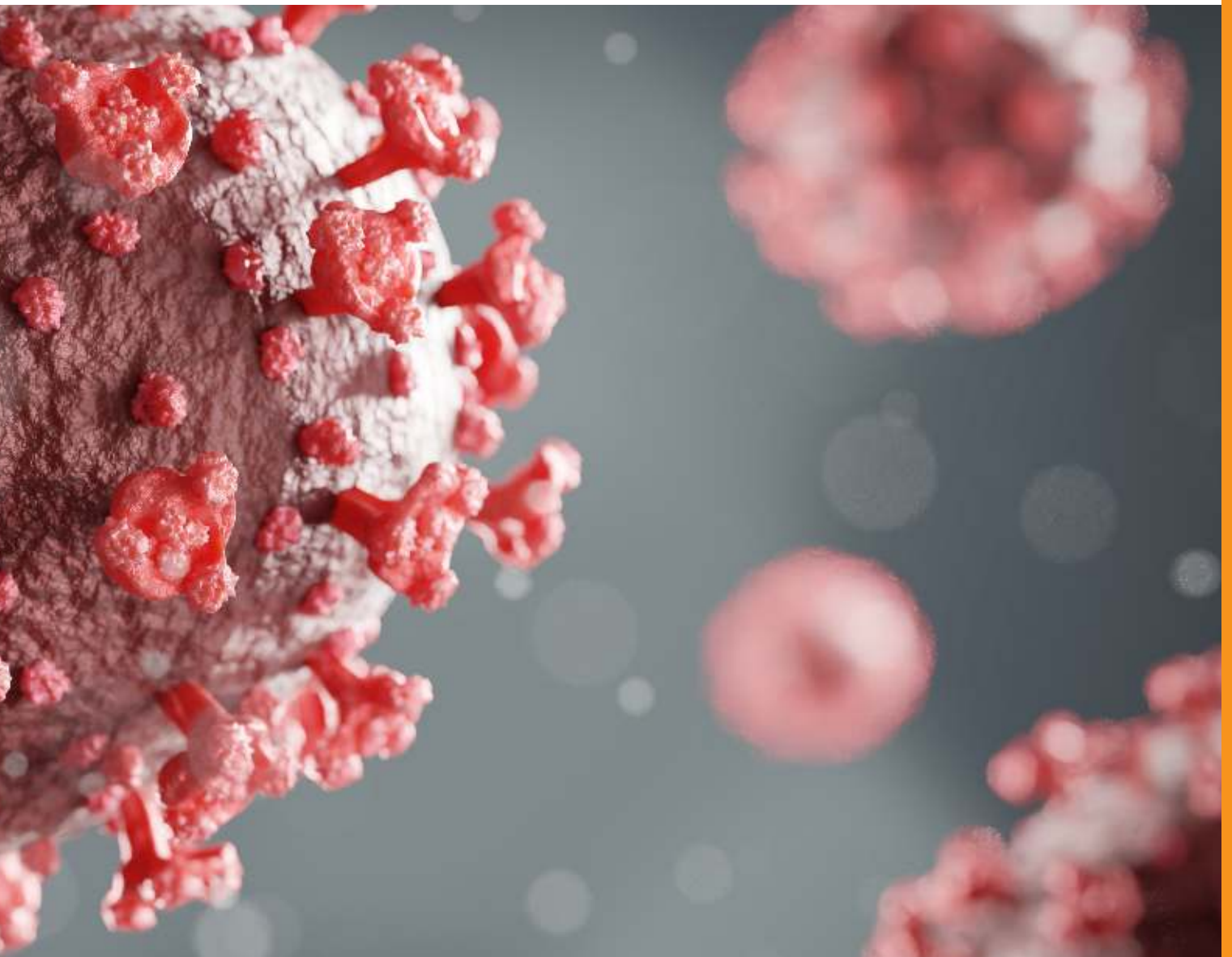
HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE POLICY DIALOGUE

John Middleton from OXFAM started the discussion by stating that the quality of health at large depends on health inequalities and income. It is important to note the increase of inequalities during the pandemic (called by OXFAM the inequality virus).

Jana Hainsworth, Secretary General at Eurochild, followed up by reflecting and posing an open question on how it can be ensured that the EU initiatives do incorporate the voices of civil society.

Dr. Wendy Yared, Director of the Association of European Cancer Leagues, emphasised that people are the solution to the pandemic but only when we can collaborate and work together. The pandemic brought a lot of learnings that we should be sharing and discussing openly to make improvements in public health.

Watch the discussion [here](#).



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