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## **An Comhchoiste um Shláinte**

**Turascáil Taistil - Comhdháil Sláinte na hEorpa i mBeirlín 2022**

Bealtaine 2023

## **Joint Committee on Health**

**Travel Report - European Public Health Conference in Berlin 2022**

May 2023



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## INTRODUCTION

In their Work Programme, the Joint Committee on Health decided to explore the policy issues of Covid-19 and its impact on healthcare, women's health issues, staffing and workforce planning, and planning for demographic changes.

With these issues in mind, the Joint Committee agreed to send a delegation from the Committee to attend the 15<sup>th</sup> European Public Health Conference 2022 – Strengthening health systems: improving population health and being prepared for the unexpected, which took place in Berlin Germany, from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> of November 2022.

At the Committee's meeting in Private Session on the 12<sup>th</sup> of October 2022, the Committee agreed that a Member should attend the conference to represent the Committee, with the aim of enhancing the Committee's understanding of the important issues regarding public health. The conference held many sessions on relevant areas which the Committee has been engaging with, which are detailed in this report.

The Committee was represented at the conference by Senator Martin Conway, who was accompanied by Ms Claudia Smith, Policy Advisor to the Committee.

### 15<sup>th</sup> European Public Health Conference 2022

The European Public Health (EPH) Conference is an annually organised conference on public health issues. It takes place in a different country each year, and works closely with local academic partners to organise the conference. It is the largest public health conference in Europe. In 2022, the conference was held in Hub27 in Berlin, Germany.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this was the first EPH Conference since 2019. This contributed to the theme of the 2022 conference, which was 'Strengthening health systems: improving population health and being prepared for the unexpected'. The conference was divided into separate tracks, which are listed below.

- A. Strengthening health systems: improving population health
- B. Preparing for the unexpected: lessons learned from Covid-19

- C. European public health/Food and nutrition
- D. Chronic diseases
- E. Environment, climate and health
- F. Digital health and communication
- G. Health data, information and assessments
- H. Health detriments and health inequalities
- I. Health services and welfare systems
- J. Health promotion, health literacy, behavioural insights
- K. Health workforce, training and practice
- L. Infectious diseases, preparedness and vaccines
- M. Maternal, child and adolescent public health
- N. Mental health/Migration and minority health/LGBTQI+
- O. Policy, politics and public health
- P. Public health monitoring, reporting and foresight

The Committee would like to express their gratitude to the organisers of this conference, as well as the academics and researchers who presented at it. The presentations attended by the representatives of the Committee will enhance the Committee's understanding of many important issues, which is integral to the Committee's work programme. The Committee would also like to thank Dr Nicholas O'Brien, Irish Ambassador to Germany, and the staff at the Irish Embassy in Berlin for their help and engagement on this visit.

## Summary of the Conference and Engagements

### Opening ceremony

The representative of the Committee began the first day at the EPH conference at the opening ceremony, which discussed the theme of strengthening health systems in Europe. Speakers at the ceremony included Mr Hans Kluge, WHO Regional Director for Europe, Mr Karl Lauterbach, German Minister of Health, and Mr Chikwe Ihekweazu, Director of the WHO Hub for Pandemic and Epidemic Intelligence. The speakers outlined the outcomes of the pandemic on European health systems, and highlighted the need for cooperation in European countries on health matters.

### Plenary: Can people afford to pay for health care?

The first plenary attended by the representative of the Committee was on the topic 'Can people afford to pay for health care? Evidence on inequity in financial protection in Europe'. The keynote speaker was Mr Charles Normand, Professor of Health Policy and Management in Trinity College Dublin. The aim of this session was to raise awareness about the most prevalent gaps in coverage in European health systems for people with low incomes.

The article from this plenary can be found at this [link](#).

### Workshop: An urgent need to understand Long Covid-19

The representative of the Committee then attended a workshop on 'An urgent need to understand Long Covid-19 and its sequela'. There were two main conclusions from this workshop. The first is that Long Covid-19 is a common among both healthy people and people with compromised health. The second is that a focused healthcare plan is required to decrease the impact of Long Covid-19, while also making sure that other underlying conditions are cared for.

The article from this workshop can be found at this [link](#).



### **Workshop: Addressing backlogs and managing waiting lists**

The next workshop attended by the representative of the Committee was on 'Addressing back logs and managing waiting lists during and beyond the Covid-19 pandemic'. The main aim of this workshop was to discuss the impact that Covid-19 had on waiting lists in health systems throughout Europe, and how different countries are moving to address this issue.

The article from this workshop can be found at this [link](#).

### **Engagement with the Irish Ambassador to Germany**

After their first day at the EPH Conference, the representative of the Committee met with Dr. Nicholas O'Brien, the Irish Ambassador to Germany. The Ambassador discussed the impact of Covid-19 in Germany, how the pandemic affected the Irish Embassy in Germany and the EPH Conference.

### **Welcome Reception**

The representative of the Committee also attended a welcome reception for the conference attendees that evening. This provided an opportunity to engage with academic staff and researchers, and to discuss their research projects and findings.

### **Workshop: Children first**

On their second day at the conference, the representative of the Committee first attended a workshop on the topic 'Children first: do health systems pay enough attention to their youngest constituents?'. This workshop discussed circumstances in which children may miss out on the healthcare they require due to gaps in health systems. The conclusion from this workshop was that collecting more data on children's access to healthcare is necessary to enable effective healthcare policies, as it shows the issues that current policies may not cover.

The article from this workshop can be found at this [link](#).

### **Oral presentations: Perinatal and infant public health**

The representative of the Committee then attended a series of oral presentations on perinatal and infant public health. Researchers from Finland, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom presented their findings on a number of issues regarding perinatal and infant health issues.

The articles from this session can be found at this [link](#).

### **Skills Building Seminar: Digital health**

The representative of the Committee attended a skills building seminar on the topic 'Digital health, informatics and public health'. This session focused on the collection of health data, and how it can be used for the benefit of health systems. The key conclusions of this seminar were that in order for digital data to be of use, a high level data infrastructure must be employed and the standards for health data must be kept high, to improve their usefulness.

The article from this session can be found at this [link](#).

### **Late Breaker: The war in Ukraine – an attack on health and human rights**

The representative of the Committee attended a lunch time session on the topic 'The war in Ukraine – an attack on health and human rights'. This session discussed the war in Ukraine from the perspective of healthcare professionals, including issues such as the effect the war will have on the Ukrainian health system and how countries housing Ukrainian refugees can support their health system.

## Conclusion

The Committee is grateful that its representative had the opportunity to attend the EPH Conference. Engaging with academic staff and researchers proved to be a valuable experience in informing the Committee of different aspects of the current issues in public health. In particular, engaging with research on contemporary issues such as improving health data systems and Long Covid-19 will aid the Committee when considering these issues in the future.

Once again, the Committee wishes to thank all organisers and presenters at the conference, as well as Ambassador O'Brien and the Embassy staff for an informative and thought-provoking visit.

In 2023, the EPH Conference will be held in Dublin, and will be centred on the theme 'Our Food, Our Health, Our Earth: A Sustainable Future for Humanity'. We wish all conference organisers and academic staff the very best of luck with their preparations.

## Orders of Reference

### 94. Scope and Context of Activities of Select Committees

(1) The Dáil may appoint a Select Committee to consider and, ifso permitted, to take evidence upon any Bill, Estimate or matter, and to report its opinion for the information and assistance of the Dáil. Such motion shall specifically state the orders of reference of the Committee, define the powers devolved upon it, fix the number of members to serve on it, state the quorum, and may appoint a date upon which the Committee shall report back to the Dáil.

(2) It shall be an instruction to each Select Committee that—

(a) it may only consider such matters, engage in such activities, exercise such powers and discharge such functions as are specifically authorised under its orders of reference and under Standing Orders;

(b) such matters, activities, powers and functions shall be relevant to, and shall arise only in the context of, the preparation of a report to the Dáil;

(c) it shall not consider any matter which is being considered, or of which notice has been given of a proposal to consider, by the Joint Committee on Public Petitions and the Ombudsmen in the exercise of its functions under Standing Order 125(1); and

(d) it shall refrain from inquiring into in public session or publishing confidential information regarding any matter if so requested, for stated reasons given in writing, by—

(i) a member of the Government or a Minister of State, or

(ii) the principal office-holder of a State body within the responsibility of a Government Department, or

(iii) the principal office-holder of a non-State body which is partly funded by the State, Provided that the Committee may appeal any such request made to the Ceann Comhairle, whose decision shall be final.

(3) It shall be an instruction to all Select Committeesto which Bills are referred that they shall ensure that not more than two Select Committees shall meet to consider a Bill on any given day, unless the Dáil, after due notice to the Business Committee by a Cathaoirleach of one of the Select Committees concerned, waives this instruction.

## 95. Functions of Departmental Select Committees

(1) The Dáil may appoint a Departmental Select Committee to consider and, unless otherwise provided for in these Standing Orders or by order, to report to the Dáil on any matter relating to—

(a) legislation, policy, governance, expenditure and administration of—

(i) a Government Department, and

(ii) State bodies within the responsibility of such Department, and

(b) the performance of a non-State body in relation to an agreement for the provision of services that it has entered into with any such Government Department or State body.

(2) A Select Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order shall also consider such other matters which—

(a) stand referred to the Committee by virtue of these Standing Orders or statute law, or

(b) shall be referred to the Committee by order of the Dáil.

(3) The principal purpose of Committee consideration of matters of policy, governance, expenditure and administration under paragraph (1) shall be—

(a) for the accountability of the relevant Minister or Minister of State, and

(b) to assess the performance of the relevant Government Department or of a State body within the responsibility of the relevant Department, in delivering public services while achieving intended outcomes, including value for money.

(4) A Select Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order shall not consider any matter relating to accounts audited by, or reports of, the Comptroller and Auditor General unless the Committee of Public Accounts—

(a) consents to such consideration, or

(b) has reported on such accounts or reports.

(5) A Select Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order may be joined with a Select Committee appointed by Seanad Éireann to be and act as a Joint Committee for the purposes of paragraph (1) and such other purposes as may be specified in these Standing Orders or by order of the Dáil: Provided that the Joint Committee shall not consider—

(a) the Committee Stage of a Bill,

(b) Estimates for Public Services, or

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(c) a proposal contained in a motion for the approval of an international agreement involving a charge upon public funds referred to the Committee by order of the Dáil.

(6) Any report that the Joint Committee proposes to make shall, on adoption by the Joint Committee, be made to both Houses of the Oireachtas.

(7) The Cathaoirleach of the Select Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order shall also be Cathaoirleach of the Joint Committee.

(8) Where a Select Committee proposes to consider—

(a) EU draft legislative acts standing referred to the Select Committee under Standing Order 133, including the compliance of such acts with the principle of subsidiarity,

(b) other proposals for EU legislation and related policy issues, including programmes and guidelines prepared by the European Commission as a basis of possible legislative action,

(c) non-legislative documents published by any EU institution in relation to EU policy matters,  
or

(d) matters listed for consideration on the agenda for meetings of the relevant Council (of Ministers) of the European Union and the outcome of such meetings, the following may be notified accordingly and shall have the right to attend and take part in such consideration



without having a right to move motions or amendments or the right to vote:

(i) members of the European Parliament elected from constituencies in Ireland,

(ii) members of the Irish delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and

(iii) at the invitation of the Committee, other members of the European Parliament.

(9) A Select Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order may, in respect of any Ombudsman charged with oversight of public services within the policy remit of the relevant Department consider—

(a) such motions relating to the appointment of an Ombudsman as may be referred to the Committee, and

(b) such Ombudsman reports laid before either or both Houses of the Oireachtas as the Committee may select: Provided that the provisions of Standing Order 130 apply where the Select Committee has not considered the Ombudsman report, or a portion or portions thereof, within two months (excluding Christmas, Easter or summer recess periods) of the report being laid before either or both Houses of the Oireachtas.

## 96. Powers of Select Committees

Unless the Dáil shall otherwise order, a Committee appointed pursuant to these Standing Orders shall have the following powers:

(1) power to invite and receive oral and written evidence and to print and publish from time to time—

(a) minutes of such evidence as was heard in public, and

(b) such evidence in writing as the Committee thinks fit;

(2) power to appoint sub-Committees and to refer to such sub-Committees any matter comprehended by its orders of reference and to delegate any of its powers to such sub-Committees, including power to report directly to the Dáil;

(3) power to draft recommendations for legislative change and for new legislation;

(4) in relation to any statutory instrument, including those laid or laid in draft before either or both Houses of the Oireachtas, power to—

(a) require any Government Department or other instrument-making authority concerned to—

(i) submit a memorandum to the Select Committee explaining the statutory instrument, or

(ii) attend a meeting of the Select Committee to explain any such statutory instrument:

Provided that the authority concerned may decline to attend for reasons given in writing to the Select Committee, which may report thereon to the Dáil, and

(b) recommend, where it considers that such action is warranted, that the instrument should be annulled or amended;

(5) power to require that a member of the Government or Minister of State shall attend before the Select Committee to discuss—

(a) policy, or

(b) proposed primary or secondary legislation (prior to such legislation being published), for which he or she is officially responsible: Provided that a member of the Government or Minister of State may decline to attend for stated reasons given in writing to the Select Committee, which may report thereon to the Dáil: and provided further that a member of the Government or Minister of State may request to attend a meeting of the Select Committee to enable him or her to discuss such policy or proposed legislation;

(6) power to require that a member of the Government or Minister of State shall attend before the Select Committee and provide, in private session if so requested by the attendee, oral briefings in advance of relevant meetings of the Council of the European Union to enable the Select Committee to make known its views: Provided that the Committee may also require such attendance following such meetings;

(7) power to require that the Chairperson designate of a body or agency under the aegis of a Department shall, prior to his or her appointment, attend before the Select Committee to discuss his or her strategic priorities for the role;

(8) power to require that a member of the Government or Minister of State who is officially responsible for the implementation of an Act shall attend before a Select Committee in relation to the consideration of a report under Standing Order 197;

(9) subject to any constraints otherwise prescribed by law, power to require that principal officeholders of a—

(a) State body within the responsibility of a Government Department, or

(b) non-State body which is partly funded by the State,

shall attend meetings of the Select Committee, as appropriate, to discuss issues for which they are officially responsible: Provided that such an office-holder may decline to attend for stated reasons given in writing to the Select Committee, which may report thereon to the Dáil; and

(10) power to—

(a) engage the services of persons with specialist or technical knowledge, to assist it or any of its sub-Committees in considering particular matters; and

(b) undertake travel;

Provided that the powers under this paragraph are subject to such recommendations as may be made by the Working Group of Committee Cathaoirligh under Standing Order 120(4)(a)



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