



30 March 2020: Invest in health, today and tomorrow

The spread of the coronavirus pandemic highlights the problems created by policies of underfunding, privatization and commodification within health systems.

The course of this crisis, which was unexpected but not unforeseeable, has been, above all, determined by austerity measures imposed by the policies of the European Union, through recommendations aimed solely at compliance with budgetary parameters.

National governments, in order to support their economic development, have cut public spending, particularly in the area of social protection and health. This approach has favoured the market and led to stratification of the quality of care: today, we can see significant inequalities in access to health care, as people's class status significantly influences the quality of the care they receive.

In many countries, these choices have led to the reduction of funds specifically allocated for the improvement of health status of certain groups as well as the number of beds in hospitals. These choices have concurrently led to the reduction of hospital staff and a parallel increase in the precariousness of their work. All with the sole aim of achieving reductions of costs.

Health care has become increasingly privatised and linked to the market. Health policies have focused almost exclusively on the production of an ever-increasing number of services, without any consideration for the real needs of the population. High volumes of procedures may mean high revenues or reimbursements for the private sector, but they are not a reflection of what a needs and rights-based health system should look like. All this has led to the creation of systems that are based on the artificially estimated cost of the disease and not on real health needs and responses.

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is clear that only a non-market health intervention, managed and financed by the public system, can be strong enough to protect the entire population and to carry out coordinated prevention campaigns. Prevention ultimately ensures that fewer people become ill, which is not in the interest of a profit-orientated health system. However, the pandemic provides close opportunities for some actors to profit from the procurement of equipment and medicines, providing tests, etc. We are witnessing that some governments, in order to be able to react to the situation and overcome the weaknesses of public health systems, contract private health providers without any transparency and negotiation.

For this reason, the *European Network against the Privatisation and Commercialisation of Health and Social Protection and People's Health Movement (PHM)* reaffirm that it is essential, now more than ever, to create a European public health system that is strong, supportive, of high quality and accessible to the entire population.

This system must be financed by public resources, through taxes or contributions, depending on the country, to enable a complete and universal response to health needs. It should also be based on solidarity within the population and among European countries, rather than private interests of shareholders.

Member States should make a priority of social and health protection in their budgets, which would not be subjected to bureaucratic constraints. It is particularly important that these budgets are funded enough to respond to health problems we will increasingly face in the future: ageing population, chronic illnesses, disabilities, mental health, occupational health, social fragility, etc. This can be achieved through social harmonisation at the EU level, as well as through combating tax evasion by introducing progressive contribution schemes for the whole EU.

It also has to be clear that health cannot be regarded as separate from other sectors; in fact, health effects should be one of the criteria for the evaluation of all European policies.

On 7 April, World Health Day, decentralized actions are being organised throughout Europe.

For the fifth consecutive year, the European Network and PHM call on citizens, health workers, associations, etc. to come together on the Day of Action against the Commercialization of Health.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic we have cancelled all gatherings and actions with physical contact.

We therefore call on everyone to demonstrate their support by "spreading solidarity, not the virus".

How? With a "white sheet" action on April 7:

1. Hang a white sheet with a slogan in a visible place or make a poster at home

2. Take a picture of yourself with your messages

3. Post it

- on social media with the hashtag #health4all and address it to your political leaders

- on the interactive map bit.ly/Agir4Health

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