



ENRF Briefing Note

Third Forum of the Scientific Panel for Health “Enabling health equality in Europe - the role of health research”

The European Nursing Research Foundation (ENRF) participated in the [Scientific Panel for Health \(SPH\) forum](#) “Enabling health equality in Europe - the role of health research”. This forum’s objective was to explore the current situation, barriers in participation and engagement with health research, and ways forward, tackling the following question: can increased engagement with health research inform and support more effective prevention measures and improve access to appropriate healthcare, and thereby reduce inequalities, knowing that health inequalities within Europe and across regions are significant and remain present?



Being the European Commission’s science-led expert group based on the provisions of the Horizon 2020 Specific Programme, and tasked with helping to achieve better health and wellbeing for all, the SPH has published several consensus documents (e.g.: “[Building the Future of Health Research](#)”, 2018) setting out a vision for the future of health research, building on input from the EU stakeholders. This event aimed at sketching important elements of inequality in access to appropriate care from different perspectives, formulate the status and the challenges that need to be addressed; to analyse the aspects of inequality from a perspective of health care and research organization: workforce, research policies, funding sources, as well as the approaches that provide elements of success in improving health equality.

Research ecosystem is undergoing rapid and profound changes, due to a wide range of factors, from advances in technology and funding pressures to political uncertainty and population shifts. Research base, mainly in nursing, is essential not just for nurses but also for funders of health services and health policy makers. It also plays a role in addressing the issue of equality in healthcare.

Regarding the challenges in health equality, implementing healthcare policies in the EU is something that should be done horizontally across all Member States. This would help to tackle the health inequalities that persist across regions and countries. Stefan Schreck (European Commission) insisted on this point, stating that “*the implementation of new health policies in the UE is always done horizontally*”. The same applies to innovation in healthcare, where there is a risk that not all the EU countries access it equally. Therefore, a way to tackle this would be to engage with scientists in the implementation of their innovation tools.



Furthermore, health research (and in particular nursing research) has a big societal impact that is bigger than its economic return. Karin Sipido (SPH) picked up on this point, adding that “*by horizontally approaching healthcare, care and research (currently carried out in silos) would be connected again*”, while Miklós Szócska (Director of [Health Services Management Training Centre](#) of the Semmelweis University) believes that “*tackling health inequality requires joint investment in research, prevention, and in primary and community care*”.

There are current challenges in health research that need to be addressed, as healthcare research funds not being fairly allocated in the EU. The top 5 EU countries (France, Germany, Italy, Spain, UK) receive 68.2% of the total EU healthcare grants, and 96.9% of H2020 grants are assigned to EU-15 beneficiaries (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, UK).

Lucyna Wozniak (Vice-Rector Research and International Relations, [Medical University of Łódź](#), Poland) criticised this situation, explaining that *“there are many talented young professionals in Poland (as an example) that are being excluded from accessing EU research funds. Furthermore, there is not enough research on the migration of nursing professionals. Nurses from Eastern or Southern Europe are more likely to migrate to Northern Europe than the other way around. This also affects health equality since the distribution of nursing professionals across Europe is uneven”*. Claudia B. Maier ([Technische Universität Berlin](#), Germany; and [University of Pennsylvania](#), USA) stressed the importance of nursing research, adding that *“Nurses are often required in lower-skilled jobs, resulting in further inequality in the healthcare sector”*.

Nevertheless, through research and the horizontal implementation of policies, the overall efficiency of the healthcare sector is improving. Digital tools and data sharing (e.g. blockchain) are fostering access to care, and hence delivering on the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#). Ricardo Baptista Leite ([Universidade Catolica Lisbon](#) and Member of the Parliament, Portugal) believes that *“the poor management of resources across different healthcare sectors (including health research) is leading to rising costs without further efficiency. Nevertheless, digital tools and new technologies are reserving this situation”*.

In the last ENRF [newsletter](#), the ENRF President, Karen Bjoro, expressed that *“evidence-based nursing and EU policy-making have to go hand in hand, mainly when we see how health, and in particular nursing, fits into the overall research agenda”*. Disruption is all around us, and the research ecosystem is undergoing rapid and profound changes, due to a wide range of factors, from advances in technology and funding pressures to political uncertainty and population shifts.

Within a context of the increasing austerity measures and current reforms of the healthcare systems throughout the EU, it is more than ever crucial that Nursing Research becomes an imperative component in building a healthier and competitive Europe. Nursing research has a vital role to play in maintaining and promoting the health of European citizens while fostering the development of quality, efficient, and safe healthcare delivery services.

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