

Dear Commissioner,
Dear Attendees,

Taking part in a European project is an investment which is very useful.
Coordinating a European project is a much bigger contribution and a privilege.

Our Federal Public Service of Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment has a long tradition of participation in European projects as partner and even as Work Package Leader, with some notable previous experiences. -I mention the example of the COPHES program on human biomonitoring, where we coordinated the sub-project DEMOCOPHES. This is the first time we took on the overall coordination of an important project in our strategic plan. I would like to take the opportunity of this closing event to point out some lessons and some recommendations with respect to this exercise.

First of all, I'd like to insist on the unique opportunities to achieve benefits for everyone concerned, originating from the EU policy to co-fund important projects through its various investment programs.

Additionally, the international character of this Joint Action provides insights in new policies, offers unique networking moments, and brings together opinions and research from all over the EU and often from beyond.

These precious exchanges of information enrich the competence of our experts and foster the development of our knowledge at national level. Without EU collaboration, it would be a struggle to collect external opinions and knowledge. Since the world has become more complex and the share of budget allocated to public services is declining every year, our national workload has become huge.

Working together offers synergies, ensures a higher potential for creativity and can offer financial advantages. The Joint Action on Health Workforce Planning & Forecasting is a strong example of knowledge acquired over many years by some countries that is brought together and made available for other countries and partners.

Working together in this way ensures a higher quality, since a large network of top experts can share opinions and provide a 360° perspective. Working together with experts from very diverse origins and health system perspectives can be a challenge but is above all an enriching experience. Europe is a unique melting pot for open thinking and experiencing new policies. Working together does not limit the countries in their national competences. Working together allows these national or regional policies to grow without risking isolation, and with a good understanding of the international context and developments.

Based on our past experiences and on the current project we take part in, I ask you, Mr. Commissioner, to call for a sustained EU investment in health research projects, networking and the sharing of knowledge.

Still, it is important to mention that it is a real challenge for Public Services to participate actively in EU projects as an associated partner and even more as a Coordinating Partner.

During this Joint Action experience, our FPS assigned 5 full time equivalents to the project for more than 3 years, and more research had been done beforehand to support the tender process. We know that the work package leaders of the different participating countries and organisations also made a strong effort. As an example, the Slovak Ministry of Health of Mr. Miklosi is one of many contributors. I am pleased to notice that since 2012 the EU rules for funding projects have been improved and have become more flexible. I call upon the EU to continue this trend and to create a project context which enables maximum participation of national and regional administrations.

Looking back on the Joint Action on Health Workforce Planning and Forecasting, I remember the valuable collaboration, the rewarding activities for our experts, the very useful products, but also the opportunity to put important knowledge on paper. In addition, I cite the meaningful contacts with other countries and stakeholders. I hope that the participants will be able to maintain those contacts in the future. Of course a strong network of experts is an important element to sustain, and I'm pleased that EU and national initiatives will lead to more conferences and workshops. But clearly, a lot of research still needs to be done. Several issues were highlighted in some of our Joint action reports: e.g. looking at the upcoming evolution in health care, and how to provide the right people with the right skills in the right place.

I would like to end this speech with some words of appreciation for my own staff, and also would like to thank the various work package leaders and their teams.

In particular, I take advantage of this opportunity to warmly thank Michel van Hoegaerden for his personal dedication to the Joint Action. His dynamic and motivated approach most certainly contributed to its successful realization and the output quality of its end products.

I also want to thank the Belgian workforce planning unit, in particular Pascale Steinberg, Veerle Vivet and Pieter-Jan Miermans. In spite of an intense national planning schedule, they were able to play an active role in the Joint Action project from the start.

My gratitude also goes out to the project team, Tina Jacob, Maria D'Eugenio and Damien Rebella, who provided essential project and administrative support. Finally, I want to thank Aurélie Somer, whose department supported and shared its resources with the Joint Action project team.

Dear Commissioner, Dear attendees,

For Belgium it is an honor and a pleasure to take a leading role, together with all of you, in the European Health Workforce issue. Our Federal Public Service will always be willing to help in the future. This Joint Action will be delivered this summer on time, within budget and with the appropriate quality. We sincerely hope that the upcoming EU projects will also benefit from the same sense of international participation and ownership as the JA.