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Contribution by Latvia

to the CSTD 2020-2021 priority theme on “Using science, technology and innovation to close the gap on Sustainable Development Goal 3 on good health and well-being”

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CSTD 2020-2021 Priority theme 2: Using science, technology and innovation to close the gap on SDG 3, good health and well-being

1. Can you give examples of projects/policies in your country aimed at using science, technology, and innovation for early warning, risk reduction and management of national risks? What are the main outcomes? What are the main challenges confronted while trying to implement these projects/policies in your country or region?

In Latvia, most of the projects and studies in the health sector are focused on socioeconomic effects. The most recent example of policymaking based on research is the National Research Programme to Mitigate the Effects of COVID-19. The programme provides for implementation of innovative high-readiness scientific projects with the aim of limiting the spread of COVID-19 pandemic and protecting the population in order to re-establish economic and social activities. It also aims at developing scientific forecasts with future scenarios in Latvia in the autumn of 2020, as well as in 2021 and 2022 by carrying out studies in three thematic areas: healthcare and public health; engineering solutions; economy and the welfare of society. In the framework of the programme, ten large projects are being implemented. Five of these projects are focused solely on medicine and health issues.

At the end of May 2020, a voluntary tracing app “Apturi COVID” (“Stop COVID” in English) was launched in Latvia. It uses Bluetooth technology to identify other nearby devices that also have the app installed. Individuals are only notified if they have been in the proximity of 2 meters to an individual for more than 15 minutes who has tested positive for COVID-19. They receive a message asking them to self-isolate to prevent the further spread of the disease. Due to the decentralized and encrypted nature of the app, it aligns with European Union regulations on data protection. The availability of the newly released exposure notification API by Google and Apple is a fundamental building block to ensure widespread use of the app.

During crisis, policy makers in their decisions have relied on epidemiologists` and infectologists` expertise and advice, thus those decisions are based on data and facts. Latvia was among the first countries to introduce e-parliament, where a Parliament can fully function remotely – propose new legislation, debate and vote on laws – relying on the secure digital identity of every member of Parliament. System proved to be efficient and ensure continuity of the Parliament work. As a result of considerable effort, Latvia has maintain a relatively low incidence rate in Europe.

2. Can you provide examples of policies/projects/initiatives aimed at strengthening national health innovation? For example, how does your country build innovative capabilities through investments in R&D and human capital? What institutional and regulatory arrangements are in place to stimulate healthcare innovations and effectively address safety, ethical and other concerns?

In Latvia, several support programmes are put in place with the aim of attracting investments to the R&D and human capital and develop co-operation between researchers, students and business sector. Several from these programmes, including in the field of medicine and health care, are financed by the European Union (European

Structural and Investment Funds). Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for management of these funds.

An important objective of projects that are implemented in the field of medicine and health care is to bring innovative solutions to the sector. Furthermore, Ministry of Health co-operates with researchers and scientists to carry out studies that contribute to the health care policy making, including on such issues as mental health or chronic diseases. The following studies have been carried out recently:

- Distribution of process addictions (gambling, computer dependency, new technologies, etc.) to the Latvian residents and risk factors affecting them;
- Study of behaviour and functional capabilities affecting the health of Latvian residents above the working age;
- Study on the prevalence of psychiatric disorders and suicidal behaviour in the adult population of Latvia.

Universities, for example the Riga Stradiņš University Technology Transfer Contact Point, have an important role in research and application of innovations.

Several policy-planning documents highlight the importance of healthcare research and innovation. According to the Public Healthcare Guidelines 2021-2027 (under development) it is planned to support research in such fields as, for example, environmental health, antimicrobial resistance or rare diseases. Digital Transformation Guidelines 2021-2027 (under development) provide for development of data exchange between research institutions, as well as for development of telemedicine. Furthermore, Ministry of Economics is working on development of a concept of “the data lake”. The data lake is a platform/infrastructure where different types of structured data are available together. In the case of the health data lake, it would be a variety of medical data, such as medical history, biomarkers, etc.

3. Could you suggest some contact persons of the nodal agency responsible for projects/policies, related technologies and international collaboration in this context as well as any experts (from academia, private sector, civil society or government) dealing with projects in this area? We might contact them directly for further inputs or invite some of them as speakers for the CSTD inter-sessional panel and annual session.

Dr. biol., Prof. Jānis Kloviņš, Director, Latvian Biomedical research and Study Centre

Dr. chem. Osvalds Pugovičs, Director, Latvia Institute of Organic Synthesis

Ms. Vita Šteina, Head of Division of Communications, Children's Clinical University Hospital

Prof. Dainis Krieviņš, Director, Institute of Research of Pauls Stradiņš Clinical University Hospital

Prof. Mārcis Leja, Head of Department of Research, Riga East Clinical University Hospital

4. Do you have any documentation, references, or reports on the specific examples on the priority theme in your country or region?

One of the most important policy-planning documents, the National Development Plan of Latvia for 2014–2020 includes as one of the strategic objectives the “Advanced Research and Innovation and Higher Education”. Science is maintained as one of the priorities also in the National Development Plan of Latvia for 2021–2027 . There are the following sectoral policy planning documents in place: Public Healthcare Guidelines 2014-2020 and the Strategy of the Ministry of Health 2019-2021.

According to the the National Development Plan of Latvia for 2014–2020, the following priority areas have been identified to receive the EU support for investments in health promotion and disease prevention, development of human resources and infrastructure and quality of health care: maternal and child health care, oncology, psychiatry and cardiovascular diseases.