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Committee of the Regions' "Healthy Workforce, Healthy Economy"

The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) has recently addressed the economic importance of reducing health inequalities.

Commenting after his draft opinion, Dave Wilcox (UK/PES), the CoR's rapporteur on health inequalities, stressed that health issues have to be a part of EU policies, specifically broadening the EU2020 Plan to include them. Investing more in quality health services would support general measures, stimulating economic growth and increasing job creation.

"Among all the proposals to lift our economies out of the doldrums, there is little or no mention of health issues", said Wilcox. "A healthy workforce is an obvious advantage when it comes to boosting productivity and improving competitiveness." Commenting on his draft opinion, titled "Solidarity in Health: Reducing Inequalities in the EU", he expanded on this topic by saying there is a need for a more comprehensive measure of the inequalities along with the efforts made in reducing them. Appealing to the CoR, Wilcox emphasised the importance of obtaining regional input in order to have a more complete view of the inequalities, not just across national borders, but also regions.

Common Measures Address Inequalities

He suggested common measures such as infant mortality and anticipated life expectancy to judge inequalities, but said there is need for even more measures when looking at the regional inequalities against national averages.

"We need to be able to know how we want to measure the changes that we are looking for in terms of reducing inequalities", said Wilcox. "This is not just a question of looking at how long people live, but at how long the wider population lives too, so that we then start to focus on the inequalities as well as the improvements."

Wilcox and fellow CoR member Karsten Uno Petersen (DK/PES) had presented a proposal to create an inter-regional group that would attempt to define a new set of criteria for assessing health inequalities. He said they had received positive feedback from the European Commission, and he hopes opinion can become action.

For more information, please visit: www.cor.europa.eu

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