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## Economic and trade policies need to take better account of health

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Health is largely determined by factors outside the domain of healthcare, and policies other than health have direct effects on health determinants. Therefore, the Finnish EU presidency's has chosen as its overall objective in health policy to promote the principle of 'Health in All Policies'. This approach is also meant to contribute to the Lisbon strategy, and have positive effects on national economies through higher productivity and labour participation.

Ahead of the 'Health in All Policies' conference, the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health published a book entitled Health in All Policies - Prospects and Potentials. The book presents a number of examples of 'Health in All Policies', where advances in health have already been acquired through policies in sectors such as education, traffic, agriculture or nutrition. It also recognises that in some cases the values and objectives of the various policy intentions can be incompatible, "if not directly in conflict" (e.g. EU alcohol production versus EU health objectives) and that in these cases compromises will need to be sought.

Issues:

The Finnish Presidency's main health event, the 'Health in All Policies' expert conference, took place on 20-21 September 2006 in form of plenary sessions and thematic workshops discussing:

Health inequalities as a multisectoral challenge: Social and economic conditions, such as level of education, poverty, social exclusion, unemployment and environment are strongly correlated with health status and therefore contribute to inequalities in health;

diet, nutrition and physical activity in countering the epidemic of chronic diseases: CAP reform should target consumption of healthier foods and trade agreements should include public-health aspects;

alcohol policies and the need to balance macroeconomic impacts and the health harm of alcohol use: How to balance the government and industry financial benefits from the production and trade of alcohol with the social and health harms caused by excessive use of alcohol;

transport and environment: the need for evidence-based policymaking, and;

mental health: how public policies on sectors such as the labour market, urban planning and housing can help to build and sustain mental health.

The workshops made a number of concrete proposals highlighting the need to make better use of impact assessments, comparable data and information.

The next EU health ministers' meeting is set to issue conclusions on the 'Health in All Policies' on 30 November 2006.

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