



COCIR Position Paper

Healthcare Infrastructure Is Essential For Economic Development

Modern infrastructure is essential for economic development. In the European Union today, borders are disappearing and Member States are linked with road, rail and air infrastructure. Healthcare too is crucial for social and economic development and requires an infrastructure which can also cross borders. EU Structural Funds can be used for healthcare projects, contributing to cohesion and economic development in the new Member States and Accession Countries.

COCIR provided a platform for further discussion on this issue in its session 'Improving Healthcare Infrastructure in an Enlarged Europe' at the European Health Forum Gastein on 4-7 October. Investing in healthcare infrastructure will not only improve the quality of healthcare but is also key for economic development in Europe.

A modern healthcare system which delivers high quality care is not only beneficial to individual citizens and their quality of life but is also one of the building blocks for economic development of the country and Europe as a whole. In other words, the economic growth of a country is directly connected to the quality of care it provides.

Demand for healthcare is on the increase. Advances in medical progress and better living conditions are leading to longer life expectancy and an increasing awareness of health and life quality. In Western Europe, for example, the average life expectancy has doubled from 40 to 80 years within the last century. These global trends result in higher expenditure on healthcare, which today is seen less as a burden and more as an investment for the future – not only for the individual benefit of citizens and their quality of life, but also for the benefit of society and its economic development.

The personal wellbeing of citizens will only improve significantly when political decisions focus on healthcare as a whole and the necessary investment is made. It is worth noting that healthy citizens contribute positively to economic growth. According to a WHO study, a 10-year increase in life expectancy adds 0.35% to a country's GDP. A society in good health will raise productivity and contribute to sustainable long-term growth. Fifty percent of the difference in economic growth between rich and poor countries is connected to bad health and lower life expectancy.

COCIR believes that health infrastructure is of value for the population and also a critical condition for economic growth. The process of building up a modern healthcare infrastructure should not only cover hospitals, a traditional symbol of healthcare, but should also focus on the necessary conditions to keep people healthy (education and prevention) and on curing people when ill (traditional healthcare). The needs of people and patients should be at the centre of all healthcare. The whole process of care, from prevention to early diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation and (home)care must be taken into consideration, as high-quality health infrastructure is the enabler for a modern and efficient healthcare system – not only in the new Member States but for the European Union as a whole.

Investing in health infrastructure will improve the efficiency and quality of health services. New Member States will have the advantage of being able to use the latest technologies, thus 'leapfrogging' less efficient structures which currently exist in the EU 15. Healthcare should be regarded as a vital part of a country's infrastructure in this framework and as a beneficial part of its economic development.

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