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Since 1998 Dr Laaser has been head of Section of International Public Health at the Faculty of Health Sciences, School of Public Health, University of Bielefeld. Principal investigator of the Stability Pact Project on Public Health Training and Research in South Eastern Europe (2000-2010). Visiting professor at the School of Public Health in Belgrade, honorary professor in Sofia and Tirana. Member of the executive boards of the World Federation of Public Health Associations (president 2010-2012), of the Association of Schools of Public Health in the European Region (1991-1996, president 1993-1995), and of the German Association for Health Sciences and Public Health (since 1997, president 1997-2001). He was co-editor of the book series on International Public Health, Hans Jacobs Editing Company, Lage, Germany, of the (German) Journal of Public Health, the (Bulgarian) Journal of Healthcare Management and associate editor of the (American) Journal of Public Health Policy. He has degrees 1970 from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Baltimore, USA (Master of Public Health) and 1969 from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (Diploma of Tropical Medicine & Hygiene). For the last decade various public health projects in South Eastern Europe, Central Asia, the Near East and in the Pacific Region.

Presenting:

Health systems in Europe face a number of increasingly complex challenges

Summary:

Globalization, evolving health threats, an aging society, financial constraints on government spending, and social and health inequalities are some of the most pressing. Such challenges require not only different funding and organizational approaches to health services, but also demand a multidisciplinary public health workforce supported by new skills and expertise. This policy summary aims to outline these needs and to consider measures and options towards meeting them. First, the aims of the public health workforce in Europe (noting that many elements of this discussion should not be seen as unique to Europe) and the importance of public health are described. The importance of public health professionals who can fill information, prevention, social and regulatory deficits is explained. This is followed by a picture of the current workforce and training provisions. Although the Bologna Process and the WHO Regional Office for Europe's Health 2020 policy provide a conducive backdrop for change and promote positive developments, public health training and education lag behind. Large gaps are apparent in both the numbers of professionals trained and the kind of training that exists. Education is still largely characterized by a traditional and limited public health focus. The discussion then outlines the importance of understanding the current situation regarding public health in Europe, and of developing and agreeing upon core and emerging competences for a well-equipped workforce. This includes the important role of employers in determining these competences. It has been demonstrated that public health education needs to include a wider range of health-related professionals, including

managers, health promotion specialists, health economists, lawyers and pharmacists, etc. If public health professionals are truly to impact upon the health of the population, they will increasingly require enhanced communication and leadership skills, as well as a broad, interdisciplinary focus. Identified and agreed-upon competences can in turn be translated into competency-based training and education, necessary to equip current public health professionals with the skills required in today's competitive job market. New developments in public health training, including flexible academic programmes, lifelong learning (LLL) and its importance for employability, and accreditation, are also outlined as key to advancing the practice and profession. The annex contains seven case studies, which represent examples of the current reality and new developments in specific contexts. Finally, it is illustrated that, in Europe's current climate of extreme funding constraints, the need for stepping up public health training and education is more important than ever. The broad supportive environment and context for change are in place. By focusing on assessment and evaluation of the current context, coordination and joint efforts to promote competency-based education, and support and growth of new developments, a stronger, more versatile and much needed workforce will be formed.