

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AREA

STANDING COMMITTEE OF THE EFTA STATES

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EFTA Working Group on Public Health

EEA EFTA COMMENT ON THE COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION

EUROPE 2020 “A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth”

The EEA EFTA States (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) welcome the Commission Communication on a “Europe 2020” strategy which was endorsed by Ministers at the European Council in March, and would now like to take the opportunity to comment before the new strategy is finally adopted at the June Council. The EEA EFTA States look forward to playing an active part in the preparations, implementation and follow-up of this Strategy.

The EEA EFTA States share many of the challenges and concerns expressed in the document. We agree with the main priorities set and the need for a coordinated European approach to reach the targets and create a sustainable future so that our and future generations can continue to enjoy a high-quality of healthy life, where different needs, starting points and national specificities are taken into account and thereby promoting growth for all.

However, we think that health as a prerequisite for growth does not receive enough attention in the strategy in its current form: investing in health through precautionary measures is vital in order to ensure a healthy workforce and a healthy population, and should in our view be lifted in the strategy.

A healthy population is a cornerstone for growth and economic success in Europe and is best achieved through addressing the problem of health inequalities, focusing on prevention through the investment in programmes to prevent smoking and reduce alcohol consumption; increase physical activity and improve nutrition; investing in healthcare systems and tackling major and chronic diseases. We know that many of these diseases are preventable, and by increasing access to effective treatment more evenly, significant health and economic benefits would follow.

The EEA EFTA States also take part in and make financial contributions to many of the EU programmes and activities that are and will continue to be important when facing future challenges. We look forward to continued cooperation with the EU both on policy development based on exchange of best practice and in developing the relevant instruments and programmes required to fulfil the potential of the above-mentioned aims and to achieve the set goals.

We are convinced that investing in health is cost effective and that we need to rethink public health spending and focus on prevention. This would lead to gains both in terms of workforce productivity and quality of life for all.
