

2023

# A year in review



**NDPHS**

Northern Dimension  
Partnership in Public Health  
and Social Well-being

**PROGRESS REPORT**

## List of abbreviations

### **EG** NDPHS Expert Group:

**AMR EG** Expert Group on Antimicrobial Resistance

**ASA EG** Expert Group on Alcohol and Substance Use

**HIV, TB & AI EG** Expert Group on HIV, Tuberculosis and Associated Infections

**NCD EG** Expert Group on Non-Communicable Diseases

**OSH EG** Expert Group on Occupational Safety and Health

**PHC EG** Expert Group on Primary Health Care

**PH EG** Expert Group on Prison Health

**EUSBSR** European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

**NDPHS** Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being

**PAC** NDPHS Partnership Annual Conference

**SMEs** Small and Medium Size Enterprises

# Table of contents

1.	OPENING REMARKS	3
2.	CONNECTING MINDS FOR HEALTHY LIVES	5
3.	COORDINATION OF THE POLICY AREA HEALTH IN THE EU STRATEGY FOR THE BALTIC SEA REGION	8
4.	PROJECTS	9
5.	COMMUNICATION	11



2023 was the year of facing aftershocks of 2022, but at the same time, a year of renewed commitment and growth. The ministerial-level Partnership Annual Conference held on 17 January 2024, marking the end of the Swedish chairship of the NDPHS, had the highest level of representation in many years and ministers gave a strong mandate to the Partnership to continue its work and explore new topics and partners for collaboration.

The political commitment to continue the NDPHS work is strong as demonstrated by the Chairs Conclusions and the Declaration signed by the ministers and high-level representatives of the Partner Countries Estonia, Iceland, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden. At the same time, we regret that one Partner has decided to withdraw from the Partnership.

Overall, the network is evolving and maturing and is becoming more resilient and efficient. When MITTENS project, the funding granted by the EU to this Partnership for implementing common activities that had been carefully planned for years, had been terminated after 24 February 2022, the Partnership quickly re-grouped and re-organized and embarked on new funding opportunities to continue with the plans.

It is fair to say, that we have been able to work efficiently, and the total returns are greater than the associated costs. For every euro that Partner Countries invested in the Partnership as their annual contributions for 2023, the return was high success rate for funding for regional project



# 1. CONNECTING MINDS FOR HEALTHY LIVES

The NDPHS brings together public health enthusiasts to share knowledge, learn from each other and care for people through health advocacy. We strengthen professional connections, share and co-create knowledge, and develop joint activities related to people's health and well-being. The following non-exhaustive list illustrates the occasions for connecting and learning. It contains four broad groups of meetings – NDPHS Expert Group meetings, NDPHS project meetings, external meetings of relevance for the NDPHS, and meetings of NDPHS governing bodies. Engaging Ukraine in the collaborative efforts on mutually beneficial terms, has become a significant priority in 2023. Ukrainian counterparts were invited to take part in the meetings when possible and have participated in some of the events mentioned below.

## 1.1 Expert Group meetings

13th Meeting of the Expert Group on Primary Health Care	31 January – 1 February 2023 Tallinn, Estonia
14th Meeting of the Expert Group on Primary Health Care	3 March 2023 Online
17th Meeting of the Expert Group on Occupational Safety and Health	8-9 March 2023 Riga, Latvia
16th Meeting of the Expert Group on HIV, TB and Associated Infections	3-4 April 2023 Berlin, Germany
15th Meeting of the Expert Group on Primary Health Care	5 May 2023 Online
25th Meeting of the Expert Group on Alcohol and Substance Use	22-23 May 2023 Helsinki, Finland
18th Meeting of the Expert Group on Occupational Safety and Health	8 June 2023 Online
26th Meeting of the Expert Group on Antimicrobial Resistance	12 June 2023 Stockholm, Sweden
16th Meeting of the Expert Group on Primary Health Care	11-12 September 2023 Helsinki, Finland
19th Meeting of the Expert Group on Occupational Safety and Health	26-27 September 2023 Tallinn, Estonia

17th Meeting of the Expert Group on HIV, TB and Associated Infections	26-27 September 2023 Tallinn, Estonia
26th Meeting of the Expert Group on Alcohol and Substance Use	4-5 October 2023 Tallinn, Estonia
20th Meeting of the Expert Group on Occupational Safety and Health	7 December 2023 Online

## 1.2. The NDPHS project meetings. The NDPHS is the lead partner or project partner

Arts on Prescription First Transnational meeting	22-23 February 2023 Odense, Denmark
Arts on Prescription Project Partner meeting	6-7 September 2023 Szczecin, Poland
1st Transnational Workshop of the Mental Health Matters project. Led and moderated by the NDPHS Secretariat	25 September 2023 Tallinn, Estonia
“Economy of Wellbeing for People” project kick-off. Co-organized by the NDPHS Secretariat	4 October 2023 Riga, Latvia
2nd Transnational Workshop of the Mental Health Matters project	8 December 2023 Online

## 1.3 External events of strategic importance to the NDPHS

Meetings of the EUSBSR Policy Area Coordinators and National Coordinators	Monthly Online
High-level meeting on AMR of the Swedish EU Presidency	6-7 March 2023 Stockholm, Sweden
ESF Baltic Sea Network	16 March 2023 Stockholm, Sweden
High-level Occupational Safety and Health Summit of the Swedish EU Presidency	15-16 May 2023 Stockholm, Sweden
Approaches to culture and health cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region	16 May Online
Final Conference of the CultureForHealth initiative	8 June 2023 Elefsina, Greece

Meeting on senior officials' level of the Friends of the Northern Dimension	16 June 2023 Stockholm, Sweden
Final event of the Swedish EUSBSR Presidency	4-6 June 2023 Visby, Gotland
Lead Partner Seminar for Small Projects receiving Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme funding	20-21 September 2023 Rostock, Germany
Policy Area Health and Policy Area Education workshop "Economy of Wellbeing for People" at the EUSBSR Annual Forum	4 October 2023 Riga, Latvia
EUSBSR Annual Forum	4-5 October 2023 Riga, Latvia

#### 1.4. NDPHS governing bodies meetings

The EG Chairs and ITAs meeting, The 36th Meeting of the NDPHS Committee of Senior Representatives, and The 2nd Meeting of the EUSBSR Policy Area Health Steering Group	14-15 June 2023 Stockholm, Sweden
21st Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on the Establishment of the NDPHS Secretariat	15 June 2023 Stockholm, Sweden
22nd Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on the Establishment of the NDPHS Secretariat	5 December 2023 Online

## 2. COORDINATION OF THE POLICY AREA HEALTH IN THE EU STRATEGY FOR THE BALTIC SEA REGION

The PA Health Coordinator role in the EUSBSR provides a good opportunity to advocate for the Health in All Policies approach because the EUSBSR stands as an unparalleled platform in the region for engaging transnationally and with other sectors, fostering shared understandings, and collaboratively implementing actions.

This was also recognized at the ministerial-level NDPHS Partnership Annual Conference held on 17 January 2024, during which the ministers underlined that "In the complexities of the regional collaboration, the NDPHS as Policy Area Health Coordinator in the EUSBSR has a unique



opportunity to advocate the placement of health at the forefront of the macroregional strategy and to engage with other policy sectors in promoting the interdependence of health, economic prosperity, social cohesion, environmental sustainability, and resilience to global challenges.“

During 2023, extensive project initiation and fundraising activities resulted in securing new resources, fortifying the implementation of the PA Health Action Plan in the EUSBSR. Collaboration with two sectors can be highlighted in 2023, namely, culture and education.

PA Health has showcased its activities through two major events that attracted large audiences. The online event “Approaches to Culture and Health Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region” took place in May and highlighted the past and ongoing initiatives of cross-sectoral cooperation between health and culture and the novel methods that were developed through it. In October 2023, PA Health organised a joint workshop with PA Education during the EUSBSR Annual Forum on the topic of Economy of Well-being.

## 3. PROJECTS

### Projects with NDPHS as a Lead Partner or Project Partner

#### 3.1. Arts on Prescription

The NDPHS Secretariat has engaged as a project partner in the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme 2021-2027 project “Arts on Prescription,” led by Odense municipality, Denmark. The total budget of the project is 3.51 million EUR. The project duration is from 1 January 2023 until 31 December 2025, and it will develop a guide for establishing Arts on Prescription schemes that is adaptable to the local and regional circumstances. Arts on prescription is a concept to improve the mental well-being of citizens not by prescribing a medicine or therapy, but by taking part in regular arts activities in group settings.

The model programme developed within the project will be piloted by local and regional public health authorities in cooperation with cultural institutions and evaluated for its health effects, organisational set-up, and economic benefits. The arts on prescription model is then transferred to other cities and regions who are supported with an online practitioner’s guide and a rent-an-expert programme. Moreover, the project will initiate a dialogue with national authorities and health insurance funds in order to improve the structural support and financing options for arts on prescription.

#### 3.2. Economy of Wellbeing of People - fostering cohesion towards a sustainable working life and ageing

The one-year project implemented from September 2023 until August 2024 is co-financed by the Swedish Institute and the total budget of the project is 1 000 000 SEK. The NDPHS Secretariat is the Lead Partner of the project implemented in collaboration with Norden Association Sweden,

Estonian Connected Health Cluster, Riga Planning Region and Public Health Association of Latvia.

The project advocates for an inclusive growth and wellbeing agenda in all policies, as well as explore the conditions and mechanisms through which social innovations can be transferred from one country to another. The current focus of the activities is on active and healthy ageing related to sustainable working life.

### **3.3. Mental Health Matters**

The project was developed by the Expert Group on Occupational Safety and Health and the NDPHS Secretariat. It is funded by the Interreg Baltic Sea region programme and the project's total budget is 498,583 EUR. The consortium consists of the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, Riga Stradins University from Latvia, Tallinn University of Technology from Estonia, Nofer Institute of Occupational Medicine from Poland, and the Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority with the NDPHS Secretariat as the lead partner. The project implementation period is from 1 August 2023 to 31 July 2025.

The objective of the project is to propose measures to address psychosocial risks in workplaces, thus contributing both to well-being of the workforce and to competitiveness and resilience of enterprises. The project will develop:

- An online tool, i.e., a first-aid kit, to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) with assessing psychosocial risks, taking preventive action and promoting good mental health.
- A roadmap proposing improvements for OSH policies, education, and practice in the Baltic Sea Region.

In 2023, the partners set up national and transnational communities of practice, consisting of OSH professionals, policymakers, researchers, and workplace representatives. In collaboration with the communities of practice, the partners have uncovered gaps in policy, practice and knowledge related to psychosocial risks at work, identifying concrete areas in need of improvement nationally and transnationally. Moreover, through discussions with SME representatives, the partners have commenced the development of the first-aid kit by discovering frequently encountered challenges related to the well-being of employees in SMEs.

### **3.4. SAFE - Solutions for age freindly employer**

In 2023, the NDPHS Secretariat, together with other partners and a lead Partner, Tallinn University Haapsalu College, applied for funding for the "Solutions for age-friendly employer" (SAFE) project to the Interreg Central Baltic Programme 2021-2027. The funding request was approved, and project partners will now embark on creating and piloting an age-friendly employer development model among healthcare and wellbeing sector companies.

The NDPHS will take leadership in the development of policy recommendations based on the developed age-friendly employer model and the experiences of the piloting and transfer results to key stakeholders, including policymakers, public health authorities, and regional health experts. Also, as the PA Health Coordinator, the NDPHS and its Secretariat have undertaken the responsibility for embedding the project into the EUSBSR PA Health actions as well as connecting

and building synergies with other relevant regional projects, funded through Interreg CBC and BSR programmes.

This initiative was a result of the fruitful collaboration established earlier under the AgeFLAG (“Roadmap to improve the health and well-being of the ageing population in the Baltic Sea Region”) project finalized in 2021.

### **3.5. LTBI - Latent Tuberculosis Inventory**

Towards the end of the year, the Latent Tuberculosis Inventory (LTBI) project – which was put on hold due to the suspension of the MITTENS project - was revitalised, and funding applied and received from the Ministry of Health and Care Services in Norway. The project aims to examine and create an overview of the ND countries’ approaches to handling the LTBI, and to compare those with the existing WHO and ECDC guidelines and recommendations. The main partners in the project are Finnish Lung Health Association FILHA and the NDPHS Secretariat, supported by Norwegian Institute of Public Health, National Institute for Health Development of Estonia and the entire NDPHS HIV, TB & AI EG.

## **4. COMMUNICATION**

Communication is one of the core priorities of the NDPHS, with the aim to ensure that all NDPHS communication, both inside and outside of the network, is clear, precise, and engaging. Moreover, communication is an important component in all projects where the NDPHS Secretariat is a partner.

In 2023, the focus was on continued development of the NDPHS website and keeping it up to date and dynamic by posting blog posts with updates related to the NDPHS work. EUSBSR and Interreg Baltic Sea Region programme websites, as well as the NDPHS social media accounts – with a focus on LinkedIn - were kept active, too. The project results and activities were communicated in accordance with the commitments under each respective project.

Visually engaging representation of the NDPHS activities was an important priority, with a focus on NDPHS documents and communications complying with the new visual identity and maintaining high standards and coherence of the visual representation of the NDPHS work. Communication materials – banners, greeting cards, stickers, posters, flyers – have been prepared to support and enhance NDPHS communication efforts.

On 21 March 2023, an online Communications Capacity Building meeting was held for the NDPHS Expert Groups’ leaderships, to introduce the new NDPHS website, its administration, as well as discuss their role in communication.

The NDPHS continues sharing the projects’ and Expert Groups’ success stories and experiences, facilitating the relationships with Partner organisations and reaching out to internal and external stakeholders.

SHARING KNOWLEDGE  
LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER  
CARING FOR PEOPLE

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