



# The policy puzzle: is Europe making progress?



This autumn marks the launch of the second edition of the FEND and IDF Europe, EU diabetes policy audit entitled *The policy puzzle: is Europe making progress?* The latest report provides a snapshot of the current actions being taken by EU member states to tackle the diabetes epidemic and, specifically, looks at progress made since the first edition of the report carried out in 2005. The aim of the report is to highlight the disparate national policies and practices across Europe which are, in effect, contributing to the continued growth of diabetes.

When FEND and IDF Europe undertook this first ever benchmarking of diabetes policy in 2005, the results were disappointing – only 11 out of 25 member states had a national framework or plan for diabetes, and where they existed, these plans and guidelines differed significantly among member states, particularly in their implementation.

While these findings were alarming, the 2005 report served as an invaluable tool, providing comparative documentary evidence on the diabetes epidemic and measures in place to address this problem. With this evidence, politicians were forced to take note and started to call for action to be taken. The 2005 audit was the basis for some critical policy developments thereafter:

- In April 2006, the European Parliament adopted a written declaration calling for a coherent pan-European strategy to urgently take up the disease as an EU public health priority
- In June 2006, under the auspices of the Austrian Presidency of the EU, the Council of Ministers adopted conclusions calling on member states to take action on diabetes
- In December 2006, the United Nations adopted a Resolution on diabetes (61/225)
- In May 2008 the WHO General Assembly produced a declaration called Parity of Non-Communicable Diseases

However, despite these declarations and resolutions, there has been little further action in the area of diabetes.

The 2008 audit, which expanded to include Romania and Bulgaria (following their accession to the EU), and three other neighbouring countries, paints a similarly worrying picture of diabetes policy to that

presented back in 2005 and underlines the serious shortfalls that continue to exist.

In the European Union, diabetes prevalence estimates now stand at 8.6% of the population aged between 20 and 79 years – up from 7.6% just three years ago. This means that over 31 million people are now living with diabetes in the EU – equal to the combined populations of Spain, Portugal and Lithuania! Many of the people newly affected by diabetes are from vulnerable groups of society, including children and immigrants.

Despite this background, the 2008 report also reveals striking differences in the way that countries prioritise the prevention, treatment and management of this often preventable chronic disease. Still less than half of EU member states – 13 of 27 – have a national diabetes framework or plan in place.

Next year will mark the 20th anniversary of the signing of the 1989 St Vincent Declaration. In this declaration, supported by WHO Europe, almost all of the European governments surveyed in the audit committed themselves to act on a series of recommendations to tackle the growing diabetes epidemic, including the creation and implementation of a national diabetes framework or plan. While this marked a turning point in Europe's fight against diabetes, progress in achieving these recommendations remains frustratingly slow.

We believe that this latest audit represents a vital contribution to our common fight against diabetes by compiling data and national practices in a way that helps to promote best practice and facilitates the task of national and European policy makers to make diabetes an effective national, European and global priority. FEND and IDF Europe remain convinced that part of the solution lies in the adoption of an EU Council Recommendation urging member states to follow widely recognised best practice in the prevention, care and management of diabetes.

It is only by acting together that can we begin to have an impact on the diabetes pandemic. FEND is committed to continuing the effective alliance with IDF Europe and other key stakeholders as we continue our advocacy for people with diabetes and for the prevention of diabetes. The full report will be available on the FEND website in September.

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