

# PROMOTING PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS



Health and policy responses  
to protect wellbeing and  
address social inequalities

## PROGRAMME & SPEAKERS

 Brussels, Belgium

 7 September 2023



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University Foundation,  
Rue d'Egmont 11,  
1000 Brussels, Belgium



This event is a collaboration between five projects (**RESPOND**, **COVINFORM**, **PERISCOPE**, **RESISTIRÉ**, and **SHARE-COVID19**) that were funded by the EU after the onset of the **COVID-19** pandemic. It will provide a wealth of information on health and policy responses to the pandemic with a focus on policy recommendations for improving health system preparedness. Discussions will be centred on how best to protect population wellbeing in pandemics and other crises, including the implementation of new programmes that can be used to address reduced wellbeing among vulnerable populations. Various European academic institutions will be represented (including institutions from Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, and the UK), as well as representatives from the European Commission.



# PROGRAMME

09:00 – 09:30	Registration	
09:30 – 09:35	Welcome	Irene Norstedt
09:35 – 09:40	Introduction	Prof. Marit Sijbrandij (Chair)
09:40 – 09:45	Advancing mental health research in the EU: policy innovations in a changing society	Dr Dirk Hadrich
09:45 – 10:05	Wellbeing and mental health during the pandemic (RESPOND)	Dr Maria Melchior
10:05 – 10:35	Intervention strategies to improve mental health and wellbeing (RESPOND)	Prof. Jose Luis Ayuso-Mateos and Dr Marianna Purgato
10:35 – 10:55	How can policies be designed to better protect population mental health in future pandemics/crises? Learning from experience during the COVID-19 pandemic (RESPOND)	Dr David McDaid
10:55 – 11:25	Coffee break	
11:25 – 11:55	PERISCOPE Data Atlas: data integration and analytics for policymaking (PERISCOPE)	Dr Enea Parimbelli
11:55 – 12:25	COVID-19 impact on vulnerable groups: a selection of case studies (COVINFORM)	Dr Lore Van Praag and Hannah Robinson
12:25 – 13:25	Lunch	
13:25 – 13:55	Non-intended health, economic and social effects of the COVID-19 epidemic control decisions: Lessons from SHARE (SHARE-COVID19)	Prof. Axel Börsch-Supan
13:55 – 14:25	Better stories from the COVID-19 pandemic (RESISTIRÉ)	Dr Claudia Aglietti
14:25 – 15:30	Parallel sessions:	
	1. Responding to and communicating a pandemic: golden nuggets and pitfalls	Moderated by: Dr Shada Islam
	2. Policy recommendations for multi-level governance across EU countries	
	3. Socio-economic gradient in COVID-19 responses	
15:30 – 16:00	Coffee break	
16:00 – 17:00	Panel discussion	Moderated by: Dr Soren Bowadt
17:00 – 17:15	Closing remarks	Prof. Marit Sijbrandij (Chair)

# SPEAKERS



**IRENE NORSTEDT**

## Welcome

**Irene Norstedt will open the meeting and will highlight the importance of the topic and how it relates to the European Commission's new comprehensive approach to mental health.**

*Irene Norstedt works at the European Commission where she is the Director responsible for the People Directorate within the DG for Research and Innovation. The People Directorate works towards the development of a healthy, safe, more equal, free, open and fair society, where the voice of the citizen and different communities are better heard. Irene has been at the European Commission since 1996, and has worked on various aspects of research in life sciences and particular health research throughout her career in the Commission. Areas of particular interest have been the set up of the public private partnership the Innovative Medicines Initiative (IMI) and the International Rare Diseases Research Consortium (IRDiRC).*



**MARIT SIJBRANDIJ**

## Introduction

**Marit Sijbrandij is the coordinator of the EU H2020 RESPOND project. She will provide a brief overview of the contributors, the programme, and speakers.**

*Marit Sijbrandij is Professor of Clinical Psychology and Director of the WHO Collaborating Center for Research and Dissemination of Psychological Interventions at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Her research focuses on the development and evaluation of psychological interventions for prevention and early treatment of mental disorders resulting from experiencing traumatic and adverse events worldwide.*

# SPEAKERS



**DIRK HADRICH**

## **Advancing mental health research in the EU: policy innovations in a changing society**

The new EU comprehensive approach to mental health aims to use evidence coming from research and to integrate mental health across all policies and promote mental well-being states in which individuals realise their own abilities and can cope with the stresses of life, work productively, and contribute to community life. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, already 1 in 6 people in the EU suffered from mental health issues. Now, the situation has worsened especially among the young and those with pre-existing mental disorders. The new EU approach attracts attention, raises awareness about this trend, and also addresses a number of different policy fields where actions have to be taken to address mental health problems and to ensure societal resilience.

*Dirk Hadrich studied biomedical science and has been working at the European Commission in Brussels since 2001. He has dealt with legislation on health and safety risks, as well as employment and social policies. Since 2011 he has been developing funding programmes and policies for health research to stay healthy and to combat diseases, in particular cancer and mental disorders.*



**MARIA MELCHIOR**

## **Wellbeing and mental health during the pandemic**

One of RESPOND's main aims is to identify risk and resilience groups for psychological distress during the pandemic. So far the groups that emerge as vulnerable are: women, young people, people with pre-existing mental and physical health conditions, people with a precarious employment status, migrants, and asylum seekers. Such indications are useful to arrange proportionate financial and psychosocial support. These results can be useful to public health and mental health decision makers.

*Maria Melchior is Research Director at the French National Institute of Health and Medical Research (INSERM) (ScD in Social Epidemiology at Harvard University). Her research focuses on social inequalities in mental health, with a particular emphasis on developmental trajectories from childhood to adulthood and intergenerational transmission.*

# SPEAKERS



JOSE LUIS AYUSO-MATEOS

## Intervention strategies to improve mental health and wellbeing

The RESPOND project is testing a stepped-care programme of psychological interventions developed by the WHO among healthcare workers and vulnerable populations. Four randomised controlled trials (Spain, Italy, France, The Netherlands) and one implementation study (Belgium) were conducted, as well as qualitative studies to adapt the interventions and to evaluate the process of the trials. The results so far are promising, with robust effects on psychological distress.

*Jose Luis Ayuso-Mateos is Professor in Psychiatry and Director of the Collaborating Center of the World Health Organization for Research and Training in Mental Health Services at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. His research focuses on the areas of nosology, epidemiology, and management and prevention of mental disorders and suicidal behaviour*



MARIANNA PURGATO

*Marianna Purgato, Clinical Psychologist, PhD, is Assistant Professor in Applied Medical Technology and Methodology at the University of Verona, Italy. Dr Purgato's main research interests cover the evaluation of the effectiveness of psychological interventions for vulnerable population groups, including people exposed to trauma and adversity.*



DAVID MCDAID

## How can policies be designed to better protect population mental health in future pandemics/crises? Learning from experience during the COVID-19 pandemic

This presentation will look at how population mental health may be better protected during future pandemics and other public health emergencies by looking at the extent to which RESPOND countries considered the mental health consequences both of the pandemic itself and the public health policy response to the pandemic. To do this a mixed methods analysis has been undertaken, including in-depth interviews with multiple stakeholders, a mental health impact assessment of country policy responses, as well as a discrete choice experiment with both stakeholders and the general public.

*David McDaid is Associate Professorial Research Fellow in Health Policy and Health Economics within the Care Policy and Evaluation Centre, Department of Health Policy at the London School of Economics and Political Science. The primary focus of David's work is on using economic arguments to support investment in mental health and wellbeing promotion, self-harm, suicide and mental illness prevention within and beyond the health sector.*



# SPEAKERS



**ENEA PARIMBELLI**

## **PERISCOPE Data Atlas: data integration and analytics for policymaking**

The Periscope Data Atlas is the centrepiece of the project data-driven research: integrating data about NPIs and policies, epidemiological monitoring indicators, and economic impact, it provides a unique resource for informing policy making and retrospective studies. The talk will present the Periscope data atlas, its design and implementation, the data it contains, the user interfaces and services that build on such data, in an effort to provide an overview of the tool, and its generalisability to applications other than the COVID pandemic, to support better data-informed policy making.

*Enea Parimbelli is Assistant Professor of Bioengineering at the University of Pavia and holds an adjunct appointment at the Telfer School of Management at the University of Ottawa, Canada. His research interests revolve around the application of Artificial Intelligence methods to the biomedical domain, and in particular eXplainable AI, clinical decision support systems, and health informatics.*



**LORE VAN PRAAG**

## **COVID-19 impact on vulnerable groups: a selection of case studies across Europe**

Based on qualitative research conducted in different European countries, conducted as part of the EU H2020 COVINFORM project, this talk will discuss key findings from case studies on the impact of the pandemic on vulnerable groups. In doing so, the speakers will highlight how contextual factors and specific COVID-19 policies have impacted vulnerable groups differently. Moreover, they will discuss which vulnerabilities are strengthened during the COVID-19 pandemic across countries. Drawing upon these key findings, a series of recommendations will also be given to policymakers.

*Lore Van Praag is Assistant Professor at the Erasmus University of Rotterdam, where she works on social inequalities and diversity. Her research interests are mainly focused on environmental migration, migrant perspectives on climate adaptation, gender empowerment and diversity.*



**HANNAH ROBINSON**

*Hannah Robinson is Junior Researcher at the University of Antwerp and works on the EU Horizon COVINFORM project. Her research interests are focused on urban studies, care and health, poverty, and climate change.*

# SPEAKERS



**AXEL BÖRSCH-SUPAN**

## **Non-intended health, economic and social effects of the COVID-19 epidemic control decisions: Lessons from SHARE**

The COVID-19 pandemic and the epidemic control measures have affected the well-being of European citizens in terms of economics, social relationships, and health: Europe has experienced the largest recession since WWII, social contacts were interrupted, and people avoided seeking medical treatment in fear of infection. The overall aim of the SHARE-COVID19 project is to understand these non-intended consequences of the epidemic control measures on the individual level in order to devise improved health, economic, and social policies at both the EU and national level.

*Prof. Axel Börsch-Supan is Director of the Munich Research Institute for the Economics of Aging and SHARE Analyses (MEA) in Munich, Germany, Research Associate at the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) in Cambridge, Mass., USA, and Principal Investigator and Managing Director of the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE). Börsch-Supan is member of the German and Austrian Academies of Sciences. His policy consulting includes German Federal Presidents, the German Economics Ministry, German Pension Reform Commissions, French President Emmanuel Macron, Senate of the United States of America, EU Commission, OECD, WHO, WEF and World Bank.*



**CLAUDIA AGLIETTI**

## **Better stories from the COVID-19 pandemic**

Drawing on data collected in 30 countries (EU27, Turkey, Iceland, Serbia, UK) under the RESISTIRÉ project, the talk will explore some of the impacts of the pandemic on gendered+ and intersectional vulnerabilities in different domains. Moreover, through the “Better story” approach (Dina Georgis, 2013), examples of inspiring practices and individual agency will be presented, as well as a set of related operational recommendations to reflect on how to intervene to mitigate the social impact of future outbreaks.

*Claudia Aglietti, PhD, is a researcher with a primary interest in inequalities in contemporary societies, with a focus on gender and environmental issues. Besides this, her focus of investigation is also on the socio-economic impacts of policy strategies and trends in favour of equitable development.*