

Step by step against discrimination in the Austrian healthcare system

Facilitated by [Women in Global Health \(WGH\) Austria](#) and the [European Health Forum Gastein \(EHFG\)](#), this recent workshop, held at the Austrian Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, convened stakeholders in health to spark dialogue, share insights, and develop strategies aimed at addressing discrimination in the Austrian healthcare system.

Opening remarks

Opening the workshop, Johannes Rauch, Federal Minister of Social Affairs, Health, Care, and Consumer Protection, Austria, shed light on the critical challenges confronting the Austrian healthcare system, encompassing issues such as health workforce shortages, extended waiting times, and heightened public frustration. He stressed the need for a comprehensive healthcare reform approach, integrating elements such as gender equality, fairness, and cultural sensitivity, while cautioning against adopting a "fortress Austria" mindset. Emphasising the importance of embracing migrant healthcare professionals and their families, the minister highlighted the need to address the significant future health workforce demands anticipated by 2030.

"Health is not only a valuable asset, it is a human right. When implementing the healthcare reform in Austria, we need to consider gender equality, fairness, and cultural sensitivity to ensure equal access for everyone."
Minister Johannes Rauch

Spotlight inputs

In the subsequent spotlight inputs, expert members of the WGH Austria chapter shared their perspectives.

Margret Jäger, a Medical Anthropologist at the Research Department of the Vienna Social Fund Education Centre, advocated for structural competency training as a crucial tool against discrimination in healthcare. Jasmin Abdelsamad, an ICU nurse working in Vienna, reiterated that health and equity are basic human rights that must be upheld, while Ursula Trummer, Head of the Center for Health and Migration, Austria, drew attention to societal inequalities and the financial repercussions of discrimination.

"Inequalities within societies make everyone more uncomfortable. Discrimination is expensive."
Ursula Trummer

Avenues for change

The discussions explored avenues for systemic change. Participants engaged in lively debates and considered whether facing increasingly difficult challenges within the system was essential before change could occur. They emphasised the need to shift perspectives away from a purely economic focus and pointed to the intrinsic value of migrants. The resounding message was clear: Austria should foster a more welcoming environment for migrants and their families, recognising their contributions to the country's functioning and the provision of essential services.

Various viewpoints were shared regarding discrimination in healthcare, its impact on migrants, the importance of cultural sensitivity, and the necessity for regular training on equality, diversity, and inclusion. Practical steps, such as incorporating cultural sensitivity into medical and nursing curricula to better address the diverse needs of populations, were considered.



Jasmin Abdelsamad, Margret Jäger, Dorli Kahr-Gottlieb, Johannes Rauch, Ursula Trummer, Petra Haderer (Photo credit: Johannes Brunnbauer)

The conversation also explored the possibility of implementing regular anti-discrimination workshops in workplaces, drawing inspiration from successful models established in other countries.

“Overcoming barriers in healthcare is vital. Implementing structural competency training for healthcare workers can dismantle discrimination, fostering a more inclusive and accessible system.”
Margret Jäger

In this significant election year, participants underscored the importance of democracy and the need for effective communication tools to raise awareness and cultivate a sense of responsibility among voters. There was a collective call for adopting ambitious and radical approaches to bring about meaningful change.

The workshop also touched on the potential of digital health solutions in addressing healthcare disparities. While acknowledging their promise, the vital need for these solutions to be accessible in multiple languages was recognised.

Charting the way forward

Key takeaways from the panellists underlined the value of unity and the need for a multi-disciplinary global healthcare community that can draw on diverse talents and perspectives. The role of individual efforts in calling-out and tackling discrimination was also highlighted, underscoring the significance of small incremental steps to achieve progress. This reinforces the idea that despite the magnitude of the task, it is not beyond our power to achieve change. This shared commitment to positive change was reflected in the insights and recommendations from participants. Moving forward, collaborative initiatives among healthcare professionals, policy-makers, and stakeholders will be crucial to translating these discussions into actionable steps, ensuring that the right to health remains a top societal priority.

“By coming to this workshop and building a 'we,' we are taking steps towards a better future for health in Europe. In our daily fight, we stand as allies together, united in purpose - because together, we charge forward.”
Jasmin Abdelsamad