



EUROPE

**WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION
COUNTRY OFFICE IN ESTONIA**

**Note to the press
Tallinn, 2 June 2006**

**WHO STUDY FINDS POOR HEALTH OF ESTONIANS HAMPERS NATIONAL ECONOMY
Launch of the report on 5 June**

“The Estonian economy is paying a high price for the poor health of its population,” says a new report from the Regional Office for Europe of the World Health Organization (WHO), Ministry of Social Affairs and Centre for Policy Studies Praxis entitled *The economic consequences of ill-health in Estonia*. Despite the country’s remarkable economic growth in recent years, the health status of the Estonian population lags behind that of most European countries both inside and outside the European Union (EU). A continuation of the current decline in health status will severely limit economic growth in the long term, warn WHO and Estonian experts.

“The upside of the currently unfavourable health status is that there are high returns from investing in health. Improving health offers a largely untapped opportunity for achieving sustained economic growth in Estonia,” says Dr Marc Suhrcke, co-author of the report and WHO economist. The relatively poor performance in terms of health is particularly marked in the case of male life expectancy, where Estonia lags 8½ years behind the worst performer in the 15 “old” EU Member States. Similarly, Estonian men aged 25–65 years run a three times greater risk of dying than those in neighbouring Finland. The health of the future adult population does not look any brighter, in the light of recent trends in alcohol and tobacco consumption among Estonian youth.

The report examines the economic impact of the comparatively poor health status of the Estonian population. It assesses the impact of ill-health on the labour market from the perspective of the individual, and gives a quantitative illustration of the benefits for economic growth of a successful health investment strategy. Suggestions are made as to how to respond to the health challenges.

Some key findings of the study are that:

- ill-health increases the probability of a person retiring by 6%;
- men in “poor health” are almost 40% (and women 30%) more likely not to participate in the labour force;
- being in poor health reduces weekly working hours by more than 12 hours for men and by about 8 hours for women;
- poor health reduces monthly salaries by almost 30% of the mean male salary and about 20% of the mean female salary; and
- reducing adult mortality rates by 1.5% per annum over 25 years could generate an approximately 14% higher per capita GDP at the end of the 25-year period.

Dr Peeter Laasik, Deputy Minister of Social Affairs admits: “The analysis brings up the opinion that we who have worked in the health sector have always thought and gives us confident that evidence based investments to health system can support to increase the competitive advantage and economic development of Estonia”

Andres Võrk, economist at the Estonian Centre for Policy Studies PRAXIS and co-author of the report, concludes, “Our results bear a simple but fundamental message to policy-makers interested in improving the long-term performance of the Estonian economy: investing in health can be considered as one important means to achieve just that – on top of being a worthy goal by itself”.

The press is invited to attend the launch of the report on 5 June, between 11:00 and 13:00 and following press conference at 13:30-14:00, at the Ministry of Social Affairs, 29 Gonsiori Street, Tallinn. Journalists who wish to attend the meeting or interview presenters should register with, or contact, Jarno Habicht, Head of the WHO Country Office in Estonia (see below).

For more information please contact:

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