

**UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL:
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Persons living with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) face huge inequalities in access, quality and cost of care across Europe

Brussels, 24 April 2012 – Growing disparities in Multiple Sclerosis (MS) care across Europe were highlighted today in the European Parliament, by Romanian MEP [Petru Luhan](#) and John Golding, President of the [European Multiple Sclerosis Platform \(EMSP\)](#) at the opening of [photo exhibition “UNDER PRESSURE: Living with MS in Europe”](#).

The pictures taken by the UNDER PRESSURE photographers visually express how national health and social policies influence - for better or worse – the experience of Living with MS in Europe.



"The images and interviews captured by the photographers show that persons with Multiple Sclerosis in some European countries become more disabled more quickly, due to a lack of access to adequate support and insufficient reimbursements. By contrast, in others countries, we've observed a policy structure that supports living life, not just being kept alive", said John Golding, President of EMSP. "This exhibition shows what's possible when policy is right and when support networks are in place. It also shows that there is still much room for improvement"

As shown by the data recently collected through EMSP's [MS Barometer](#), little has improved for persons with MS since the adoption of a Resolution on Multiple Sclerosis by the European Parliament in 2003. Important discrepancies in access to quality care and treatments exist and are worsening across EU countries. Access to disease-modifying drugs varies from 7% to 80% across Member States. Existing data shows that Germany ranks high in overall MS care, while Italy rates highest for access to treatment and therapies. In some countries such as Poland or Bulgaria, access is even becoming increasingly restricted.

The global economic crisis has forced governments to make some tough choices, which have resulted in short-term cuts in MS healthcare provisions contrary to guidance given by leading health economists. "The long-term impact of those cuts will inevitably increase costs on society, and place tremendous personal burdens on patients, families and communities", Golding added. "Slowing down the progression of the disease is key to keeping disability levels as low as possible and allowing persons with MS to live more independent lives and actively contribute to the society."

Romanian MEP [Petru Luhan](#) said: "There is a definite need for action at European level, in the interests of European citizens, to eliminate the disparities in access to diagnosis and treatment which exist in Member States. Funds must be freed up to make sure that each citizen can properly treat and manage their disease. Relevant authorities should not forget that restricting access to adequate treatment in Multiple Sclerosis is a counterproductive measure and leads to higher societal costs at the end. I also note the necessity for the European Union to foster closer international scientific collaboration, in the context of Horizon 2020, in order to find the causes of MS and accelerate the development of even more effective treatment of the disease in all its forms."

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Marilyn Smith, who led the UNDER PRESSURE photography project said: "I've been very moved and inspired by the positive attitude persons with MS involved in the project are able to maintain, regardless of their situation. I hope the images we've gathered will not only challenge people's perception of MS, but that it will prompt decision-makers to take action."

MS is one of the most common diseases of the central nervous system. The disorder, caused when the immune system damages the myelin sheaths around the nerves in the brain and spinal cord, can occur at any age. It is most commonly diagnosed between ages 20 and 40 years. In Europe, there are 600,000 persons living with MS today. Women - who are up to two times more likely than men to develop MS - are often hit especially hard. Innovative treatments have been developed over the past years which slow down the progression of the disease and reduce the frequency and severity of relapses, but as yet MS is not curable.

About EMSP

Founded in 1989, EMSP is the umbrella organisation for 38 MS societies from 34 European countries. EMSP represents their interests at the European level and works to achieve its goals of high quality equitable treatment and support for persons with MS throughout Europe.

Pictures from the **UNDER PRESSURE** event are available:

www.emsp.org/index.php?option=com_phocagallery&view=category&id=1:under-pressure-exhibition-european-parliament-brussels&Itemid=168

About UNDER PRESSURE

UNDER PRESSURE is a multimedia project that explores how national health and social policies influence – for better or worse – the experience of Living with MS in Europe.

About the MS Barometer

Launched by EMSP in 2008, the MS Barometer is a benchmarking tool that measures care and services for persons with Multiple Sclerosis in seven key areas, including access to treatment and therapies, research on MS, employment and job retention, and medication coming onto the market. The 2011 edition measured data in 33 European countries. Please find out more at:

www.emsp.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=160:ms-barometer-2011&catid=55:multiple-sclerosis-information-dividend&Itemid=152

For media enquiries contact:

William Parker-Jenkins

williamparker@webershandwick.com

GSM: 00 32 490 44 39 77

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