Cardiovascular disease in women: a call for action from Europe

14/03/2025

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) remains one of the leading causes of death worldwide. Moreover, women experience higher mortality rates and worse outcomes following acute cardiovascular events than men. Cultural mislabelling of CVD as a ‘man's disease’ and women's lack of awareness of the symptoms may be partly responsible for the 20% higher risk of mortality following a heart attack in women than in men.

These gender disparities highlight the need for tailored cardiovascular strategies that address the specific risks and health challenges faced by women. This is one of the conclusions of the event ‘A wake-up call: Key trends and policy asks in cardiovascular health for women and girls’, organised in the **European Parliament** by MEP **Elena Nevado del Campo**, in collaboration with the European Society of Cardiology, on the occasion of International Women's Day.

Dr. Maria Rubini, cardiologist, researcher at the **National Centre for Cardiovascular Research** (CNIC) and chair of the Gender Working Group of the European Society of Cardiology (ESC), participated in this event with her presentation ‘Shedding light on cardiovascular disease in women and the need for action’, in which she emphasised the importance of raising awareness of CVD in the female population.

‘It is essential to raise awareness of CVD in women, as it is the leading cause of death in the EU, with more deaths than all cancers combined,’ she said.

More gender-sensitive research

In addition, Dr Rubini highlighted the role of CVD research in women: ‘We need to actively support CVD research in women, especially in some areas such as women-specific risk factors.

Another critical point addressed was the **under-representation of women in clinical trials**. In this regard, Dr Rubini insisted that ‘we need to encourage the inclusion of women in clinical trials to mitigate female under-representation and to be able to obtain more accurate and relevant data’. Finally, the cardiologist and researcher called on policy makers to include the gender perspective in the **European Cardiovascular Health Plan** and to integrate CVD into the **Gender Equality Strategy**.

The session continued with a panel discussion moderated by MEP **András Kulja** and featuring Dr Maria Rubini, **Elena Arbelo**, Professor at the Hospital Clínic of the University of Barcelona and **David Adlam**, Professor of Cardiology at the University of Leicester, where advances in diagnosis and treatment as well as research and policy challenges were discussed. Attendees had the opportunity to hear first-hand from **Anezka Gombosova**, a congenital heart disease patient who shared her personal experience of the challenges faced by women with these diseases.

In addition, **Fulvia Raffaelli**, European Commission Head of Unit 'Digital Health', presented how artificial intelligence and EHDS can improve prevention. Finally, the event closed with an intervention by MEP **Dolors Montserrat**, who stressed the importance of addressing these gender inequalities in the future European Plan for Cardiovascular Diseases.

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