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WHO – EU

Interim second report on social determinants of health

The WHO Regional Office for Europe is completing regional review of the health divide and inequalities in health. The second interim report was discussed during the 61st session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe. It highlights how the global economic recession has impacted on health and well-being in Europe.

Coordinated by Sir Michael Marmot, *The interim report on social determinants of health and the health divide in the WHO European Region* furthers the approaches to tackling health inequalities outlined in the [first report](#) from the WHO European Region in September 2010 and new developments ever since. The review presents a synthesis and overview of the themes and issues, which will inform the new policy for health for the European Region, [Health2020](#).

The key findings are:

- the global economic downturn has profound importance for the health and well-being of populations and is likely to worsen health inequity. Those who are already most exposed to vulnerability and disadvantage feel the effects of the global economic downturn more strongly, similar to the effects of natural disasters ;
- sustaining a growing ageing population across the European Region requires increasing the focus on prolonging good health and well-being

throughout the life course. This especially emphasizes taking a life-course approach to achieving equity in health and well-being and being responsive to the gender issues involved in health and survival.

- local-level action is key to addressing the social determinants of health, due to an advantage of proximity to peoples' lives and experiences. However, it is frequently constrained by national and global economic influences and power relationships. As a result, local action - as long as it remains local - is limited in changing the underlying influence and distribution of power, money and resources that perpetuate health inequity in society. For this reason, a concerted, multi-level approach is required in the process of developing, implementing and reviewing policy.

Leadership for health

- Action to reduce health inequity and to promote health equity requires the whole of government and society to be involved. This includes the health system together with stakeholders and sectors within and beyond the boundaries of the health system. This can be achieved in four ways :
- - advocating : because population health and levels of inequality in health measure how well societies are functioning, every sector influences health and well-being ;
 - emphasizing core public health activities more strongly through health promotion, disease prevention, intersectoral working and ensuring equitable access to healthcare ;
 - health ministries, WHO and others need to actively generate evidence and knowledge of what works in the field of health inequities reduction, monitoring the effects of cross-societal actions and using this information to enhance systems ;

- at a global level, political, social and economic policies have transnational effects, and therefore health equity should be at the heart of all policy-making.

Next steps

A consultation paper is being developed, based on the report and the sub-reports of specific task groups around different themes of the overview. A stakeholder consultation is to be held, in which EuroHealthNet is participating. A final review report will be prepared for the sixty-second session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe in September 2012

The interim second report on social determinants of health and the health divide in the WHO European Region, by Sir Michael Marmot, is available [here](#).