

Written Statement by EuroHealthNet

73rd Session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe

Provisional Agenda item 10 “Accelerating progress towards healthy, prosperous lives for all, increasing equity in health and leaving no one behind in the WHO European Region” (EUR/RC73/11)

Dear Chair, Mr President, Regional Director, honourable ministers, representatives, and distinguished delegates of the WHO European Region Member States,

EuroHealthNet welcomes this opportunity to reflect on the report "Accelerating progress towards healthy, prosperous lives for all, increasing equity in health and leaving no one behind in the WHO European Region", as well as recommend ways forward.

By the numbers, the progress report is urgent. Since the resolution on this subject was passed, inequalities across the Region have grown larger due to the effect of the pandemic and the 'polycrisis' of rising costs-of-living, poverty, climate change, conflict, and continuing workforce shortages. More people than before are living in vulnerable situations and trust in institutions has diminished, making societies more fragile and ill-prepared for emerging and future health and social threats.

This is a grave challenge and one which could ultimately undermine progress on all other goals that WHO European Region and its Member States are striving for. However, by the actions described in the report, it is clear that the WHO European Region is well-aware of and acting to address the challenge. While reflecting on all eight key areas of the resolution and taking stock of the progress made, EuroHealthNet recommends to prioritise action to:

1. **Encourage Member States to take systems-wide approaches to health creation and achieving a wellbeing economy.** This should be done by continuing to bring together policymakers from other sectors (Key area 4) to redirect the economy

towards delivering wellbeing for all its people. WHO Europe can offer an enabling environment and convene key actors (Key area 5) who can then develop and implement strong, integrated social protection and health promoting systems, while offering agility and flexibility in a fast changing geopolitical environment.

2. **Generate and disseminate cutting-edge evidence, tools and methods to systematically include equity in growth, financial, investment, and fiscal policies** (Key area 2). In particular, champion a paradigm shift away from wasteful health budgets that are not fit-for-purpose anymore, but instead, towards increased investment in social infrastructure, communities of care, health promotion and prevention, and capacitating services (Key area 6). This should be underpinned by routine equity impact assessments, wellbeing budgets, and entering wellbeing metrics into economic, fiscal and investments frameworks.
3. **Support the technical and knowledge capacity of the public health workforce, including health policy makers in Member States** to exchange best practices and strengthen leadership and diplomacy skills in navigating complex policy areas relevant for achieving health equity. It is crucial to guarantee resources to be able to advocate for and oversee the critical reforms that health systems need to be fit for the future, as well as to realise the co-benefits across whole-of-government (Key area 1).

Ahead of the end of the current European Programme of Work in 2025 and the UN Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2030, substantial steps must be taken to truly and fully realise equity in health and leave no one behind in the Region. This cannot be done by WHO Europe or its Member States alone, **but through a whole-of-society approach**. Only by working together, including non-state actors such as EuroHealthNet, can we reduce inequalities in health and enable states and regions to achieve genuinely sustainable societies and wellbeing economies. All of us gathered here have the same goal – move faster and do better for people to live healthy, peaceful and prosperous lives.

Astana, 25 October 2023