

Reducing disparities in the EU – 8th progress report on economic, social and regional cohesion

EuroHealthNet's feedback to the EC Roadmap consultation¹

EuroHealthNet is the European Partnership of national public health institutes, health promotion agencies, regional health authorities and related organisations. Our core mission is to tackle health inequalities and to improve and sustain health between and within European States through action on the underlying socio-economic determinants of health. We believe that **the 8th report on economic, social and territorial disparities should include a greater focus on health inequalities, as a key indicator of whether the investments being made to improve cohesion are truly benefiting the health of people and generating more well-being across societies.**

Since the publication of the 7th progress report on economic, social and regional cohesion, the situation across the EU and the world has dramatically changed. The COVID-19 syndemic, which can be seen as symptom of the chronic environmental crisis we face, has made all too clear the inter-relationship between health and the economy. The health related and economic effects of the COVID-19 and non-communicable diseases (NCDs) “are clustering within social groups according to patterns of inequality deeply embedded in our societies.” An unprecedented level of funds have been made available to help Member States ‘build-back-better’. At this critical juncture in human history, these provide an opportunity to reassess our values and invest in initiatives that strengthen the EU’s social foundations, while re-orienting economic activities to respect planetary boundaries.

Given the considerable evidence that ‘more equitable societies are better for everyone’, also when it comes to job creation and growth, EuroHealthNet recommends the following to strengthen cohesion and to deliver on the EU’s priorities in relation to achieving a *fair* green and digital transition:

- **Systematically include health and health equity in assessments of regional disparities.** We recommend ensuring that data linked to key indicators like life expectancy by age, self-reported health status, preventable mortality and morbidity, and access to quality child-care are disaggregated by socio-economic status, also at the regional and local levels. EuroHealthNet in this respect welcomes the Committee of the Region’s efforts to add a regional dimension to the Social Scoreboard linked to the EU Social Pillar.
- **Assess the extent to which a wide range of sectors, including the health and social sectors, are collaborating to define and implement funding priorities.** Since many of the key determinants of health and health inequity lie beyond the health sector, improving the impact of cohesion funds requires better governance and administrative mechanisms around cross-sectoral collaboration. All too often key sectors like health and social sectors are unaware of and uninvolved in national approaches to establish priorities areas for EU-level fund allocation, including the new National Recovery and Resilience Plans. Many relevant actors are also unaware of and uninvolved in European Semester processes, that are increasingly influencing EU MS’s spending priorities (see also attached report).
- **Encourage EU Member States to develop pan-governmental strategies and set targets to reduce health inequalities**, with consistent approaches across governance, and apply cohesion funds to “do something, do more, or do better” to achieve their targets.



- Finally, **tools like Health Equity Impact Assessments and Health Equity Audits must be strengthened and applied in a more systematic fashion** to understand the distributional impacts of planned investments. Post-facto impact evaluations are also crucial to improve the evidence base of how to invest in ways that simultaneously benefit the environment, health and equity, to maximise the impacts of investments.

The feedback with references and EuroHealthNet European Semester analysis are attached. Further information can be found on the EuroHealthNet [website](#) and our [Health Inequalities Portal](#).

¹<https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12835-8th-Report-on-economic-social-and-territorial-cohesion>