



High-level Conference on Health Equity – Accelerating Progress Towards Healthy and Prosperous Lives for all in the WHO European Region

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**Ljubljana, Slovenia
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Scope and purpose

Background

The WHO Regional Office for Europe is convening a high-level conference on health equity hosted by the Ministry of Health of Slovenia in Ljubljana on 11–13 June 2019.

The conference will bring together Member States, international organizations and civil society organizations to take stock of progress to date and debate on how to accelerate progress towards achieving healthier and more prosperous lives for all in the WHO European Region.

Attention to health equity, gender equality and the right to the highest attainable standard of health has never been more important. Across Europe, many are working to ensure that equity is central to the implementation of health programmes across genders, age groups, ethnicities, disabilities and other differences in order to close coverage gaps, promote health and strengthen the well-being and resilience in women, men, boys and girls from diverse communities.

Improving health for all is a high priority among the public. A recent study of opinion polls across Europe found that the public view good health as a top priority for getting ahead in life. This priority is reflected in numerous political and international commitments and the related principles of leaving no one behind and creating conditions for all people to flourish. Health equity is a core value in the Sustainable Development Goals, the Health 2020 European health policy framework and the principle of universal health coverage. In addition, WHO's Thirteenth General Programme of Work 2019–2023 emphasizes the right to the highest attainable state of health and the importance of access to universal health coverage.

Progress to reduce health gaps within countries

There is good evidence that financial protection for health is achievable, but across the WHO European Region catastrophic and impoverishing out-of-pocket health spending affects up to 15% of households, contributing to increased risk of poverty and social exclusion.

All countries of the Region have strengthened the ways in which action on the determinants of health is brought into wider government policies and development plans through multisectoral working groups and committees at the local, county, oblast and national levels, reflecting their concerns about health inequity. Yet in many countries changes in policies and conditions related to health determinants, such as work and social protection, have increased the number of people at risk of income and employment insecurity. The number of people worried over making ends meet

has increased, thereby increasing the levels of anxiety, depression and mental illness as well as the related risks of food and fuel insecurity. These effects are disproportionately experienced by those who are already falling behind in health and in life.

When people experience multiple exposures to living and working conditions that are harmful to health, their sense of hope and resilience declines. This partly explains why good universal policies may not be delivering the intended results. Through analysing countries of the Region the Health Equity Status Report found that lack of trust, not having others to ask for help and living in unsafe neighbourhoods and homes are strongly associated with the gap in self-reported poor health between the top and bottom income quintiles within countries. The same analysis found that over the last 15 years a significant number of countries have reduced their investments in public policies for housing and community amenities, including water supplies, green spaces, lighting, and community groups and initiatives.

But there is good news: the Report shows that within-country differences in life-limiting illness can be reduced within a period of two to six years by combining accelerated and universal policies.

New opportunities and directions

Making progress towards healthy, prosperous lives for all requires systematic and sustainable action, including scaling up and adapting what works and generating new solutions and alliances that remove the barriers to progress.

Across the WHO European Region, health systems are demonstrating new ways to tackle inequities, assure health financing, and innovate to deliver high-quality local health services. Alongside these health system solutions are multisectoral approaches that are showing success in reaching those being left behind and in acting to prevent others from falling behind.

Innovations in using data to measure and monitor within-country health equity status and policies are enabling, motivating and empowering decision-makers to take action and guide public policies to increase health equity through creating the conditions needed for all to live a healthy life.

Taking action to reduce health inequities builds and sustains better societies, and reducing health inequities can achieve quantifiable economic gains.

Purpose of the conference

The high-level conference focuses on putting forward solutions to reduce health inequities and to set the European action agenda on increasing equity in health for the next 10 years by considering three action goals:

ACHIEVE: create the conditions and remove barriers for all to prosper and flourish in health and in life. An essential set of conditions is needed for all to be able to live a healthy life, and is the foundation for effective and sustainable progress.

ACCELERATE: implement a set of policies built on inclusive and empowering approaches to reduce health gaps. Shifting from fragmented and short-term interventions to a comprehensive and coherent set of solutions is key to create and sustain the essential conditions for all to be able to lead a healthy life.

INFLUENCE: put health equity at the centre of sustainable development and inclusive economies. Eradicating health inequities and strengthening sustainable development for all are bold but achievable ambitions. For these, new partnerships and instruments are needed that advocate, enable, motivate and show how health equity matters for the future of countries and communities.

Main aim of the conference

The conference will bring together Member States, international organizations and civil society organizations to take stock of progress to date and debate on how to make further progress towards healthier and more prosperous lives for all in the WHO European Region

Conference objectives

1. Inspire action for health equity by sharing country experiences to prevent and reduce health inequities within countries and identify the factors needed for successful implementation.
2. Explore a range of approaches that are delivering improved policy coherence, enabling public engagement and increasing investment for health equity.
3. Galvanize existing platforms and partnerships and identify new mechanisms and opportunities to accelerate progress towards health equity.

Target audience

The meeting is intended to be a forum for high-level representatives of the 53 Member States in the WHO European Region, relevant international organizations and selected nongovernmental organizations. Participants will be representatives of the health sector and of government ministries and departments that impact health inequities within countries.

