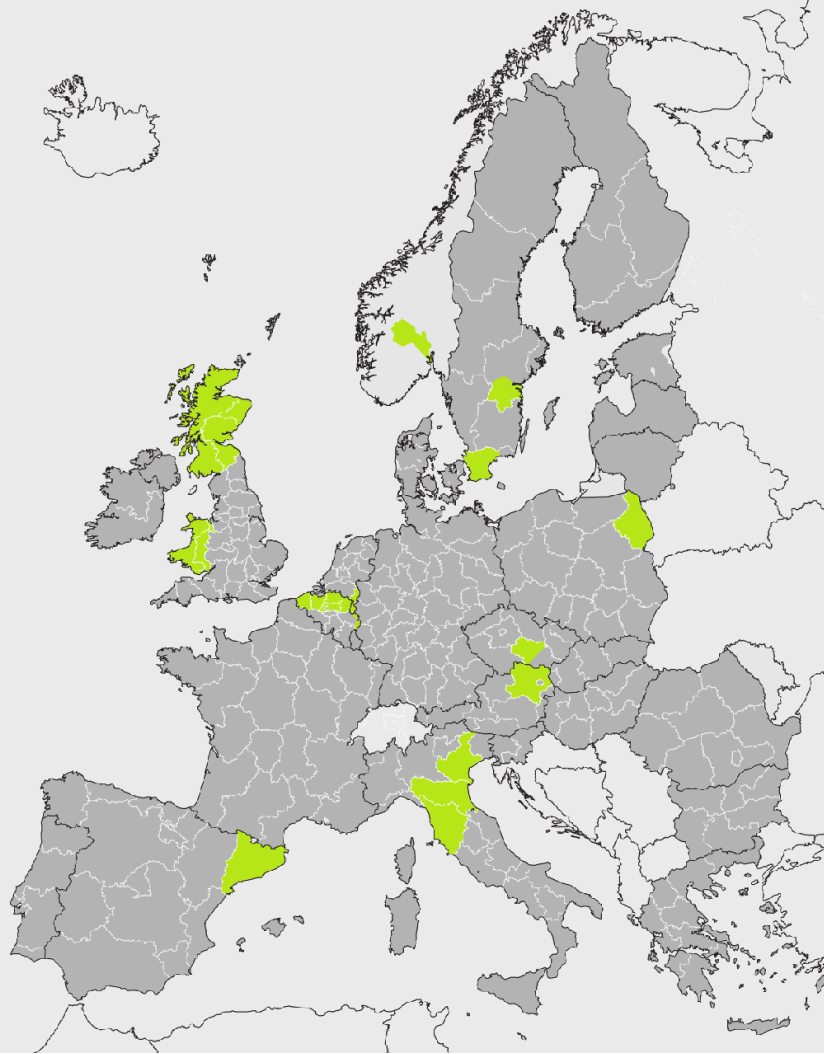


# EUREGHA'S RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION ON "EU ACTION AND HEALTH INEQUALITIES"

2009



In response to DG Health and Consumers public consultation on “EU Actions to Reduce Health Inequalities”<sup>1</sup>, the European Regional and Local Health Authorities Network, hereafter referred as EUREGHA, will outline in this paper its position statement.

After having outlined EUREGHA vision on the issue of health inequalities, the paper will focus on the actions that we believe should taken into account in future EU legislative proposals.

<sup>1</sup> The consultation is available at

[http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph\\_determinants/socio\\_economics/cons\\_inequalities\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/socio_economics/cons_inequalities_en.htm)

*The following response does not reflect the point of view of the single regions members of EUREGHA since it is the result of the work of the EUREGHA secretariat.*

# INTRODUCTION

Large differences in health status exist within and between the EU Member States that are determined by the combination of socioeconomic, societal, environmental, and genetic aspects. Research shows that the intertwining of these factors is likely to hinder the health of existing vulnerable target-groups such as the elderly, migrant communities and the poor. As a result, substantial differences in overall life expectancy at birth and in the years lived in healthy life years can also be observed across the EU Member States and regions.

In this context, the regional or territorial dimension of health policy plays a key role due to its closeness to citizens and the relevance of health in Cohesion Policy. Being health a prerequisite for socioeconomic and human development, a major investment in health is needed to reduce the health inequalities between European regions.

## EUREGHA RESPONSE

The work of the Commission clearly shows the importance of broadening the scope of public health research to give emphasis on the determinants of health. Since these aspects are deeply interconnected with the specific historical, cultural and geographic characteristics of each community, actions to tackle health inequalities have to focus on the regional and local dimension.

Thus, we urge Community's measures and resources to enable regional and local actors to improve public awareness on the theme of health inequalities, support a "health in all policies" approach into the political agenda, develop new indicators, strengthen the monitoring of the main factors involved, and increase the structural funds for health investment.

EUREGHA emphasizes three main themes to be addressed in future EU legislation and in the Work Plan 2010 for the implementation of second programme of Community action in the field of health:

### 1. RAISING AWARENESS OF THE "HEALTH IN ALL POLICIES" APPROACH

Broader socioeconomic health determinants in addition to health-related behaviours, genetic predisposition and psychosocial factors influence the distribution of risk among population groups and concur to create health inequalities.

The risk factors of major diseases cannot be seen as a specific challenge to the health sector since they have an impact on other sectors as well. This does not take into account that the incidence of certain risk factors is also influenced by measures managed by other government sectors as well as by other actors in society.

For these reasons, there is the necessity to promote and prioritise an "Health in All Policies" approach in the decision-making process. The cooperation among different sectors at regional level must then be encouraged to formulate effective policies.

## 2. SETTING UP MONITORING SYSTEMS BASED ON SUB-NATIONAL HEALTH INDICATORS

An effective way to tackle health inequities is offered by grounding policies and actions on evidence-based research.

In the field of health monitoring, it is very important to enable and support health professionals and decision-makers from different regions across Europe to liaise and exchange knowledge and information.

In this regard, it is particularly significant to support cross-border collaboration to develop relevant sub-national indicators in order to measure and improve existing policies. There are already in place a number of good initiatives based on a set of regional (or sub-national) health indicators such as the ones developed by the ISARE Projects, by the EURO-UHRIS project and by Eurostat. By referring to these positive experiences as a benchmark, European institutions should encourage the development and improvement of sub-national indicators.

More resources should also be addressed to better disseminate the results achieved by existing programmes and monitor the implementation of the health indicators systems at a sub-national level.

## 3. STRENGTHENING AND CONTINUING HEALTH INVESTMENT THROUGH THE USE OF ESF AND ERDF

The work to overcome health inequalities requires that bodies, including national health centres, medical and social research institutes, continue to invest resources in addressing the social determinants of health with a particular focus on multi- and interdisciplinary research.

The structural funds, such as the European Regional Development Fund and European Social Fund can really help to reduce health inequalities by financing infrastructures and equipment to renovate hospitals and health care units as well as “soft” investment in health such as the training of health professionals, the exchange of best practices and the definition of financial models to increase the efficiency of health systems.

Regional and Local Health Authorities, with the support of the European Commission, should improve the use of Structural Funds in the field of health and assist regional authorities in simplifying the administrative procedures and overcoming the existing barriers in using ESF funds.

# CONCLUSION

Reducing health inequities is a public health priority and an ethical imperative that requires an immediate commitment at all levels. A stronger cooperation among regions and between regions and the European institutions is fundamental to foster a better and more equal health for all.

In this paper we have explained the complexity and seriousness of health inequalities and *why* we should unravel and address different factors at one time. Since the regional and local authorities have

the organisational resources, the capacity and understanding of citizens' needs to put into place effective policies and promote targeted actions, they should be supported by national and European programmes in the process of defining and implementing comprehensive policies to tackle the problem of health inequalities in Europe.

Therefore, EUREGHA addresses three specific points to be taken into account.

First, the need of raising awareness of the "Health in All Policies" approach so as to prioritise this concept into the political agenda. Second, in the field of data collection on health inequalities, EUREGHA highlights the importance of setting up monitoring systems based on sub-national health indicators. European institutions should encourage the dissemination and improvement of sub-national indicators in line with some positive experiences, such as the ISARE Projects, the EURO-UHRIS project and others developed by Eurostat. Finally, we believe that is paramount to continue and strengthen the use of the structural funds to both invest in health and tackle the largest health inequalities between and within Member States.

**EUREGHA is the reference network for European Regional and Local Health Authorities.** We bring together a critical mass of knowledge and expertise and encourage diversity with the purpose of helping our members to improve the efficiency and quality of health systems and services in Europe.

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