

KEY FACTS AND FIGURES

What are inequities in health and why do they matter?

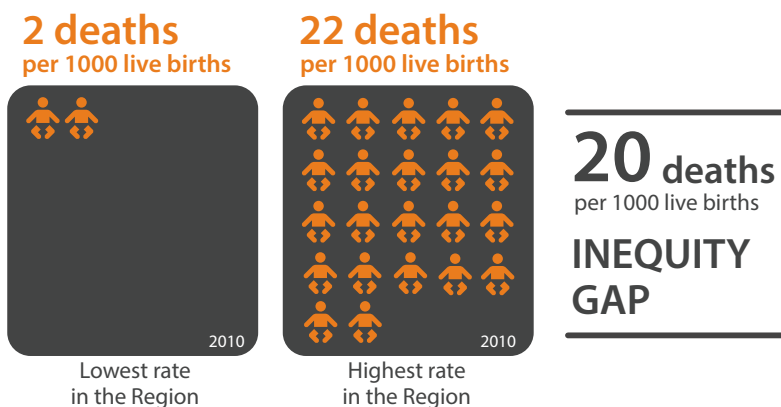
Health inequities are avoidable, unnecessary differences in health status between population groups, countries and regions. They may result from social, economic, cultural, political or other factors, and should not be confused with differences caused by genetic or biological factors. Inequalities are the measurements used to describe these inequities.

Many health outcomes are influenced by social determinants. The Health 2020 core list includes several indicators that are either influenced by social determinants – such as infant mortality or life expectancy – or describe inequities directly – such as school enrolment or unemployment. The Health 2020 monitoring framework also assesses whether countries have adopted policies to reduce inequities, and WHO reports regularly on their progress.

Inequities are diminishing in Europe but...

Infant mortality has fallen steadily, but substantial variation still exists between countries in the European Region. Infant mortality has more than halved in the last two decades and the gap between the highest and the lowest countries' levels has shrunk. This is a remarkable achievement, but more needs to be done to reduce infant mortality in some countries as the difference between the highest and lowest levels in Europe is still 20 deaths per 1 000 live births. **Europeans should not accept this inequity.**

Inequity in infant mortality in the WHO European Region



Some inequities across Europe are diminishing

- **The good news:** the gaps between countries in Europe for some socially determined indicators, such as infant mortality and life expectancy, are shrinking.
- **The challenge:** the inequity gap between countries with the highest and lowest infant mortality levels is still 20 deaths per 1 000 live births.

Absolute differences between countries are still unacceptably high

- **The good news:** the gap between countries in school enrolment and unemployment levels is diminishing.
- **The challenge:** the absolute differences between countries are still far too high.

European countries are taking policy action to tackle inequalities

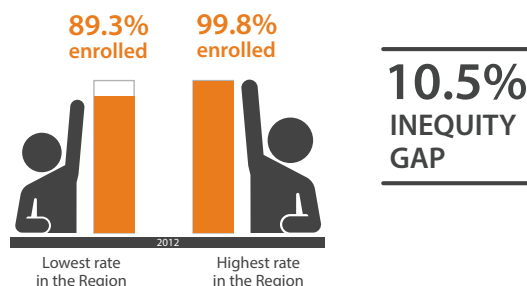
- **The good news:** 86% of countries have policies addressing social determinants and inequalities.
- **The challenge:** all countries should align their policies with Health 2020 and take action to reduce inequities in health.

European countries are monitoring their progress

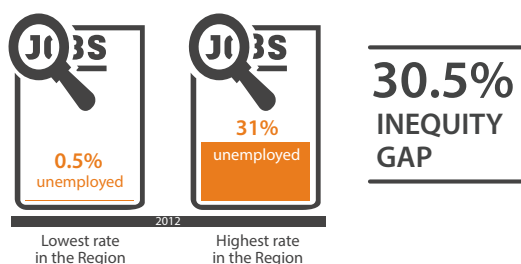
- **The good news:** the number of countries that have set national targets and put accountability mechanisms in place has almost doubled in recent years.
- **The challenge:** too many countries are still not collecting adequate health information to monitor their progress and are not setting targets.

The difference between the highest and lowest proportions of children of official **primary school age not enrolled** in the Region is declining. Nevertheless, differences between countries remain large, with proportions in 2012 ranging from 10.7% to 0.2%.

Inequity in primary school enrolment in the WHO European Region



Inequity in unemployment in the WHO European Region



Rates of **unemployment** across the Region vary considerably: the lowest is 0.5% and the highest 31%. Although the difference between the highest and the lowest values has been decreasing since 2005, the rate of decline has slowed in recent years.

What are European countries doing about these inequities?

More and **more countries are aligning their national policies with the European Health 2020 policy framework**: 73% of European Member States had such policies in place in 2013, compared with 58% in 2010. In addition, **86% of countries had policies addressing social determinants and inequalities** by 2013. The **number of countries that adopted concrete accountability mechanisms for their Health 2020 policies more than doubled** between 2010 and 2013. It is clear that inequities in health are high on the agenda of European policy-makers and are being addressed across the Region. It is important to continue monitoring the impact of these policies in the coming years.

