

## What is the European health report?

The European health report is a flagship publication of the WHO Regional Office for Europe, issued every three years. It reports on the health status of the European population, examines progress with health policies in Europe, presents options for improving the health of Europeans and stimulates new thinking in the areas of health and well-being.

Through the Health 2020 policy framework, the 53 countries in the European Region have set themselves six challenging targets to be achieved by 2020. This report assesses progress towards these targets and describes what must be done to meet them.

## Is Europe on track to meet its targets? Yes, but...

The report shows that **the European Region is on track to meet the Health 2020 targets**. Much progress has been made in improving the health and well-being of people in the Region **but there is no room for complacency: for some health outcomes Europe is placed at the bottom of the global scale**.

Europeans are living longer than ever before and the differences in health outcomes between countries are shrinking. Europeans have also reduced smoking and alcohol consumption. Much progress has been made in strengthening health systems but too many people are still plunged into poverty from high out-of-pocket payments when they become seriously ill.

Despite the progress made, the outlook is not exclusively rosy. **Europeans still smoke and drink more than people anywhere else in the world**. Absolute **differences in health outcomes between countries also remain unacceptably wide**: life expectancy in the eastern part of the Region is 11 years lower than in western Europe.

While countries in the European Region have strengthened their policies to reduce inequalities, are setting national targets and are letting themselves be held accountable on their progress, **greater efforts are needed to enhance the collection of health information** that monitors their progress. All too often where health is poorest, health information is also poorest; this leads to **underestimation of the differences between the best and the worst performing countries**.

## KEY FACTS AND FIGURES

### Europeans are living longer

- **The good news:** Europeans are living longer than ever before, and differences between countries in life expectancy and mortality are shrinking.
- **The bad news:** the gap between countries in Europe with the highest and lowest life expectancy figures is still 11 years.

### Europeans are reducing their health risks

- **The good news:** rates of smoking and alcohol consumption are declining in many parts of the Region.
- **The bad news:** Europeans smoke and drink more than people anywhere else in the world and are among the most obese in the world.

### Health systems are making progress

- **The good news:** many countries in Europe are taking steps to improve their health systems.
- **The bad news:** in many countries too many people still face catastrophic out-of-pocket payments when they get sick.

### European countries are strengthening their policies

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



To address inequalities in health in Europe, our first step must be to address the inequalities in health information. All too commonly where health is poorest, health information tends to be poorest. Health information is absent or incomplete just where we need it most. Health information is crucial in all countries, rich or poor.

– Sir Michael Marmot

## What's new in this report?

Well-being matters to people and encompasses much more than health. Well-being is a key concept related to health but is not easy to measure; therefore, WHO and the countries in the European Region have agreed to **describe subjective and objective well-being and to monitor its progress regularly**. As both well-being and health are strongly influenced by culture, **WHO has embarked on an initiative to examine and describe the impact of culture on health and well-being**.

This and many other new concepts of the Health 2020 policy – such as community resilience, empowerment and the whole-of-government approach – require the collection of new types of information and evidence. WHO and its Member States have begun to define and measure these new concepts to provide new evidence that is fit for the 21st century.

## What does this mean for all of us?

The report makes it very clear that:

- the European Region is on track to meet its six health targets, but much more needs to be done to improve the health and well-being of Europeans;
- differences between countries in Europe in health and well-being are still unacceptable;
- WHO and its Member States are working together on innovative concepts and methods to improve the health of Europeans – for example, by better understanding culture, well-being and health;
- countries need to collect better health information to monitor progress in health and increase international collaboration.