

# Social determinants of health

Technical briefing –  
08:00 – Tuesday,  
14 September 2010



# Regional Committee for Europe Sixtieth session

Moscow, 13–16 September 2010

EUR/RC60/TD.3

## Social determinants of health

### Structure

*Tuesday, 14 September 2010*

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| <b>08:00</b> | Dr Agis Tsouros,<br>WHO Secretariat                           | <b>Welcome</b><br>Aims and structure of the technical briefing.<br>Introduction of the main contributors to the briefing and the Rapporteur, Dr Piroska Ostlin.  |
| <b>08:05</b> | Professor Sir Michael<br>Marmot, University<br>College London | <b>European Review on the Social Determinants of Health and the Health Divide</b><br>Goals, rationale and expected outcome of the forthcoming European Review. Professor Marmot will present the preliminary findings of the work carried out to date and explain the participatory process through which it is planned to conduct the Review.             |
| <b>08:25</b> | Dr Erio Ziglio, WHO<br>Secretariat                            | <b>Brief overview of the work of the Regional Office for Europe</b><br>The work of the Regional Office and the support provided to Member States. Dr Ziglio will describe the type of requests for technical assistance increasingly received from Member States seeking to address the social determinants of health and related inequities.              |
| <b>08:30</b> | Dr Agis Tsouros,<br>WHO Secretariat                           | <b>The role of the European Review in relation to the work, priorities and processes of the Regional Office</b><br>After explaining the role of the European Review within the overall process leading to the adoption of a European health policy, Dr Tsouros will briefly describe existing work within the Office that complements the European Review. |
| <b>08:35</b> |   | <b>Facilitated discussion</b><br>Participants will have an opportunity to make comments, ask questions and provide advice on how best to mainstream the social determinants of health into the agenda of Member States and across Europe.  |
| <b>08:50</b> |   | <b>Conclusions and next steps</b><br>Professor Marmot and the WHO Secretariat organizing the technical briefing will reflect on the contribution made by the delegates and conclude the technical briefing.  |
| <b>09:00</b> |   | <b>End of the technical briefing</b>   |

## Description

During the sixtieth session a special technical briefing on social determinants of health is to be held at 8:00–9:00 on Tuesday 14 September, with the objective of providing a platform for exchange of relevant information on the work of the WHO Regional Office for Europe in this field and enabling delegations to be briefed on the European Review on the Social Determinants of Health and the Health Divide that will be coordinated by Professor Sir Michael Marmot in 2010–2012.

The technical briefing will focus on an issue of increasing importance for Member States and for Europe as a whole, namely the magnitude and trends of health inequities and ways in which they can be tackled. The briefing will provide an opportunity to share information on the Office's current work on the social determinants of health and the preliminary results and overall process of the European Review. The Office embarked on the Review as a practical way of following up the recommendations of the global Commission on Social Determinants of Health (CSDH), issued in late 2008, and the commitment by WHO and Member States in the 2009 World Health Assembly resolution WHA62.14 on Reducing health inequities through action on the social determinants of health. The technical briefing will also offer an opportunity for an exchange between the WHO Secretariat and delegations on progress made and the challenges ahead on increasing the capacity of European countries to address the social determinants of health and tackling current trends in health inequities. Relevant work being carried out by the Regional Office in this domain will be briefly described.

## Background: the CSDH and resolution WHA62.14 on Reducing health inequities through action on the social determinants of health

The CSDH was launched by WHO in March 2005 with a three-year mandate, the main aim being to provide evidence on policies that improve health and reduce health inequities by addressing the social conditions in which people live and work. Its preliminary findings and recommendations were presented at a technical briefing held at the fifty-eighth session of the Regional Committee.

The Commission was chaired by Professor Sir Michael Marmot and presented its main findings and recommendations in the 2008 report entitled *Closing the gap in a generation: health equity through action on the social determinants of health*. The report summarized the global picture of health inequities –that is, systematic differences in health that are judged to be unfair and avoidable by reasonable action – and provided evidence that poor health is not confined to those most underprivileged socially and economically. In all countries, no matter what the level of income, health and illness follow a social gradient: the lower the socioeconomic position, the worse the health.

Many countries have started incorporating the Commission's findings into their national policies, for example Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, India, Norway, Slovenia, Sweden and the United Kingdom. The most ambitious effort was made by the United Kingdom, where the Secretary of State for Health commissioned, in 2008, a strategic review of health inequalities, which was clearly inspired by the Commission's findings and recommendations.

Given the current global economic crisis, the topic covered by the CSDH is of key importance for countries in the European Region of WHO. Indeed, as maintained in the 2008 CSDH final report and in resolution WHA62.14, it is necessary, in addressing socially determined health inequities, to deal with the "causes of the causes". These include the unequal distribution of power, income, goods and services, globally and nationally, that results in unfairness in the immediate, visible circumstances of people's lives – their access to health care, schools and

education, their conditions of work and leisure, their homes, communities, towns or cities – and their chances of leading a flourishing, healthy life. Resolution WHA62.14 urged Member States, inter alia, “to take into account health equity in all national policies that address social determinants of health, and to consider developing and strengthening universal comprehensive social protection policies, including health promotion, disease prevention and health care, and promoting availability of and access to goods and services essential to health and well-being”.

## European Review on the Social Determinants of Health and the Health Divide

Despite the growing importance attached to the social determinants of health and related initiatives at national level and across the WHO European Region, there are large and avoidable differences in health opportunities and outcomes between and within Member States the indications are that these are growing in some countries. Without an explicit picture of the situation through adequate monitoring and analysis, there is a limited awareness of or responsibility for reducing absolute and relative health inequities. This issue is strongly emphasized also in the Regional Committee document, entitled “Addressing key public health and health policy challenges in Europe: moving forwards in the quest for better health in the WHO European Region” (EUR/RC60/13).

The rationale for the European Review is, inter alia, to:

- update the existing evidence on the scale of inequity within and between Member States;
- identify the evidence underpinning the health divide in Europe;
- address European processes and current trends on the social determinants of health;
- examine the prerequisites for change and ways of creating and sustaining political commitment;
- advise on and inform the development of a European health policy.

## Material available at the technical briefing

The following WHO materials will be available at the technical briefing:

- Executive summary of the preliminary findings of the European Review
- Multiple copies of the CSDH final report
- The 2009 resolution on Reducing health inequities through action on the social determinants of health (WHA62.14)
- *Poverty and social exclusion in the WHO European Region: health systems respond* (WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2010)
- *Millennium Development Goals in the WHO European Region: A situational analysis at the eve of the five-year countdown* (WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2010)
- *Concepts and principles for tackling social inequities in health: Levelling up Part 1* (WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2006)
- *European strategies for tackling social inequities in health: Levelling up Part 2* (WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2006)