



Written statement - TB Europe Coalition

Distinguished Participants of the Sixty-Third session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe,

This statement is prepared on behalf of the TB Europe Coalition and presents views of TB advocates and civil society engaged in the WHO European Region regarding *Health 2020* implementation challenges.

It is commendable that both the *Health 2020* framework and the implementation document place strong emphasis on a whole-of-society approach and call for contributions from civil society. The framework clearly states the critical need for empowering patients to improve health outcomes and health system performance; it underlines the importance of the contribution of civil society and community organizations in formulating, promoting and delivering change.

However, despite some progress in many of the Member States the important role of civil society in TB prevention, control and care is often overlooked. Oftentimes healthcare professionals do not see the value of involving civil society organizations and patients in decision-making processes. The idea of communities or people living with the disease supporting national TB programs is not universally accepted. Civil society plays a crucial role in representing patient voices and ensuring the most vulnerable and marginalized within the population have access to health services. Unfortunately, civil society may indeed lack the required capacity, and the community of people affected by TB is underdeveloped or simply inexistent. Therefore, in addition to building a dialogue, it is equally important to invest in empowerment and capacity building.

In this context, the implementation document needs to elaborate the measures to enable civil society participation in TB policy, program development and implementation. It should be remembered that empowerment of patients is only one step in the community mobilization process (an important concept that is completely missing in the document). Compared to the community involvement of people living with HIV, the community involvement of people affected by TB in our countries either does not exist at all or is at a very early, so to say embryonic stage of development, and it requires stronger efforts and targeted investments for the community to become capable to more meaningfully contribute.

I hope that as a result of this meeting, the concept of community mobilization will be further prioritized in the *Health 2020* implementation document, that the monitoring framework contains appropriate indicators, and that community and broader civil society organizations become actively involved in national responses to contemporary health issues.

Another important issue that seems to be left unresolved is funding. Without adequate investments, health for all will remain a dream. According to a recently published study,¹ a conservative calculation suggests that in the EU alone, the economic burden of TB amounts to a total of €5.9 billion per year and, taking into account the many conservative assumptions, the

¹ R.Diel et al, Costs of tuberculosis disease in the EU – a systematic analysis and cost calculation; *European Respiratory Journal*, <http://erj.ersjournals.com/content/early/2013/08/15/09031936.00079413.abstract>

amount of direct costs are likely to be much higher than calculated in the study. Dr Joris Vandeputte, co-author of the article, says: “We now have a clear indication that the cost of TB, even in the wealthy European Union where many people think TB is a disease of the past, is many times higher than most people realize. With the threatening rise of MDR-TB and XDR-TB, not only in Europe, but in the whole world, it is likely that these costs will increase in the near future.” Therefore it is extremely important to ensure that the priorities of the *Health 2020* framework receive sufficient financial support, both at national and international levels.

But money alone will not help without an important paradigm shift. Very often diseases are considered purely medical issues that have to be dealt with by the healthcare sector; very often medical professionals and even healthcare policy makers have no idea about a *human rights based approach* and the importance of addressing *social determinants of health*. The *Health 2020* framework and the implementation document show that the approach is changing, at least at the international level, but the most difficult task is to make sure that national healthcare professionals also understand that treating a disease may be enough to cure a patient, but will never eradicate a disease. As long as there is poverty, migration, substance abuse, unsafe sexual practices, violence, gender inequality and so forth, the capacity of healthcare sector will never be enough to end diseases, no matter how much resources are invested.

That is why it is of ultimate importance that implementation of *Health 2020* framework at country level is sufficiently financed, ensures integrated, whole-of-society and whole-of-government approaches to health, is based on human rights and addresses social determinants of health.

Thank you very much for your attention.