



## Meeting of the Expert Group on Social Determinants and Health Inequalities 15-16 June 2015 Conclusions of the Chair

The Meeting took place with the participation of 11 Member States and Turkey, and was chaired by Philippe Roux, Head of the Health Determinants Unit, Directorate General for Health and Food Safety. The thematic focus of this meeting was on “Health inequalities monitoring, evaluation and indicators”.

The aim of the meeting was to:

- \* Exchange information on recent policy developments by Member States, reflect on the current actions of the Commission and discuss the future role of the expert group;
- \* Discuss initial feedback from Member States on the planning of the next Joint Action on health inequalities in 2017 and initial commitments on participation and proposals on key topics and on leadership;
- \* Discuss the proposed new Workplan (2015-2017), potential comments and interest from Member States
- \* Introduce the renewed format of the EU Health Policy Forum;
- \* Provide renewed motivation and engage Member States for future work within the Expert Group in order to have a real impact on the ground in Member States.

### TOUR DE TABLE – MEMBER STATES

The 10 participating Member States were welcomed (Sweden, UK, Belgium, Latvia, Bulgaria, Italy, Finland, Austria, Germany, Czech Republic, Slovak Republic) and candidate country Turkey. The countries presented the progress made

within the field of health inequalities. Examples include:

- **Sweden:** Health equity as part of the social sustainability agenda is a strong priority for the new government; a Public Health Agency was established in January 2015; a new National Commission on Health Inequalities started to work.
- **Latvia:** A new member of the group was introduced; the priority of the current Presidency of the EU was presented (focus on nutrition, physical activity and cancer).
- **Finland:** The government presented the new programme with 8 strategic objectives – one of them is “improving health and wellbeing”, including cross-sectoral cooperation. There is a strong focus on integration of social and health services and on the Health in All Policies approach. New guidelines for improving public health will be prepared by the end of 2016 – health equity is one of the 3 priorities.
- **Italy:** A review on health inequalities was published and endorsed by the Ministry of health. Information concerning the recent meeting of the “South European network” suggested possible synergies with a preparation of the 2017 Joint Action.
- **UK:** There is a continuation of the health policy within the new conservative government in the UK. Obesity continues to be a public health priority, considering the social gradient. The Health equity agenda builds on the Marmot Review. A new successful Programme following up on “troubled and disadvantaged families” was presented. Focus is also placed on the “economic case”. In cooperation

with WHO a country report on health inequalities is being finalised and will be presented at the next meeting of the group.

#### **DG SANTE INFORMATION ON COUNTRY HEALTH PROFILES**

Stefan Schreck, Head of Unit “Health Information” informed about ongoing work on country specific knowledge on chronic diseases. He stressed that collecting and analyzing country-specific data will not replace existing work from Member States but should rather lead to more evidence-based decision making on how to make better use of the existing EU tools. Expert group members expressed interest on how this group could assist in this SANTE work; more information on the consultation process is expected in the future.

#### **HEALTH IN THE EUROPEAN SEMESTER AND THE OPEN METHOD OF COORDINATION - MONITORING TOOLS AND MEMBER STATES COOPERATION**

Boriana Goranova from DG EMPL presented ongoing work in Unit D3 Social Protection, including the development of the Joint Assessment Framework (JAF) methodology. The JAF allows for the detection of possible challenges in MS's health systems, with a specific focus on issues related to access, quality and equity. The objective of such a framework is to strengthen the use of the evidence base by the Social Protection Committee (SPC) in its activities related to health policy in the context of the Open Method of Co-ordination (OMC), and also in the context of the European Semester. The JAF methodology is a combination of a first-step screening of country specific challenges based on quantitative information and a second more in-

depth step of qualitative analysis in order to contextualise findings resulting from hard data. The latter involves consultation of thematic reports, national-level publications as well as national data sets.

#### **UPDATE ON THE HEALTH POLICY FORUM**

Hana Horka introduced the new format of the EU Health Policy Forum (HPF), and suggested that the expert group use the IT Platform for preparation of the meetings and exchange of information within the group. This possibility was welcomed by most Member States in order to guarantee continuity between the individual meetings, and to give Member States a more active role in the preparation of the meetings.

#### **JOINT ACTION ON HEALTH INEQUALITIES**

A new Joint Action is planned to be launched in the second half of 2017, in which the reduction of health inequalities is streamlined.

A short introduction was given by Cinthia Menel Lemos, CHAFEA, on the mechanism of cooperation between Member States, on success stories of similar Joint Actions and what Member States should be cautious of. In the “tour de table” Member States expressed interest to participate and presented first suggestions for the topics they would like to focus on.

#### **CURRENT ACTIONS RELATED TO LIFESTYLE DETERMINANTS**

Stefan Craenen and Arila Pochet from Unit C4 – Health Determinants presented the current actions related to Nutrition & Physical Activity and Alcohol respectively, in order to give an insight into the other lifestyle-related work of the unit and the

synergies with the health inequalities file.

#### **UPDATE FROM THE COMMISSION ON RECENT DEVELOPMENTS RELATED TO HEALTH INEQUALITIES AND PRESENTATION OF THE WORKPLAN OF THE EXPERT GROUP**

Hana Horka and Agnes Molnar presented the ongoing work of the Unit on health inequalities, in particular in the field of vulnerable groups. They informed about the ongoing discussion on health of migrants in irregular situations and presented the possible Workplan of the group until 2017. In the discussions Member States suggested to focus more on social determinants of health and the Health in All Policies approach. They displayed an interest in learning more about synergies with other Joint Actions, e.g. on Cancer and Mental Health.

#### **RESULTS OF THE DRIVERS FOR HEALTH EQUITY PROJECT**

Claudia Marinetti, Programme Manager at EuroHealthNet and a coordinator of the project gave a presentation on addressing the strategic determinants to reduce health inequities. The project aimed to understand and promote health equity through policy and practice in early childhood development, employment & working conditions, and income & social protection, with an emphasis on translating research into policy making. In the frame of the project several case studies were conducted, using participatory approaches. Main principles from the findings of the project included universality of access, addressing disadvantages, accounting for context and respecting rights and evidence-based policy.

#### **HEALTH PROMOTION EFFECTIVENESS**

Marion Devaux from the OECD presented the work on assessing effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of prevention policies, with a focus on social disparities of key behavioural risk factors, such as obesity and alcohol use.

#### **Conclusions of the Chair**

- Sweden and Italy will prepare a first short draft of the Joint Action proposal which will be circulated for the rest of the group for comments and suggestions. An audio meeting on the preparation of the Joint Actin may be organised in September.
- The group will be informed about the launch of the IT Platform (indicative date September 2015) and about new possibilities to integrate part of the work of the group online. UK and IT agreed to take part in the pilot test of the IT Platform in July.
- Participants were asked to circulate the information about the Health Prize on Ebola.
- The chair acknowledged the request from the group to focus more on socioeconomic determinants of health and the health in all policies approach in the future workplan of the expert group.
- It has been agreed that contact details of the expert group members will be circulated.
- Participants were informed about the vacancy post for a seconded national expert within the health inequalities team in Unit C4. Deadline for applications is 21 July 2015.
- The next meeting is provisionally planned for November 2015 and the exact date will be circulated soon.