

The World Health Organization (WHO) is an active supporter of HIA development. In 1982, the World Health Assembly passed a resolution introducing a framework for HIA development (WHA-35.17).

The European office of WHO places HIA high in public health priority areas and provides tools and advice to Member States on health impact assessment (HIA) through building capacity, developing methodology, and carrying out assessments and reviews. It also aims to increase awareness of health issues within other sectors by contributing evidence on health benefits and risks.

Health Impact Assessment for Health in All Policies

Health in All Policies is based on Article 168 of the Lisbon treaty on the functioning of the European Union which states that “a high level of human health protection shall be ensured in the definition and implementation of all community policies and activities”.

HIA is an essential element of the Health in All Policies approach and a tool that aims to inform decision makers mostly outside the “traditional” health sector on future consequences of current decisions. As such, HIA aims to be prospective or parallel and supportive to policy- and decision-making. HIA is increasingly embraced in numerous countries around the globe. Despite great progress, use of HIA especially at policy level is rather rare and requires concerted action of Ministries of Health and governments across Europe.

HIA and health inequities in Europe

There are wide differences in health between countries and between different population groups within countries. Recent evidence shows that the life expectancy gap in Europe is related to social inequalities, environment, legislation and behavioural factors which are often outside of the reach of a health sector. HIA is a tool, which can support Health in All Policies by clarifying the consequences of different policy options for health and health inequalities.

Current issues

On the issue of implementation, the legal or non-legal status of HIA needs to be decided on a country level. Although HIA is sometimes used to assist decisions about projects, some governments do not make use of HIA to help develop policy.

Health in All Policies too often remains more rhetoric than action. It is therefore often suggested that governments could increase the use of HIA by making it mandatory, but the necessary skills and commitment must also be built.

EC regulations introduced in 2002 state that all major Commission initiatives should be covered by an integrated impact assessment. However, there are concerns that currently practice of Integrated Impact Assessment does not give sufficient weight to health.

The European Commission (EC) supports HIA development on various ways. In 2002 guidance was issued on Integrated Impact Assessment, which includes health, and has now become mandatory. Health is considered as part of EC impact assessment procedures and the EC has funded projects to develop methods of improving quantification of impacts, among which

- Effectiveness of HIA
- HIA-NMAC
- PHASE, EPHIA
- RAPID
- DYNAMO-HIA

How can HIA help a Ministry of Health?

- HIA provides support to place health on agenda of other governmental sectors (Ministries)
 - By drawing clear connection lines between health effects, risk factors, determinants of health and policies it adds significantly to justification of the need to consider health in all sectoral policies
- HIA can provide useful information (including quantitative estimates) on future population health development related to concrete policies, strategies or actions
- HIA facilitates not only cross-sectoral working practices but also motivates towards closer research-practice-policy collaboration enhancing better use of scientific evidence in policy making and practice
- HIA helps to identify gaps in education and data collection systems

How can a Ministry of Health help development of HIA in a country?

- By acknowledging the role of HIA and the Health in all policies approach in national public health and health policies
- By setting up an appropriate infrastructure in form of “HIA support unit” at Ministry or a national public health institute
- By including the determinants of health theory into public health training and focusing on implementation of research evidence in practice and policy making



REMAINS COMMITTED

EUPHA:

- **Acknowledges** that major decisions, which bear on health and equalities in health, are made outside the health sector;
- **Feels** that it is vital to ensure the integration of health protection into all policies and actions on all levels;
- **Knows** that, HIA, a tool which has potential to increase the probability of a positive impact of policies on health, enables better understanding of interactions between health and other policy areas and assists decisionmakers to identify and reduce inequalities in health;
- **Feels** that beneficial effects for health are most likely to be achieved where HIA and the policy making process are closely linked;
- **Is concerned** that the progress regarding implementation of Health In All Policies in the European Union is slow and that the application of HIA is not fully utilized in all member states and in the Commission;
- **Underlines** that it is therefore necessary to ensure further progress in the implementation of Health in All Policies strategy by creating legal and institutional frameworks for the application of HIA of policy initiatives, decisions and programmes of actions;
- **Encourages** the further application of HIA as the main tool to ensure progress in the Health In All Policies in Europe;
- **Supports** the implementation efforts as an organization that includes all leading experts as members;
- **Calls upon** the European Commission to take appropriate measures to strengthen the inclusion of health considerations in all policy initiatives across Europe and to use all available instruments to encourage and help Member States to establish legal and institutional frameworks for applying HIA as a tool for integrating objectives of public health into the policy development.