

# Health gap within Europe

The health gap between old and new EU member states is partially closing, but disparities in mortality and morbidity still exist and in some cases are widening.

Environmental exposures contribute to this gap, together with lifestyle and genetic factors.

# Contribution of risk factors

A quantification of the contribution of different risk factors to health disparities within Europe would have a major impact in terms of (i) defining preventive strategies and public health policies, (ii) quantifying the causes of major chronic diseases in understudied European populations, and (iii) contributing to the identification of new causes and mechanisms of chronic diseases and their interactions with genetic factors.

# Role of large-scale prospective studies

Large-scale longitudinal prospective studies have been initiated in several of the old member states (e.g., Norway, United Kingdom, France, Sweden).

With a few exception (e.g., Estonia Genome Project), similar studies are lacking in new member states.

A priority in the Environment and Health of FP7 should be the establishment of a large-scale prospective epidemiological study in new member states and candidate countries, with focus on environmental exposures and risk of chronic diseases.

# Characteristics of a new prospective study in candidate countries

A new prospective study should

- be conducted according to a standard protocol in selected areas, preferably those covered by good-quality health information systems (e.g., population-based cancer registries);
- put emphasis on the assessment of environmental exposures and lifestyle factors;
- include collection of biological samples for the determination of genetic factors and biomarkers;
- be linked (e.g., via a consortium) to existing projects in old member states and to relevant EC-sponsored projects (e.g., ECNIS, Cascade).