Small Countries as live “implementation sites” of the new WHO European Policy Framework for Health and Well-being Health 2020

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Normative work, implementation of protocols, data analysis, scientific guidelines and recommendations for policy directions in the health sector are often based on the experience of large countries. However, since many Member States of the European Region of the World Health Organization have a population of less than one million, specific needs, opportunities and policy-making contexts are to be considered. On one hand, small countries are more exposed than larger ones to hazards with potential health consequences and increased overall vulnerability. On the other, it is the small countries that have special assets to be best equipped to adapt quickly, to reach easily social and political cohesion and to prosper. Thanks to their greater sense of shared purpose, it is easier for them to set policies and implement them effectively. It is this strategic agility that makes Small Countries ideal settings for innovation.

In September 2012, all 53 Members States of the WHO European Region endorsed Health 2020. This WHO Policy Framework is characterized by 2 strategic objectives and 4 areas of priorities. Countries are now translating Health 2020 into practice.

The benefits of being “small” can be maximized especially in broad policies, such as Health 2020, which are by their very nature multi-sectoral and require whole of government and whole of society approaches. In July 2014, the WHO Regional Office for Europe, with the support of the Republic of San Marino, launched the Small Countries project. The project involves eight countries and has four different aims:

- Sharing Health 2020 implementation-related knowledge, processes and promising practices through a dedicated platform;
- Strengthening capacity to deal with key Health 2020 strategic objectives/priorities through tailored capacity building events. Topics for the latter ones include: whole-of-government, whole-of-society approaches and, more generally, multisectoral mechanisms; early childhood development and link between health, education and social policy cohesion; health in all policies; social determinants of health; communicating health inequities with various stakeholders and strengthen media capacity to deal with these issues; health literacy; health diplomacy.
- Aligning/developing National Health Policy with Health 2020;
- Contributing to fill the gap in the European policy-making literature in health policy development in the contexts of small countries.

This presentation will report on the main outcome of the kick-off meeting that approved the San Marino Manifesto. The presentation will also examine key enabling factors for small countries to adopt innovative policies and interventions to improve populations’ health and reduce health inequities.