



"The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without the distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition." [WHO Constitution]

Over the last two decades, the Eastern Mediterranean Region has been undergoing a number of radical social, political and economic changes which have impacted the health of the Region's population. In some countries these changes have been aggravated by conflict, which has increased the number of the most vulnerable deprived of access to quality health care. Despite WHO's efforts to improve quality of life and public health and its achievements in this, there are still significant public health challenges faced by countries of the Region.

These challenges, which include increasing rates of noncommunicable diseases, the negative effects of rapid urbanization and changes in tobacco consumption and diet, high prevalence of stunting, iron-deficiency anaemia and obesity and mortality due to road traffic accidents, are disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable and unprotected. Providing access to quality acceptable health care services remains a major challenge for developing countries with the provision of universal coverage and the right to health limited by a lack of resources.

The right to health is not simply the right to be healthy but the right to a comprehensive public health system that provides equal opportunities to everybody to be able to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health. Non-discrimination in relation to access to health care and the

conditions necessary for good health is a key entitlement. Moreover, irrespective of a country's developmental levels and economic situation, there are essential services that should be in place, such as available, accessible, acceptable, affordable and quality health care services.

Within the current situation of resource constraints, limited development funds due to the global financial crisis and competing priorities, it is essential not to under serve the disadvantaged pursuing development targets. Addressing the poor and marginalized in an equitable manner is an entry point in moving towards achievement of the targets of the Millennium Development Goals.

Participation of target groups in public life is essential in order to identify actual needs and concerns, as well as to determine appropriate responses. Obtaining the views of a population can only be achieved through a transparent and participatory process. Participation of target groups, with a focus on the most vulnerable and marginalized, in setting agendas for discussion, creating policy dialogue and implementing and monitoring policy should be complemented with extensive collaboration with other stakeholders, such as civil society and state and non-state actors with obligations, including the various sectors of the government. At the same time, raising people's awareness of their rights and entitlements is essential.

Participation is “the right of rights”, even more so when it concerns the health of a population.

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