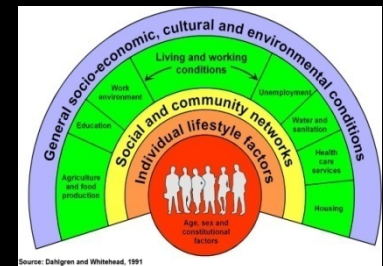


# What kinds of evidence do policymakers and practitioners need for action on health inequalities?

Experts' Conference of Spanish EU Presidency, Madrid, 21<sup>st</sup> April 2010

Professor Margaret Whitehead

WHO Collaborating Centre for Policy Research on Social Determinants of Health, University of Liverpool, UK



# **Consensus that action on social determinants of health is crucial for reducing health inequalities**

## **Global Commission's three overarching recommendations:**

- **Improve conditions of daily life**
- **Tackle the inequitable distribution of power, money and resources**
- **Measure and understand the problem and assess the impact of action**
- **There is enough evidence to act on all these issues NOW - though it may not be in the most useful form for policy and practice**

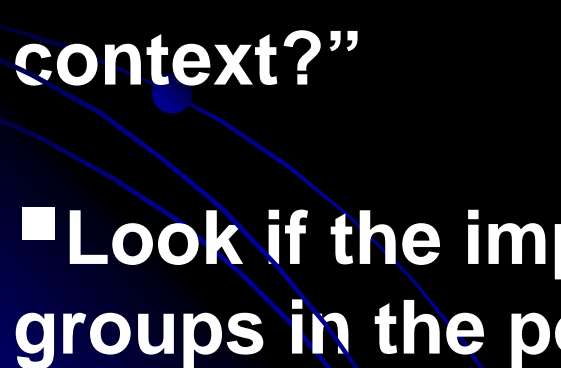
# What needs to be evaluated and monitored?

- Wider population-level policies (past, present and prospective) that influence living and working conditions, economic security and other social determinants of health

- Deliberate national strategies focussed on tackling the determinants of inequalities in health

-

# **Need to re-think evaluations of both wider policies and focussed interventions:**

- **It is not sufficient to simply ask “What works and what doesn’t work?”**
  - **Need to ask “for whom?” and “In what context?”**
  - **Look if the impact is different for different groups in the population (differential impact)**
- 

**Need to get away from ‘averages’ and disaggregate data, to ask searching questions:**

- **Who are the winners? Who the losers?**
- **Who benefits ? Who pays?**
- **What is the impact of a policy on the most vulnerable in society?**

# What is needed to generate such evidence?

- Using natural policy experiments
  - Cross-country comparative analysis, including benchmarking
  - Developing more appropriate methods of evidence synthesis
- 

## Natural policy experiments:

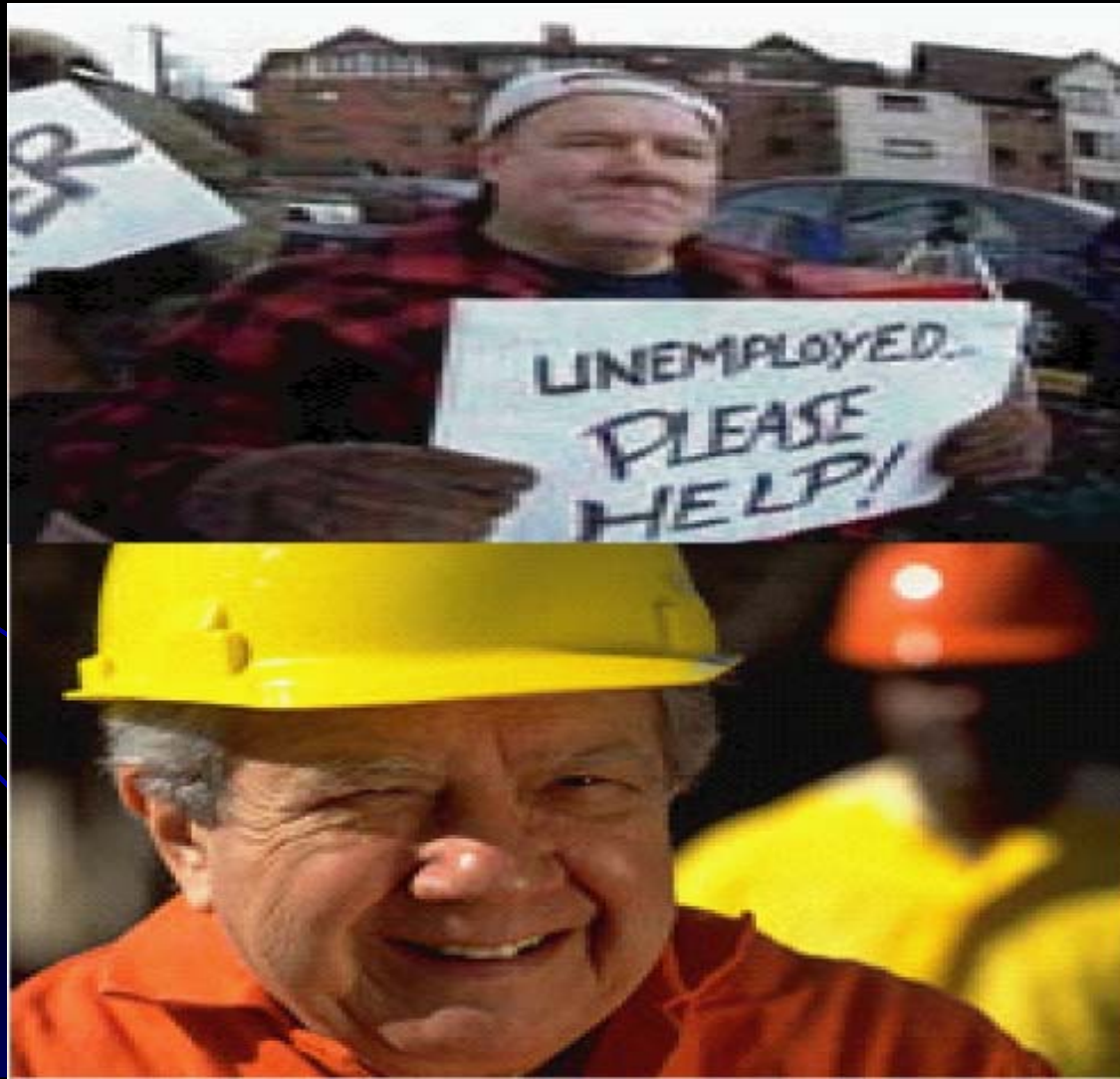
Proportion relatively poor

before and after tax and welfare benefit transfers



Poverty threshold = 60% median disposable income

# Methods for health EQUITY impact assessment, e.g. of EU employment strategy?





# What is the health impact of housing regeneration plans in inner cities?



Informing local government strategies

# Evidence needs for monitoring strategies at all levels of government

- Monitoring **DIFFERENTIAL IMPACT** of policies and strategies
- Devising appropriate methods of evaluating current population-wide policies - for their negative as well as their positive impacts
- Intelligent application of health inequality targets and performance indicators to monitor progress to avoid perverse incentives
- Realistic timescales – a generation to change some mortality indicators - need short and medium term process and action indicators
- Qualitative studies to understand **WHY** an intervention did or did not work: to investigate the **ACTUAL** experiences of different groups
- Every country can make some form of health equity assessment – lack of the perfect information system should not be an excuse for **INACTION**