

# The role of European Union enlargement in mortality convergence across Europe

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## **The role of European Union enlargement in mortality convergence across Europe**

by Rok Hrzic

Maastricht, 23rd January 2024

1. “The Commission regards the extent of the health inequalities between people living in different parts of the EU and between socially advantaged and disadvantaged EU citizens as a challenge to the EU’s commitments to solidarity, social and economic cohesion, human rights and equality of opportunity.” (*European Commission*)
2. Population health is an emergent property of a complex system comprising the population, its context, and their interaction at different geographic levels; differences in population health can result from differences in any part of this system. (*Adapted from Cummins, 2007, Diez Roux, 2011, and Bambra et al. 2019*)
3. The 2004 EU accession process did not directly influence the process of mortality convergence across Europe over the short term. (*This dissertation*)
4. The impact of EU accession on transferring mortality-relevant innovations to accession countries is contingent on the national and regional health, social, economic, and political context. (*This dissertation*)
5. Enhancing the capacity of individuals to adopt mortality-relevant innovations through social welfare policies across the EU may speed up mortality convergence in the future. (*This dissertation*)
6. Highly heterogeneous study designs and the paucity of high-quality, longitudinal data on health determinants at multiple levels across Europe hinder synergistic research into mortality divergence-convergence and effective policy action in the EU. (*This dissertation*)

7. This dissertation highlights that incorporating insights from implementation science, social epidemiology, and complexity science to examine how the capacity and willingness to implement mortality-relevant innovations arise from the interaction of supranational, national, and regional contexts and factors is critical to extending our understanding of mortality divergence-convergence processes and guiding effective policy action. (*This dissertation*)
8. "It remains to be seen whether persistent COVID-19 losses in eastern Europe and diminishing losses in western Europe will create a new East/West divide and divergence in life expectancy in the years to come." (*Schöley et al., 2022*)
9. "For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away." (*Matthew, 25:29*)
10. "Social scientists are better advised to be eclectic in their approach to problems, incorporating causal and hermeneutic analysis, quantitative and qualitative methods, and a range of explanatory theories and causal mechanisms." (*Little, 1990 (2012)*)
11. "But there is a limit to thinking about even a small piece of something monumental. You still see the shadow of the whole rearing up behind you, and you become lost in your thoughts in part from the panic of realizing the size of that imagined leviathan." (*Jeff VanderMeer*)