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THE POLITICS OF HEALTH INEQUALITIES IN EUROPE

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Politicians in many countries have embraced the notion that health inequalities derive from socioeconomic inequalities, but European governments have for the most part failed to enact policies that would reduce underlying social inequalities. The central argument of the book-in-progress on which this talk is based is that “medicalizing” the issue of social inequality by focusing on health inequalities reframes the problem of social inequality in a way that makes it more difficult to solve. In fact, I argue, both the epidemiological science and the political science suggest that policy-makers who are concerned with improving equity in their societies should instead consider adopting more traditional programmes of taxation, redistribution and labor market regulation in order to reduce both health inequalities and the underlying social inequalities. The argument draws on primary data from in-depth interviews with policy-makers in the UK, France, Belgium, and Finland; and on systematic qualitative content analysis of government policy documents and newspaper coverage of the issue of health inequalities.

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