WHO
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Agenda item 12.4 – Promoting the health of refugees and migrants

Statement of Portugal
25.05.2019

Muito obrigado, Senhora Presidente.

Portugal thanks the WHO for the preparation of the draft global action plan for promoting the health of refugees and migrants.

We co-sponsored WHA resolution 70.15 which requested the elaboration of this action plan because we believe that ensuring the fulfillment of refugees’ and migrants’ human right to health is a matter of the utmost urgency which deserves greater attention and commitment.

Portugal supports this draft action plan. We believe that it has the potential to contribute to raise awareness to this issue and improve lives. Notwithstanding, we would have preferred a document containing stronger commitments – we are particularly disappointed with the fact that all recommendations directed to Member States have been withdrawn during the drafting process.

Member States are the ones responsible for implementing policies aiming to grant refugees and migrants the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, and the ones with the obligation of fulfilling their right to health. For this reason, and since the action plan was already deprived of recommendations to Member States, we would have hoped that at least the decision of this Assembly contained a strong invitation for States to report on the progress made at the national level on the promotion of migrants’ and refugees’ health.

We thus supported previous OP2 of the decision proposed by the Secretariat. We regret that it has been withdrawn. We support the amendments proposed by Mexico.

Madam Chair,

Now, we encourage all relevant stakeholders, in particular States, IOM and UNHCR to join WHO in strengthening their efforts to promote and protect the health of refugees and migrants. Ensuring the access of refugees and
migrants to quality healthcare as well as the continuum of care for persons on the move is an essential precondition to the achievement of universal health coverage, and it is central to achieve the SDGs by leaving no one behind. Human rights-based mental health services adapted to the needs of refugees and migrants are also very important.

Madam President,

To conclude, let me reiterate that Portugal is deeply committed to complying with its obligations in this regard. In Portugal all migrants, irrespective of their regular or irregular status, have free access to public health services. We have been developing and implementing migrant-sensitive health policies that incorporate a public health and human rights approach. In addition, there is a legal “firewall” which forbids the transmission of data on migrant children, collected by health institutions, to police or border authorities.

Muito obrigado.