

WHA76 (Committee A) – Agenda item 15.4: *Poliomyelitis*

Statement by Gavi, The Vaccine Alliance

Routine immunisation, including polio vaccination, has been hit hard by the pandemic. Immunisation campaigns were suspended or cancelled, and a backslide in immunisation coverage has left millions of children at risk. As a result, we have seen an upsurge in cases of vaccine-preventable diseases and a re-emergence of polio in places that had long been polio-free. This is a stark reminder of what will occur if we do not achieve global eradication – a global resurgence of transmission and polio-associated morbidity and mortality.

The highest-risk areas, where the virus continues to circulate, are invariably the hardest to reach and require concerted efforts and resources. The only way to stop and maintain zero polio circulation once and for all is to leave no one behind.

2023 is a critical year for both polio eradication and polio transition efforts. To achieve and maintain a world free of poliovirus, we must prioritise maintaining routine immunisation services to reach the estimated 25 million zero-dose children worldwide who have missed at least one vaccination in 2021.

We also need to recognize that 90% of polio cases are in consequential subnational geographies with the highest proportion of these un- and under-vaccinated children. This requires integrating routine immunisation, including polio vaccination, with other essential services and the broader humanitarian and emergency response contexts.

Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance calls upon Member States to:

- *Prioritise* and *ensure* an integrated approach to reach zero-dose children and their communities with life-saving vaccination services and other PHC interventions, especially in the seven subnational consequential geographies that are affected by broader humanitarian concerns and complex emergencies.
- *Promote* and *accelerate* the transition of essential polio and broader immunisation functions by integrating polio-funded assets into existing national health systems.

Thank you.