



European Union

Statement

WHO

156th Executive Board

(3-11 February 2025)

Agenda item 6- Universal health coverage

Geneva, 4 February 2025

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Chair,

Director general,

Members of the Executive Board,

Colleagues,

I have the honour of delivering this statement on behalf of the EU and its Member States.

The candidate countries Türkiye, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, Ukraine, Republic of Moldova, Bosnia and Herzegovina* and Georgia as well as Armenia align themselves with this statement.

The EU thanks the Director-General for the comprehensive report on Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and acknowledges the critical importance of reaching UHC for global health equity and sustainable development.

We are deeply concerned that we remain off track to strengthen health systems and achieve UHC by 2030. The sobering reality is that over 4.5 billion people still lack access to essential health services, and financial hardship continues to drive millions into poverty annually. This has a devastating human cost, particularly for women and girls, as evidenced by stalled progress in reducing maternal mortality and childhood immunization coverage, and all persons in vulnerable situations and those often left behind, such as persons living with rare diseases or persons with neglected tropical diseases.

At the UN high-level meeting on UHC in 2023, Member States reaffirmed their commitment to UHC, resolving to redouble efforts toward achieving its ambitious targets. UHC should be kept high on the agenda despite budgetary constraints or other national priorities. While setbacks persist, progress in some countries demonstrates that change is possible. As stated in the Lusaka Agenda, investments in primary health care (PHC) are key, with the potential to save 60 million lives and extend global life expectancy by 3.7 years by 2030.

The EU strongly supports the integration of public health functions, including strengthening health promotion, into primary health care systems. This ensures equitable, adaptable, person-centred, resilient and quality health services. However, achieving these outcomes requires

* North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

urgent action in key areas, while maintaining focus on WHO's essential programmes and strategic objectives:

Investing in the Health Workforce. The projected shortfall of 11.1 million health workers globally by 2030 must be urgently addressed. The EU calls for sustained investments in education, innovation, training, and retention in line with the World Health Organization's (WHO) Global Strategy on Human Resources for Health: Workforce 2030. Initiatives such as the WHO Academy are vital in equipping health workers with the skills needed to deliver high-quality care, particularly in underserved communities.

Strengthening community engagement through Social Participation. Engaging communities in the design, delivery, and evaluation of health services is critical to ensuring relevance, equity, and accountability. Social participation not only enhances health outcomes but also builds trust and resilience in health systems. It increases health literacy and the ability to navigate the health system, and can increase local capacity to face health crisis, early identify outbreaks and mobilise the first line of the response.

Scaling Up Financial Protection. We must prioritize reforms that eliminate impoverishing out-of-pocket health expenditures. The EU emphasizes the need for efficient, innovative, equitable and sustainable financing mechanisms, including domestic funding, complementary and coordinated international cooperation to reduce economic barriers to health services, particularly for the most vulnerable.

Strengthening health expenditure data, analysis and tracking UHC progress. UHC requires modern, fit-for-purpose health information systems that provide timely and reliable data to inform policy design. The EU welcomes the upcoming launch of a global survey to assess health systems for UHC and the UHC Global Monitoring Report.

Achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC) requires a multifaceted approach, including by integrating digital health solutions, building climate-resilient systems, and managing non-communicable diseases within primary care. Coordinated cross-sector action and involvement of various stakeholders are vital to expanding service delivery and driving innovation in health financing for robust, adaptable systems.

The EU remains committed to working with all Member States and stakeholders to deliver on the promise of UHC. Together, we can create health systems that leave no one behind.

Thank you.