

Statement of the Slovak Republic
156th Session of the Executive Board
Agenda Item 5 Report of the Standing Committee on Health Emergency Preventio, Preparedness
and Response

11 February 2025

Honourable Chair.

Slovakia extends our gratitude to the Secretariat and Chair Dr. Abdelkrim Meziane Bellefquih for the comprehensive report and appreciate the opportunity to engage in a constructive dialogue during the last committee meeting and we support proposed the ToR.

Slovakia acknowledges the critical need for effective responses to ongoing and emerging health crises and wishes to highlight the following key areas:

1. **Responding to Ongoing Health Crises:** Slovakia supports the implementation of the 2024-2025 Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan (SPRP) for mpox, with an allocated budget of USD 290 million. We call for transparency in tracking vaccination progress in affected countries, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and urge WHO to address the gap in diagnostic capacities for the newly identified Clade Ib variant. We also recommend enhanced border monitoring mechanisms in Africa to prevent cross-border transmission.
2. **Strengthening the Mandate of the Standing Committee:** Slovakia recognizes the need to expand the Standing Committee's membership from 14 to 16 members to ensure equitable regional representation. However, we emphasize the importance of preserving decision-making efficiency, particularly during public health emergencies. We recommend reviewing the frequency of emergency meetings, currently set at 24 hours post-PHEIC declaration, to optimize response effectiveness.
3. **Addressing Regional Health Challenges:**
 - **Africa:** We acknowledge the 23 ongoing health crises in Africa, including cholera outbreaks and climate-induced disasters. Slovakia supports strengthening synergies between WHO and Africa CDC to enhance emergency response coordination.
 - **Europe:** Given the persistent funding shortages for Ukrainian refugees, we call for mobilizing financial resources and we highlight the contributions of the EU HERA initiative to sustain health service delivery.
4. **Enhancing Financing and Partnerships:** Slovakia notes with concern that only 35% of the required USD 135 million funding for mpox response has been secured. We propose fostering partnerships with GAVI and CEPI to ensure equitable and sustainable vaccine access. Furthermore, we urge a critical evaluation of the Pandemic Fund's effectiveness in addressing emerging health threats.
5. **Key Discussion Points for Further Action:**

- **Climate Risks:** Given the increasing impact of climate change on health, Slovakia calls on WHO to integrate climate projections, such as El Niño patterns, into regional emergency preparedness plans. We suggest hosting a workshop with the IPCC to assess climate-related health risks and develop targeted interventions.
- **Attacks on Health Workers:** With 707 recorded incidents in 2024, including 354 fatalities, Slovakia urges the WHO Secretariat to propose mechanisms involving regional member states, other international and regional agencies and organizations for protecting health and other humanitarian workers in crisis zones.
- **Innovations in Surveillance:** We encourage WHO to explore the use of artificial intelligence for predicting outbreaks for example mpox, and others. We propose piloting AI-driven surveillance initiatives in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to enhance early detection and response capabilities.

Furthermore, given the current need for absolute rationalization of resources, Slovakia would like to share the following proposal with esteemed Executive Board members and the Secretariat. As previously discussed, the current focus, impact, and benefits of the Standing Committee, as well as its composition, still do not fully reflect the articulated need for expert participation or the establishment of specialized working groups. These groups would conduct real-time analyses of critical situations, interconnect with existing Technical Advisory Groups (TAGs) and platforms, and provide the Director-General with the best possible support in decision-making and rapid responses within 24 hours if necessary.

In a time when we are scrutinizing every dollar or euro to ensure effective investment, we do not see the current structure as efficient. Therefore, Slovakia proposes either fully freezing the Committee's activities and activating it only when there is a real reason and a suspected Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) or at the request of the Director-General. We recommend that during this session, the legal department propose a viable mechanism for implementing this change and present it for consideration. This approach would allow for resource savings while reducing currently inefficient Committee meetings, reserving them for moments of genuine necessity.

At the same time, we support a rational restructuring of the Committee with revised Terms of Reference, incorporating expert working groups or direct expert participation as members. Additionally, we request consideration of the possibility of membership for non-Executive Board member states.

Finally, Slovakia expresses appreciation for the efforts of Brazil and co-sponsors in advancing the resolution and is pleased to confirm our co-sponsorship.

Thank you.