

Portugal

World Health Organization 73rd Session of the World Health Assembly (9-14 November 2020)

Committee A – Item 13.2 WHO's work on Health Emergencies Geneva, 10th November 2020

Chair,
Director General,
Excellencies,

I have the honour to address the 73rd World Health Assembly on behalf of Portugal.
We align with previous statement by the European Union.

Let me begin by thanking WHO for its work on Health Emergencies and its leadership on global health. We note the last report of the DG on this and the importance of coordination, training and support provided to Member States.

The world needs a stronger WHO. The magnitude and impact of the pandemic makes this period one of the most challenging in the Organization's long history and the complexity and scope of WHO's mandate requires a corresponding provision of resources.

Portugal reiterates its support to multilateralism as the only approach capable of responding to global crises, mitigate their effects, and prevent outbreaks of a similar nature in the future. We look forward to the lessons learned exercise on the global response to the pandemic, as we rely on this to steer the reform of the organization, grounded on a broad commitment between Member States.

Chair,

Public Health Emergencies have a disproportionate higher impact on persons in vulnerable situation, such as older persons or persons with mental health conditions and psychosocial disabilities. These emergencies disrupt essential health services. Likewise, the higher incidence of poverty and overcrowded housing conditions has meant that the COVID-19 crisis has had a

higher health and socio-economic toll on migrant and refugee populations, especially children. Prioritising reaching these children and people facing deprivation with effective, comprehensive and equitable interventions is essential to ensure social justice and resilient communities.

Portugal has designed policies and enacted legislation making the promotion of migrants' and refugees' health a priority, with an inclusive, non-discriminatory, humanistic approach. However, like in every country, work plans and programmes are constrained by new demands from the pandemic. Resilience and flexibility are therefore key.

We ask the secretariat to prioritise investments in rebuilding essential health services, such as routine immunisation, and stimulate national development plans to progress and strengthen public health essential operations, in order to effectively respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and future health emergencies.

In order to strengthen global health security, we cannot only mitigate outbreaks when they happen. We must work on preparedness, build the capacity to prevent them, to early detect them and to respond as quickly as possible. We must invest in improving country capacity globally such as on epidemiological surveillance, laboratory capacity and contact tracing, as well as scale up the appropriate and trained health workforce.

Lastly, we call for the implementation of resilient, inclusive and effective health policies supported by the single aspiration – “*no one is left behind*”. This principle has guided our country's National Health Service in the last forty-one years. It is today, in the challenging context of the COVID-19 pandemic, even more fundamental.

Thank you

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