SUMMARY

E4As Guide for Advancing Health and Sustainable Development

RESOURCES AND TOOLS FOR POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION
Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires working in transformative ways. The Guide uses the E4As approach – engage to assess, align, accelerate and account – to create a compilation of methods, diagnostic tools, guidance documents, processes and mechanisms for better policies to achieve the SDGs and advance health in the WHO European Region. Its development responds to the request of Member States for a resource kit to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Guide has been developed in collaboration with national authorities, civil society and academia and also presents case studies from countries and institutions in the Region. The tools and methods have been developed by WHO, other United Nations agencies, academia and civil society. The Guide can be used by policy-makers, public health institutions, academia, civil society, development partners and funding agencies within and outside the health sector, and by anyone with an interest in promoting and protecting health and well-being for all at all ages.

**Keywords**

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS, UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE, INTERSECTORAL ACTION, HEALTH IN ALL POLICIES, GLOBAL ACTION PLAN, 2030 AGENDA, HEALTH TARGETS


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Summary

In September 2015 heads of states and governments agreed to set the world on a path towards sustainable development through the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By 2020 progress had been patchy. We were unprepared for the COVID-19 pandemic, which has resulted in unprecedented damage to lives and economies. World leaders, United Nations partners and civil society all agree that the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs remain now more relevant than ever. But if we are to achieve the SDGs, we need to transform our systems.

The SDGs and their targets are indivisible and should be implemented in an integrated manner. As such, the 2030 Agenda calls for governments to transform and change the way they make and deliver policies and relate to people. For the health sector, this transformation presents an opportunity to translate the universal nature of the 2030 Agenda into focused health and well-being priorities and targets, and to build inclusive national and subnational mechanisms to plan, implement, monitor and review implementation continuously.

The E4As Guide, developed by the WHO Regional Office for Europe and partners, offers a set of resources (selected approaches, information, tools and case studies) to support the needed transformation in the health sector. While the Guide has been designed to support policy-makers, public health institutions, academia, civil society, development partners and funding agencies within and outside the health sector, everyone with an interest in promoting and protecting health and well-being for all at all ages will find it useful.
The resources can be used, alone or in conjunction with others, to make the most of the available entry points in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda to promote, enable and mediate for health and well-being for all at all ages. It will be particularly useful to support many areas of opportunity, including updating and revising national and/or subnational strategies, policies or plans in both the health sector and other sectors (Health in All Policies approach); preparing to participate in and debate global and regional governance mechanisms; assessing country/region/city progress towards achieving the SDGs (e.g. a voluntary review); and rebuilding after COVID-19 for a better future.

Central to the guide is the E4As approach, which is a transformative approach to implementing the 2030 Agenda and encompasses engagement, assessment, alignment, acceleration and accountability. Building on insights from change management in public health and dynamic approaches to development policy implementation, the E4As approach integrates societal transformative change with policy implementation at the systems level. In the E4As approach, engage is the pacemaker that drives action; the 4As are the building blocks and their elements can be used in a continuous and synchronized way.

The E4As approach to achieve the health-related SDG targets

Engage

Engagement is a purposeful, inclusive, transformative, proactive, trust-building and sustainable interaction with stakeholders across sectors. It will help to advocate, enable and mediate for better health and well-being and increase ownership and inclusion in policy implementation.

Engagement must be broad but relevant and meaningful. It should be strategically planned to raise awareness, empower, advocate and promote collaboration. It can take many forms, including face-to-face workshops, policy dialogues, online platforms, written comments, focus groups, citizens’ juries, public meetings, user panels and crowd-sourcing comments on proposed policies or legislation.

Engagement is an opportunity and a responsibility to ensure diverse voices are heard, particularly marginalized and vulnerable groups, and allow people to become active stakeholders to advance SDG implementation, for example young people. Young people have a pivotal role to play both as beneficiaries of actions and policies under the 2030 Agenda and as partners and participants in its implementation.

All countries have existing multi- and intersectoral mechanisms that can be built on and that will include local and regional levels. The engagement of health stakeholders in these coordination arrangements should aim to strengthen leadership for health and its determinants and promote the integration of these into the work of other sectors and wider government policies and plans.
Assess

Progress towards the SDGs needs to be assessed in a way that understands the context and can identify gaps and opportunities. The SDGs provide a comprehensive framework against which to measure progress and gaps: 169 targets and 232 indicators. There are multiple methodologies proposed to use the SDGs framework to identify gaps and for foresight. These can be adapted to a particular context.

Knowing the gaps is not enough, it is also necessary to understand a country’s overall development landscape, including the development priorities and needs. Awareness is also required of the processes, institutions, actors, resources and other factors that influence effective implementation.

The objective of assess is to obtain an evidence-informed foundation against which policies and interventions can be formulated and introduced.
Align

Alignment refers to harmonizing financial, legal and regulatory mechanisms and promoting the co-benefits of health and well-being across all SDGs: a Health in All Policies or a Health in All SDGs approach. The aim of pursuing alignment is to manage policy conflicts, minimize trade-offs and potentiate synergies. More importantly, it aims at ensuring that no one is left behind.

To promote alignment there is a need to pursue policy coherence, promote strong intersectoral collaboration, connect governance mechanisms with long-term objectives, improve capacities and strengthen public health institutions. Policy, legislation, regulatory frameworks, financing and technical standards and norms are the supporting tools to promote such alignment.

Action from the bottom up is essential, but this needs the assurance of continuity in political commitments, empowerment of local and regional governments, and an enabling legal and institutional environment for local authorities.

The intergenerational nature of the SDGs calls for a long-term perspective; policy instruments are the place to enable governance that promotes health and well-being for present and future generations.
Accelerate

The breadth of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs requires moving beyond traditional silo approaches and adopting an integrated approach to policy and implementation, one that will trigger positive multiplier effects across the SDGs and targets, increase the pace of progress and support uptake of innovation at all levels.

This block of the E4A approach seeks to promote selected policy and/or programme areas that are systemic multipliers and it highlights the importance of virtuous cycles as potential catalysts.

Acceleration is context-specific, highlighting the importance of tailoring SDG implementation to a system’s characteristics and to the institutional conditions and specific health needs of national and subnational environments. The assessment can identify national priorities, the distance to achieving the SDGs, gaps, potential bottlenecks and barriers, and potential interventions and areas of opportunity. Participatory methodologies can then be used to identify accelerators and to think through the connections and synergies across the goals, highlighting how action in one area can create dividends in others or can require some trade-off.

One such accelerator is strengthening primary health care (PHC) as this is the predominant entry point into the health system and the foundation and cornerstone of universal health coverage. The majority of a person’s health needs throughout the life course are addressed in PHC and it provides an effective
entry point into the correct area of further care when needed. PHC is a catalyst for socioeconomic development and a key contributor to social and gender equity, social justice, human rights and inclusive economic growth. Consequently, strengthening PHC and health systems for universal health coverage not only leads to better health but also has multiple benefits for the SDGs as a whole.

Equally, many SDG targets influence PHC; for example, education (SDG 4) is required to train health-care workers; peace (SDG 16) is required to maintain infrastructure (SDG 9) and the function of a PHC system; and partnerships (SDG 17) may be required in those countries that have fewer national resources. Of course, the extent to which an SDG target may influence PHC and health system strengthening as an accelerator (or any other accelerator) depends primarily on the country context.
Account

The non-binding and complex nature of the 2030 Agenda requires strong commitment and accountability at the global, national and subnational levels, and platforms or mechanisms that measure progress, increase transparency, address power asymmetries and make institutions more responsive.

Accountability is the product of a complex and dynamic system of relationships between actors, platforms and functions.

The recognition of the shared responsibility for the achievement of the SDGs means that both rights holders and duty bearers have roles, based on responsibility, answerability and enforceability. Building on the components that form accountability systems can enable and incentivize actors to fulfil and transparently discharge their rights-based duties and obligations and to deliver on their commitments.

The availability of robust, reliable and high-quality disaggregated data is critical to accountability. Making these data accessible to people by duty holders is fundamental to ensure that people know what governments and other implementing partners are doing and can help them to assess whether these actors are fulfilling their duties in line with their commitments.

Fewer than 10 years remain to achieve the SDGs. Despite the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on our lives, livelihoods, freedoms and economies, achieving the SDGs remains a priority for all countries and communities. In the aftermath of the pandemic, countries need to reevaluate their policies and plans and will face difficult trade-offs.

How can we ensure that health policies and development policies are more coherent?

For health, with the adoption of the European Programme of Work, Member States have agreed that the focus for the next five years is to move towards universal health coverage, to better protect people and communities from health emergencies and to address all determinants of health for better health and well-being for all. This intrinsically requires collaboration between and across sectors guided by effective leadership.

Although the resources, tools and examples in the E4As Guide are not exhaustive, they represent the collective knowledge and experience of our networks, platforms, action plans, organizations, sectors, communities and countries. The E4As Guide outlines approaches and the tools and resources to support work towards the needed transformation, and the case studies from actors across the WHO European Region show how it can be done.

For more information, visit https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-policy
The World Health Organization (WHO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations created in 1948 with the primary responsibility for international health matters and public health. The WHO Regional Office for Europe is one of six regional offices throughout the world, each with its own programme geared to the particular health conditions of the countries it serves.

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