WHO Partners Forum 2023

Summary report, Istanbul, Türkiye, 13-14 June 2023
Sustainable financing  Resilient health systems  Protecting against health emergencies  Climate change and health  Healthy lives and well-being

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The World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Europe convened the first-of-its-kind Partners Forum in Istanbul, Türkiye, from 13 to 14 June 2023, bringing together leading health contributors from Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. Over one and a half days, more than 100 representatives gathered to enhance health sector partnerships through panel discussions and presentations on the significant health and well-being challenges in the WHO European Region.

Capitalizing on the existing momentum for public health, the Partners Forum served as a platform for diverse expertise and perspectives. It facilitated discussions on genuine opportunities to achieve sustainable health funding throughout the region, strengthening new and established partnerships.

Forum objectives

- Examine challenges and opportunities for enhanced partnership within regional country contexts.
- Identify critical thematic and subregional funding gaps relevant to successfully implementing the European Programme of Work.
- Explore anticipated resource requirements for the WHO Regional Office for Europe’s most prominent regional emergency responses.

About the Forum
Abbreviations

AI artificial intelligence
AMR antimicrobial resistance
COVID-19 coronavirus disease 2019
CPS Country Health Policies and Systems
DG NEAR Directorate-General for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations
DG ECHO Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
ECEH WHO European Centre for Environment and Health
EU European Union
EC European Commission
NAPHS National Action Plan for Health Security
NCD noncommunicable disease
SDG Sustainable Development Goal
UN United Nations
UNDCO United Nations Development Cooperation Office
USAID United States Agency for International Development
USCDC United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
WHE WHO Health Emergencies Programme
WHO World Health Organization
Significant health challenges throughout the World Health Organization (WHO) European Region pose a significant threat to our collective progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In recent years, a multitude of global changes including globalization, migration, urbanization, climate change, resource scarcity and digitalization, have left an indelible mark on the lives of people in the region. These changes have not only reshaped our daily existence but have also had profound implications for our health and well-being. Amid these transformations, uncertain economic conditions, periodic disease outbreaks, and looming security threats have strained public finances, exacerbating the complexity of the situation. Moreover, the region has grappled with crises such as the war in Ukraine and the aftermath of the Türkiye earthquake, adding an extra layer of challenges to an already intricate landscape.

The repercussions of these multifaceted challenges are manifold. Mental illness rates have surged; noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) are on the rise; and antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is becoming an alarming concern, all of which severely impede our ability to combat infectious diseases effectively. As our populations age, health-care demands continue to mount, driving up costs and exacerbating medicine shortages.

Bringing together WHO partners in Europe for united action for better health
Addressing these complex health issues requires united action and effective, well-coordinated partnerships with a wide range of contributors. The Partners Forum aimed to bring together decision-makers, WHO country offices and partner organizations to discuss these pressing challenges and work towards better health. Sustainable financing and governance reform were important topics at the Forum to ensure the effectiveness of WHO’s role.

Health emergencies, response, recovery and building strong health systems
Lessons from the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic highlight the importance of preparedness in protecting people during health emergencies. Developing future preparedness and response plans should consider the long-term effects and overall impact on the health system. WHO encourages Member States to accelerate the development and implementation of their National Action Plan for Health Security (NAPHS), to strengthen national capacities and achieve health security. The panel session highlighted the importance of NAPHS for cross-sector coordination, and how countries can use NAPHS to garner funding support for national health priorities.

Building resilient health systems is critical for effectively dealing with emergencies and shocks. These events must also be leveraged for ongoing efforts to strengthen health systems. This task requires innovative thinking, digital technology, partnerships and investment in the health workforce.

Better health in future – dealing with NCDs, AMR and climate change
Health partnerships are key to achieving SDG 3, Ensuring Healthy Lives and Well-Being for All. NCDs, AMR and climate change are major threats to this goal. NCDs need greater investment, with prevention and management integrated into primary care; while the One Health perspective WHO is promoting – highlighting the connection between human, animal and environmental health – can help combat AMR. Climate considerations must also be prioritized within the health agenda to ensure communities can cope with climate change. Lastly, involving youth in these discussions and decisions is important as they are the future torchbearers.
Heard around the room

“The fact that WHO has brought together 30 organizations here in this room to address the challenges of today and tomorrow on health and well-being is of itself delivering on goal 17, on partnerships, of the Sustainable Development Goals. WHO is walking the talk and delivering on SDG 17.”

Ms Gwi-Yeop Son
Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia, United Nations Development Cooperation Office (UNDCO)

“This was an excellent opportunity to express our gratitude to WHO for the strong collaboration throughout Europe and Central Asia, particularly in Ukraine. We also had the chance to learn about the partnerships that WHO has forged with other development partners.”

Dr Tania Dmytraczenko
Manager, Health Nutrition and Population, Europe and Central Asia, World Bank

“The exchange was the highlight of the forum. It was great to talk to people, learn from their experiences, hear about their challenges and find out what works well for them.”

Mr Joel Stanojevich
Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, US Centers for Disease Control

“Hearing about the topics presented during the panels has been valuable. But I think it’s about having all of the partners from across the region present together, and having the time to sit in person to discuss issues.”

Ms Naomi Fvet
Federal Office of Public Health, Switzerland
WHO governance reform and sustainable financing

The challenges numerous nations face in reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasize the importance of giving them equal emphasis and determination, as we did in tackling the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Health is a fundamental component that connects and accelerates progress towards all other goals. Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of WHO, has identified five key priorities to expedite progress on global health. These priorities include tackling root causes like food prices and climate to prevent diseases, refocusing on primary health care, strengthening the global health security system, and leveraging science and innovation.

Partnerships and a robust WHO are crucial in achieving the SDGs. However, WHO faces various challenges, such as a lack of financial predictability and flexibility, and heavy reliance on a small number of donors. Only one third of the available financing for WHO comes from flexible funding sources, and less than 15% is from assessed contributions. This limited flexible funding and unequal distribution between priority areas contribute to the persistence of poverty in certain regions.

While WHO is close to being fully funded in the current financial cycle, it still faces structural financial challenges in critical priority areas, including the health workforce; access to medicines, vaccines and diagnostics; management and control of NCDs; and strengthening national capacities to face future pandemics. These financial limitations directly impact the Organization’s ability to plan and execute its mandate, implement activities in priority areas, and attract and retain high-quality staff.

To overcome these challenges, WHO Member States have committed to working towards sustainable financing of the Organization while accelerating governance reforms. Emergency appeals and a contingency fund have also been established to close immediate funding gaps. In support of WHO, Member States have made an historic decision to increase assessed contributions by 20% in 2024–2025 and strengthen financial management models. Globally, there is a shift in focus away from health as other critical issues take precedence. Member States have also tasked the Secretariat to prepare a plan for the organization of the first-ever WHO investment round, to be organized in November 2024, aimed at supporting the full financing of the upcoming WHO Global Programme of Work 2025–2028 and complementing the gradual increase of assessed contributions. WHO remains committed to maximizing its impact through partnerships with Member States and donors, looking forward to the future.

“We can’t address other Sustainable Development Goals without first addressing the health goals.”

Ms Gwi-Yeop Son
Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia, UNDCO

“We are often underestimated diversity of countries in the region will bring even more credibility to Europe as a region to lead, support and foster new global initiatives, and to help us drive progress in global health forward together with all Member States.”

Dr Catharina Boehme
WHO Assistant Director-General, External Relations and Governance

Key messages

- A sustainable financing model for WHO must be established.
- Sustainable financing of WHO means more predictable and flexible funding for the Organization.
- The combined increase of assessed contributions and the investment round will equip WHO to fully implement the Global Programme of Work 2025–2028.
- Governance reforms are essential to ensure a robust WHO equipped to deal with health challenges.

Resources

- Working towards a sustainably financed WHO (1)
- WHO Budget portal (2)
Building resilient health systems: Time to act

Health-care systems in Europe and Central Asia face significant challenges, including an ageing population, shortages of healthcare professionals and medicines, and unequal access to services. These challenges have been further exposed during the COVID-19 pandemic, creating an urgent need for action. Strengthening health-care systems and investing in a well-being economy that leaves no one behind is essential.

Transforming health-care systems to prioritize patient-centred care is crucial. A key goal is ensuring the right people with the necessary skills are in the right place at the right time to provide appropriate and convenient care. This requires valuing the health-care workforce and creating supportive environments where they can thrive.

Successful transformation should be based on co-creation and knowledge sharing, involving patients and health-care professionals in problem identification and solution development. Health authorities and governments must support the implementation of solutions within resource constraints. This collaborative approach necessitates rethinking the delivery of effective, patient-centred care and incorporating digital solutions.

A resilient health system is crucial for effectively dealing with catastrophic events like economic crises, emergencies, and major societal shocks. Not only do strong health systems play a vital role during times of crisis, but they are also essential in delivering crucial disease programmes and promoting equity, particularly for vulnerable populations, during normal periods. It is important to recognize that health systems are interconnected with other functioning infrastructures, and therefore improving the health sector can bring about co-benefits and ensure that no one is left behind.

Building resilient health systems requires changing the political narrative with WHO's partners. Partnerships should extend beyond traditional health-care stakeholders, and aim to develop a health-focused well-being economy that promotes equitable prosperity, health and well-being while protecting the planet. When constructing the scientific evidence base for decision-making, partners should also consider the unique circumstances of different countries in the region.

Countries like Tajikistan, which have strengthened their health-care system capacity to better cope with crises after the COVID-19 pandemic revealed serious inadequacies, are useful examples, and provide guidance on building a more resilient primary health-care system that incorporates a dual-track approach, where the health system is equipped to handle both emergencies and routine services.

“People need to transform systems. Systems don't transform on their own. It's the health-care workforce and patients working in tandem that transform services. Still, to do so, we need to really build trust among the people, among the health-care workforce, and those who are putting money into the system – as insurers, as payers.”

Dr Natasha Azzopardi-Muscat
Director, Country Health Policies and Systems (CPS), WHO Regional Office for Europe
Improving the sustainability and motivation of the health workforce is a critical priority in Europe. Shortages in the health-care workforce due to retirement, inadequate recruitment, migration, burnout, and heavy workloads threaten workforce stability. Countries need to ensure a sufficient number of well-supported and cared-for health workers. Policies targeting mental health support, fair salaries, working conditions, inclusion, tackling inequalities and incentives for serving underserved areas are crucial.

However, investing in the workforce alone is not enough. Health workers also need access to tools and knowledge, including digital solutions, to effectively serve their communities and provide inclusive care. Equitable access to these tools, and ensuring digital literacy among patients and health workers, are important considerations.

To address the health workforce challenges, the WHO Regional Office for Europe has proposed ten actions for countries to adopt. Key priorities include improving working conditions, recruitment and retention, especially in underserved areas. These priorities were presented at a high-level meeting in Romania and endorsed in the Bucharest Declaration, where Member States committed to investing in and strengthening the health-care workforce. The aim is to develop a framework centred around the needs of health workers to attract and retain skilled professionals.

In addition, optimizing performance, reorganizing services efficiently, and aligning skills with changing health priorities are crucial. Workforce planning, leadership initiatives, and management strategies are among WHO’s efforts to improve the health-care workforce in collaboration with Member States. Romania, for example, has utilized European funds for post-COVID-19 workforce challenges, with support from WHO. This has involved assessments, policy dialogues, and action plans focusing on workforce development.

“The Bucharest Declaration is not only an important statement at the international level that we hope all Member States will strive with Romania to implement, but in Romania, it also provided the push needed at the national level to promote the development of the health and care workforce.”

**Dr Teodor Blidaru**
Counsellor to the Minister, Ministry of Health, Romania

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**Key messages**

- Retain the current health workforce, and make working in health more attractive to young people, by highlighting training and professional development.

- Ensure the long-term sustainability of health-care services in the context of rising demand through adequate recruitment, retention and incentivization.

- Ensure equitable access to quality health-care services by incentivizing professionals to serve in underserved areas.

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**Resources**

- Health and care workforce in Europe: time to act (4)
- Bucharest Declaration on the health and care workforce (5)
In the WHO European Region, the COVID-19 pandemic has worsened existing health, social and economic vulnerabilities while giving rise to new ones. This has threatened to reverse improvements made to health and well-being in recent decades, particularly in areas such as maternal and child mortality and overall life expectancy. Moreover, existing inequities urgently need to be addressed. Innovative actions are critically needed, and evidence-based digital solutions should be leveraged to address the remaining health gaps and reduce existing inequity.

Institutionalizing digital health requires a long-term commitment and an integrated care approach. However, incorporating digital solutions into public health is not a straightforward task. Decision-makers have varying interpretations of digital health, and a general lack of relevant data complicates the development of evidence-based solutions. Consequently, there is often a lack of long-term vision and consistent funding for such initiatives.

For eight of the 17 SDGs, fewer than half of the 193 countries or areas have internationally comparable data from 2015 or to date. This data deficiency is worsened by often inadequate data collection systems in countries that do report on the SDGs. To address this problem and enable the development of evidence-based health-care solutions, opportunities should be seized to collaborate with partners in routine data collection and enhance the competence of the health-care workforce in utilizing digital technologies.

WHO recommends several key actions. Regarding data, WHO suggests to develop (or enhance) a data governance framework; invest in infrastructure; and combine digital solutions and non-traditional data sources. For digital health literacy, WHO proposes to measure digital health usage, barriers and attitudes; identify core competencies of digital health literacy in the health workforce; and improve public health information and data science practices. Finally, regarding equity, WHO suggests to develop a common framework to monitor and report inequalities; map inequalities in digital infrastructure; and use an inclusive and participatory design approach. By implementing these recommendations, efforts can be made to bridge gaps, reduce inequities, and promote more equitable and inclusive health-care systems.

**Key message**

It is critical to work towards independent and empowered patients, digitally competent health workers, and data-driven decisions in health systems (health-care facilities), to overcome the health and social care divide and leave no one behind.
Health partnerships during the Ukraine war

Since 24 February 2022, the conflict in Ukraine has caused widespread suffering and infrastructure damage. Attacks on the health-care system and power networks have disrupted health-care provision and the distribution of essential medical supplies. This has resulted in treatment delays and interruptions, impacting millions of people and exacerbating war-related trauma and illness in Ukraine and neighbouring countries. There is a significant demand for mental health and psychosocial care for those affected, including health-care workers who are also under attack.

WHO serves as the primary health coordinator within the United Nations (UN) system, providing health-care services in Ukraine and countries hosting Ukrainian refugees. WHO has proven to be a dedicated, flexible and experienced partner, working closely with humanitarian agencies and others to ensure the health and well-being of all people. WHO’s role as health coordinator focusing on delivery remains critical, considering the numerous

“We’re really seeing that the help is provided on a ‘needs-based’ approach, and that’s the way assistance should be delivered, and the main takeaway is not to create new dependencies but to complement the health system in Ukraine.”

Ms Justine Garduhn
Deputy Head of Unit, Ukraine Coordination Unit, Federal Ministry of Health (BMG), Germany

Key messages

- Health coordination is an important function within the emergency response, especially with the proliferation of partners contributing to the recovery effort. Coordination that delivers results is critical.
- Emergency response efforts should support current health reforms to facilitate the country’s recovery.
- The transition from humanitarian assistance to recovery must be intentionally managed for long-term sustainability.

Resource

Learn more about the WHO response in Ukraine and refugee-receiving countries (8)
partners involved in Ukraine’s relief, reform, recovery and initiation of reconstruction efforts.

With support, WHO will continue to be present and work towards protecting people, reducing illness and aiding recovery. However, rebuilding and improving the health system in Ukraine will be a lengthy process, given the ongoing crisis. Reforms are also being implemented in the health system, which is crucial for the response and future resilience. Access to health care remains challenging, particularly for those in rural areas. There is also a significant need for specialized care, which requires funding to close gaps.

As Ukraine embarks on the road to recovery, there is an opportunity to continue working to address immediate needs and improve resource allocation for a more focused and efficient response. This includes supporting the government in policy and system reforms, and strengthening the nexus between recovery and humanitarian assistance through stronger country coordination and data collection. This intentional transition from humanitarian assistance to recovery will lay a foundation for long-term progress.

“One big challenge ahead is the fiscal gulf. Increasingly, there will be needs for reconstruction, and the financing is not yet in place.”

Mr Ben Zinner
USAID (remote)
COVID-19 has emerged as the most significant global public health emergency in a century. Several other crises, such as the earthquake in Türkiye and the war in Ukraine, have further impacted public health and served as reminders that the European Region is not immune to crisis. The question is no longer if a crisis will occur, but when – highlighting the importance of emergency preparedness and that health systems must adapt to this state of ‘permacrisis’.

In response to the pandemic, substantial investments have been made in preparedness and response capacity-building, leading to accelerated and innovative improvements in community, national, and international outbreak response systems. Maintaining and building upon the successes achieved during this unprecedented crisis is crucial. Many countries have recognized the progress made over the past three years and have actively integrated these advancements into their preparedness and response systems.

To ensure that the additional capacities built during the COVID-19 response are not lost but preserved long-term, WHO has developed a 13-point strategic plan to transition out of the pandemic phase. However, as the acute phase of the global COVID-19 emergency subsides, attention is quickly shifting away from emergency preparedness. It is vital, therefore, to continue collectively investing in sustained preparedness in every country, recognizing that the collective capacity is only as strong as the weakest link. Now is the opportune time to emerge stronger and construct improved health systems that are better prepared for future emergencies.

However, a more proactive approach is needed, together with sustained investment in mid-term planning and preparedness, integrating the lessons learned from COVID-19 into long-term joint efforts to strengthen global health security. The approach to future crises must be built on strong coordination plans, a multihazard and multisectoral perspective, and a resilient health workforce. This necessitates substantial investments in systems and resources to effectively respond to future crises, ensuring that we are better equipped to protect and promote the health of all individuals.

“WHO receives substantial resources for response. But we are underfunded regarding system strengthening to preparedness efforts. This gap must be closed. At this Forum, we have an opportunity to make the case for investments in health systems and readiness so that we are not confronted with yet another ill-prepared health system at the country level in future.”

Dr Gerald Rockenschaub
Regional Emergency Director, WHE, WHO Regional Office for Europe

Better protecting people against health emergencies
At this critical post-COVID-19 pandemic juncture, there is a choice: either abandon the progress made, or acknowledge the achievements of the pandemic and integrate them into public health responses to drive transformation. It is imperative to invest now to ensure that the efforts expended during this unprecedented public health emergency are well spent. WHO, its partners and Member States must evaluate the accomplishments in managing the pandemic and incorporate them into future preparedness strategies for potential pandemics. This moment should be seized to establish a more robust and proactive approach to global health crises.

Notable examples of leveraging gains from the COVID-19 pandemic response can be seen in European countries like Georgia and Tajikistan. In Georgia, WHO supported clinicians in managing severe COVID-19 cases in intensive care units, identifying gaps in health-care provision at various levels. As a result, broader health-care reforms were initiated, encompassing the reorganization and redesign of emergency care units, primary care services, and the integration of services and networks at the community level, along with developing a workforce strategy.

In Tajikistan, possibly the poorest country in the WHO European Region, a significant positive outcome was the establishment of laboratories that facilitated diagnosis and data analysis, enabling authorities to coordinate COVID-19 responses more effectively. These services and genetic expertise have been transferred nationally. They are now employed in other disease areas, such as human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and tuberculosis, along with the establishment of laboratory information management systems.

Community engagement has yielded successful gains, with notable examples across the region. In the Republic of Moldova, a WHO proposal for a door-to-door information campaign about COVID-19 led to a substantial increase in vaccinations, and this approach is now being harnessed for other health initiatives.

"We can ensure the sustainability of gains by continuing to invest."

Ms Victoria Neaga
Programme Manager, EU Delegation to the Republic of Moldova

"As we come out of the COVID-19 emergency, we need to build on the momentum and investment we’ve seen over the past three years. And by doing that, we can ensure that we don’t let the tollways of COVID-19 go to waste and we can emerge stronger."

Dr Catherine Smallwood
Emergency Officer and Programme Area Manager for Emergency Operations, WHE, WHO Regional Office for Europe
“Never let a good crisis go to waste. Crises give us opportunities, they open policy space, they enable political attention to be focused and galvanize things we could not otherwise do together, and they provide sustained resources.”

Dr Catherine Smallwood
Emergency Officer and Programme Area Manager for Emergency Operations, WHE, WHO Regional Office for Europe

“There are several examples from Georgia of how the WHO COVID-19 response, assessment and actions to address gaps, including systemic challenges identified, have led to sustained reforms at the system level that will make the health-care system more resilient.”

Dr Silviu Domente
WHO Representative to Georgia

“We should use the momentum from emergency response to also make progress on the structural issues at primary care level that were there before the pandemic, such as governance in the health-care sector, out-of-pocket and co-payments.”

Mr Erik Zolcer
International Aid/Cooperation Officer, DG NEAR, European Commission

Left to right: Dr Catherine Smallwood, Mr Erik Zolcer, Dr Silvio Domente, Ms Victoria Neaga, Mr Chris Barrett and Dr Gerald Rockenschaub © WHO

Videos

Collaborative surveillance: Better labs for better health in Tajikistan (10)
Community Protection: Community engagement in Central Asia (11)
Clinical Care: Managing patients in intensive care in Georgia (12)
Coordination: Setting up a public health emergency operations centre in North Macedonia (13)
The National Action Plan for Health Security (NAPHS) is a strategic framework that enhances a country’s capacity for health prevention, preparedness, response and recovery to achieve national, regional and global health security. It aims to ensure the safety of the region, serve vulnerable populations, and promote health through a comprehensive approach involving all sectors of government and adopting a One Health, all-hazards perspective. It is a country’s priority action plan for preventing, detecting, and responding to public health emergencies.

NAPHS are developed collaboratively, with the Ministry of Health and other relevant government stakeholders of health security working alongside civil society and the private sector. They encompass a five-year strategic plan and shorter operational plans, prioritizing activities such as surveillance, laboratory capacity, immunization, risk communication, and health-care worker readiness. They facilitate coordination with other countries and organizations and align with international frameworks. The NAPHS can derive from the conduct of a voluntary Joint External Evaluation (JEE), as WHO’s broadest-scope health security evaluation, to assess and enhance a country’s emergency response capabilities.

Furthermore, NAPHS contribute to regional health security agendas and complement existing EU legislation. For instance, the European Commission has introduced new “Cross-Border Health Threats” legislation to enhance the EU’s preparedness and response to disease outbreaks. Regional and national-level risk assessments are required, and close collaboration between the European Commission, WHO, and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) helps minimize duplication and reduce reporting burdens for countries. A NAPHS can be utilized to ensure interoperability between EU countries’ preparedness planning.

As an example, Moldova has conducted participatory assessments and invested in community engagement to better prepare and respond to health crises. The country has successfully utilized the NAPHS as a basis to apply and receive funding through the new pandemic fund. The NAPHS goes beyond being a bureaucratic exercise; it serves as a tool to facilitate coordination among partners, maximize technological advancements and bridge existing gaps.

"There is no dispute for how important the NAPHS are for cross-sector coordination. This applies to within and between national governments and their relationship with international partners and donors, who often create a very congested funding and technical support space."

Joel Stanojevich
Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

"In the European Region over the last four years, we are seeing crises of a magnitude not experienced previously. Are we ready, are we prepared enough? We know everybody is tired of talking about COVID-19, but we must be ready and prepared for the next one."

Dr Miljana Gbrić
WHO Representative to the Republic of Moldova
A medical team coordination cell was established as part of the emergency response that was the largest WHO operation with Emergency Medical Teams (EMTs) in the Organization’s history.

Dr Selami Kılıç
Director-General, EU and International Affairs, Ministry of Health, Türkiye

On 6 February 2023, a series of devastating earthquakes struck south-eastern Türkiye near the border with Syria. These caused widespread destruction in both countries, resulting in the loss of thousands of lives and substantial damage to critical infrastructure, including health-care facilities. These were among the strongest earthquakes to hit the region in a century, prompting a significant global humanitarian response, including support from WHO and United Nations partners, in response to the request from the Turkish Government.

WHO European Regional Office is actively collaborating with the Turkish Ministry of Health and other stakeholders to identify and address urgent health needs during the immediate aftermath of the disaster, and the long-term recovery phase. The Organization is committed to providing continued support to the Government and people of Türkiye in the present and in the future.

Even months after the earthquakes, the situation remains highly challenging in the affected areas, with numerous ongoing needs. As the response transitions from emergency aid to reconstruction, millions of people remain displaced, including refugees and the most vulnerable. Access to health care is a major challenge, exacerbated by water scarcity and the spread of communicable diseases in densely populated settlements. Additionally, many individuals are dealing with significant trauma and require mental health and trauma services, and rehabilitation for physical injuries sustained during the earthquakes.

The main priorities agreed upon between WHO and the Ministry of Health for the recovery phase include restoring access to essential health-care services; paying particular attention to women’s and children’s needs; ensuring continuity of care for those with chronic conditions; and addressing rehabilitation requirements. Mental health services will receive high priority, with plans to strengthen these services at the primary care level as part of the rebuilding process – aimed at “building back better”.

To effectively address the extensive needs during the recovery period, WHO will focus on prevention, health promotion, risk reduction and community engagement as cross-cutting priorities across all activities.

“Investment is critical to close the wide gap between the significant unmet needs in the earthquake-affected region and available funds.

 Provision must be made in the long term for psychological support for individuals and caregivers, medical workers and social workers deployed to affected areas.

“A medical team coordination cell was established as part of the emergency response that was the largest WHO operation with Emergency Medical Teams (EMTs) in the Organization’s history.”

Dr Batyr Berdyklychev
WHO Representative to Türkiye

“It’s important to stress that this is a government-led response. International actors play a complementary role. WHO already initiated work in long-term priority areas identified by the government, and continues to work with partners. This is a good shift from humanitarian response to reconstruction and development work.”

Dr Batyr Berdyklychev
WHO Representative to Türkiye

Learn more about the WHO response in Türkiye and Syria (14)
Climate change and health in the European Region

The imperative to protect and improve the health of current and future generations is one of the strongest arguments for action on climate change. The changing climate increases the risk of pandemics; contributes to the spread of food-, water- and vector-borne diseases; exacerbates the burden of NCDs including mental health; and drives health emergencies related to extreme weather events like heatwaves, droughts, floods and storms. Climate change also affects air quality, food and water security, adding further to the climate-related causes of death, illness and suffering.

The global average temperature is predicted to rise by approximately 2.7 °C by the end of the century. Without significant action to mitigate and adapt to climate change, substantial increases in preventable morbidity and mortality, adverse impacts on quality of life, and widening equity gaps can be expected over the coming decades and beyond.

In the WHO European Region, the average temperature has risen nearly twice as much as the global average, directly impacting public health and wreaking havoc on natural and social systems. Protests and calls for action are increasing, particularly from younger generations concerned about the future consequences of climate change. Governments are urged to revise political commitments to effectively tackle this issue.

Addressing climate change’s impact on health requires rigorous climate change mitigation and adaptation measures, including by the health sector; integration of health considerations into all climate actions; and protection of the environment. Strong partnerships, effective frameworks, evidence-based approaches, enhanced capacities, and strong leadership are crucial for success.

Health sectors in Member States should lead by example and strive to become climate-neutral. Climate action should permeate every action and aspect of health systems. Ireland’s whole-of-government approach to climate action sets a positive example of a country-level action, examining the health system’s interaction with climate change and launching a climate strategy for health. Sharing evidence, knowledge, and successful approaches to climate action within health systems presents opportunities for collaboration.

"Provide young people with a seat at the table and value their contributions. By harnessing the energy, passion and ideas of the younger generation, we can unlock new solutions and ensure a sustainable future for all people, as young people are not only stakeholders but also agents of change."

Luka Delak
European Medical Students’ Association

Key messages

- Bring climate change squarely into the health agenda. Strengthen public health and health services to bolster climate-resilient communities.
- Bring health squarely into the climate change agenda. Advocate for health protection across sectoral government policies addressing climate change.
- Reduce carbon emissions and enhance the climate-resilience of health-care facilities and services.

Resources

Zero regrets: scaling up action on climate change mitigation and adaptation for health in the WHO European Region (15)

Declaration of the Seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health: Budapest, Hungary 5–7 July 2023 (16)
The European Centre for Environment and Health (ECEH) leads WHO’s activities on climate change and health in the Region. It works closely with Member States, partners, NGOs and youth organizations in advancing the agenda. By working together, innovative solutions can be developed, including climate change prevention and mitigation strategies integrated into health systems; enhancing disaster preparedness; and improving air quality. The Declaration of the Seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health provides a strong political framework for guiding climate action in the WHO European Region.

Accountability is a priority, requiring the establishment of mechanisms to hold governments, entities and individuals accountable. Clear targets, transparent reporting, and a culture of accountability are necessary for tangible actions that drive change. The role of young people, with their commitment to steer climate action and bring fresh and innovative perspectives, should be acknowledged. Member States should actively involve the youth in implementing climate change policies and strategies, following the lead of WHO.

“Time for rhetoric has passed. It’s time for action. I call on Member States to uphold the climate policies they have pledged to; implement robust measures; change to a low carbon economy; and set ambitious emission reduction targets.”

Dr Dorota Jarosinska
Programme Manager, WHO ECEH

Left to right: Mr Luka Delak, Dr Dorota Jarosinska, Dr Annika Green, Dr Eveline DeCoster, Ms Catherine Guinard, Mr Oliver Schmoll and Mr Colin O’Hehir
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Ensuring healthy lives and well-being for all at all ages

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3, ensure healthy lives and promote well-being at all ages, aims to prevent needless suffering from preventable diseases and premature death by focusing on key targets that boost the health of a country’s overall population. In working towards delivering on SDG 3, there are several critical points to note. The first is that the health and well-being of people are closely tied to the health of our planet. Taking bold action to protect the planet and supporting green and sustainable transitions is crucial. Secondly, economic, social, and political determinants of health shape well-being. Inequalities in housing, health care and social services contribute to disparities in health. Everyone, regardless of their economic background, deserves a healthy life. This requires investing in robust health systems, universal health coverage, and addressing the social, economic and political factors that drive health disparities. Thirdly, economic development must be pursued sustainably and inclusively, with health as a critical component. Fourthly, leaving no one behind is key to the 2030 Agenda towards a healthier future. This can be achieved by implementing dedicated public health programmes and policies to address social, environmental and economic determinants of health. Collaboration between different health sectors is necessary to tackle public health challenges such as NCDs, as one sector alone cannot address these issues. Initiatives like the Green Deal investments and the future economy of well-being can contribute to collective efforts.

Financing is crucial to address these challenges and requires significant resources. Exploring innovative financing options through partnerships with international financial institutions, foundations, and other stakeholders is key. Collaboration between governments, the private sector, civil society and communities is crucial to mitigate the negative impacts of challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic and ensure a healthier and more sustainable future in Europe and globally.

Youth also play a vital role in shaping the future. In Europe, one-third of the population is under 30, yet they are often underrepresented in policy decision-making. The Youth for Health initiative aims to amplify the voices of young people by fostering diverse and inclusive collaborations with youth organizations. It is important to increase the meaningful engagement of young people by providing transformative environments, informed choices, accountability and sustainability. Improving youth health across different sectors is necessary, and youth forums can address topics such as mental health, climate change, infectious diseases, inclusivity in health policies, sexual and reproductive health rights, and more. The initiative allows youth to meet with technical officers and contribute to policy-making as part of WHO’s efforts to engage with youth. The fresh ideas and energy of the new generation can be accelerators in achieving the SDGs.

“We need to ensure that all the voices are around the table, including those of young people.”

Dr Kira Fortune
Regional Adviser, Healthy Cities, Health Promotion & Well-being, Country Health Programmes, WHO Regional Office for Europe

“Youth are torchbearers of the 2030 agenda, there is the recognition but now it needs to be operationalized.”

Ms Neus Rosell
Youth representative & Chair, Executive Board, Global Health Next Generation Network

Speakers
Dr Kira Fortune, Regional Adviser, Healthy Cities, Health Promotion & Well-being, Country Health Programmes, WHO Regional Office for Europe
Ms Gwi-Yeop Son, Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia, UNESCO
Ms Neus Rosell, Youth representative & Chair, Executive Board, Global Health Next Generation Network

| Sustainable financing | Resilient health systems | Protecting against health emergencies | Climate change and health | Healthy lives and well-being |
Ensuring healthy lives and well-being for all at all ages

Noncommunicable diseases

NCDs present an ongoing health challenge in Europe, causing the majority of premature deaths. These high rates of NCDs not only perpetuate poverty but also hinder economic development and strain fragile health systems, making them less resilient during emergencies such as infectious disease outbreaks or natural disasters. Taking action now is crucial to tackle these challenges and prepare for the future.

As people live longer, there is an urgent need to promote lifelong healthy behaviours and create health-supportive environments, particularly during childhood and adolescence. Early interventions offer the best chance for primary prevention of NCDs. For example, women with gestational diabetes mellitus during pregnancy have a higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes early in life, and their children also face an increased risk of developing diabetes during adolescence. Taking action to prevent or delay the onset of diabetes in these groups is essential. France has launched a population-based health strategy focusing on positive health messaging and checks, including within the first 1000 days of life.

Preventing, identifying early, and providing structured care for most NCDs does not require excessive costs. However, delayed diagnosis and unstructured primary care lead to poor health outcomes and higher health-care expenses. Countries should prioritize policies and regulations that prevent NCD risks, especially addressing health inequalities for vulnerable groups in obeseogenic and polluted environments. WHO offers a list of cost-effective prevention interventions known as Best Buys.

Recognizing the severe threat of NCDs to the Region and the approaching SDG deadline of 2030, the WHO Regional Director for Europe has prioritized NCDs and accelerated action. Two specific goals include reducing premature mortality caused by NCDs, and alcohol consumption.

To expedite progress, the WHO Regional Office for Europe focuses on three key areas. Firstly, reducing cardiovascular disease and circulatory disease mortality by addressing strokes and heart attacks, which profoundly impact society and health systems. Secondly, eliminating cervical cancer by developing successful oncology services as a legacy for future cancer care. Thirdly, integrating NCDs into primary care and ensuring comprehensive responses across the continuum of care, including emergency health-care services.

More efforts and investments are needed beyond policy development. Implementation with adequate resources is crucial to build capacity for preventing and managing NCDs, especially at the primary care level and close to communities and individuals affected by NCDs. France’s “health democracy” system, involving citizen participation in governance structures where decisions are made that affect health, sets an example.

Partnership and support for health system strengthening, with a focus on integrated care, can bridge divides and enhance the capacity of the system, health-care providers and citizens to address shared risk factors, and develop strategies to combat chronic conditions at all levels.

“The Healthy Cities programme has developed some very impactful activities and is a good example of what should be done.”

Ms Christine Berling
Head of International Relations, Health Directorate, Ministry of Health and Prevention, France

Key messages

• Address health behaviours in childhood and adolescence to promote the prevention of NCDs and ensure that people are supported throughout their lifetime. Countries must urgently adopt simple, effective and cost-effective best-buy interventions.

• A systemic, multi-faceted and multi-pronged approach is required to address NCDs in an integrated manner and create impact. NCDs must be addressed within emergency responses and through life-course approaches.
The health of animals, the environment, plants and humans are interconnected and should be addressed in an integrated manner. Biodiversity loss allows pathogens to easily jump from animals to humans, as demonstrated by the COVID-19 pandemic. To improve health and prevent illnesses, we must consider these factors.

Given the triple crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and environmental pollution, taking care of our environment is crucial. Adopting a One Health perspective is an effective approach to address these issues. One Health is an interdisciplinary approach recognizing the connection between human health, animal health and the environment. It encourages collaboration between professionals from different fields to prevent diseases, protect ecosystems and enhance public health. Breaking down barriers and promoting communication among experts is vital.

Antimicrobials in humans and animals pose a global concern due to AMR. The misuse and overuse of antibiotics, environmental pollution and global interconnectedness contribute to the spread of AMR. Although progress is being made, more resources are needed to fill evidence gaps and evaluate the implementation of innovations. Tajikistan is an example of a country taking steps towards One Health. A rise in AMR during COVID-19 has provided a platform for an intersectoral National Coordination Taskforce to unite around a common issue, leading to further collaboration, communication, and ongoing communication between the various institutions as well as investment from bilateral partners. Taking proactive measures and adopting a One Health perspective can prevent diseases, protect ecosystems, and improve public health outcomes. Addressing AMR and incorporating innovations are vital for a sustainable future.

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The European Union has launched the Antimicrobial Resistance Roadmap 2023–2030, and initiatives to support countries in addressing health security and health-care frameworks. Incorporating innovations such as digital tools, artificial intelligence (AI) and sequencing can greatly benefit the One Health approach, enabling environmentally sustainable farming practices and smarter surveillance. Leadership, partnerships, legislation and cross-border initiatives are also crucial.

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Welcome & Health challenges and opportunities in Europe and Central Asia

Dr Selami Kılıç and Dr Hans Henri P. Kluge welcomed participants to the Forum and set the scene for the WHO Partners Forum 2023, reflecting on the Region’s health situation, priorities and the importance of partnerships to tackle regional health challenges.

The power of partnerships towards public health impact in Europe and Central Asia: High-level panel discussion

This high-level panel will feature a discussion between Mr Robb Butler, Executive Director, WHO Regional Office for Europe, and key senior political figures from across the Region, including high-level representatives from Germany, Greece, the European Union (EU), Türkiye, the UN and WHO.

Building resilient health systems: Time to Act

This session explored strategies for advancing Universal Health Coverage (UHC) within the European Region, specifically emphasising the roles of digital health, health and care workers, and health in the well-being economy. Case studies from the Republic of Moldova and Tajikistan were analysed, and insights incorporated from Romania, the EU, Finland and other crucial collaborators.

Special session: Health partnerships during the Ukraine war

This special session concentrated on the war in Ukraine and the challenges faced by refugee-hosting nations. Featuring in-depth conversations with WHO country representatives, we assessed the current response and anticipated requirements for 2023. We also gained valuable insights from key partners like the EU and Japan, who shared their experiences and knowledge acquired throughout the crisis.

Wrap-up: Day one

Concluding day one of the Partners Forum, Mr Robb Butler will provide a summary of the key insights and main takeaways. Additionally, he will offer a preview of the exciting day two agenda, setting the stage for further engaging discussions.
Day 2 | 14 June

Agenda

09:00–09:30
WHO Governance reform and sustainable financing
This session offered a concise recap of day one’s discussions and showcased the efforts made by Member States in recent years to achieve sustainable financing for WHO. Forum delegates learnt about the progress and ongoing initiatives to support the Organization’s long-term financial stability.

09:30–10:00
Special session: Türkiye earthquake response and recovery
This special showcase session focussed on the February earthquakes in Southern Türkiye. In collaboration with the Türkiye Ministry of Health, this session reviewed WHO’s prompt response efforts and introduced the upcoming health sector response and recovery phase.

10:00–11:45
Protecting people better against health emergencies
This session aimed to explore the importance of national action plans for health security, serving as a benchmark for future initiatives to enhance health security in the region. The importance of short- and mid-term investments through a COVID-19 transition plan, which will act as a foundation for long-term efforts under ‘Preparedness 2.0’, were discussed. The session featured case studies from Georgia, North Macedonia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. Panelists shared progress in these areas. The session included a panel discussion with speakers from partners such as the EU, the US Centers for Disease Control and USAID.

12:15–13:15
Special session: Climate climate change and health in the European Region
In the era of climate change, significant and rapid shifts are needed to enhance resilience and ensure the sustainable operativity of health systems. This special session, led by the WHO European Centre for Environment and Health (ECEH) in Bonn, Germany, focused on recent regional developments on climate change and health, the need for integrating climate change in the health agenda, as well as highlighting the upcoming Seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health (Budapest, 5–7 July 2023).

14:15–16:00
Ensuring healthy lives and well-being for all at all ages
This session addressed various health challenges, such as the increasing prevalence of NCDs, the importance of fostering lifelong healthy habits for all across all age groups, and the potential for adopting the One Health approach to combat AMR. Additionally, it explored the ‘triple planetary crisis’ – climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution – and its consequences on health and well-being in the European and central Asian region. To illustrate these challenges and opportunities, case studies were presented from the Republic of Moldova and Tajikistan, and insights from notable Member State partners like France and Belgium, as well as the EU and the World Diabetes Foundation.

16:00–16:15
Wrap-up: Journey towards sustainable health partnerships in Europe and Central Asia
The main takeaways were summarized and participants were provided with a final opportunity for feedback.
References


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11. WHO Regional Office for Europe. (2023, June 7). Investing in community readiness, response and resilience to emergencies [Video]. https://dreambroker.com/channel/8n6pefqo/wvpsieik3


The WHO Regional Office for Europe

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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