

## **Joint Statement of the European Commission and the WHO Regional Office for Europe**

### **A deeper and result-oriented partnership for health in Europe**

The European Commission and the WHO Regional Office for Europe (WHO/Europe) share a common ambition to achieve the highest level of health and health protection, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), in particular Sustainable Development Goal 3 on health and well-being.

Building on this shared ambition and our respective mandates, strengths and complementarities, we have developed over the years a close collaboration<sup>1</sup>.

New developments and challenges that have emerged lately demonstrate the importance of this partnership and its benefit for the European region. The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a heavy toll on populations, health workers, health systems and economies across the region. Its economic fall-out will further affect health and well-being across Europe. At the same time, the region continues to face increasing health inequalities, an increasing burden from non-communicable diseases, notably cancer, and the growing health burden from environmental degradation.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted providing a common framework and shared purpose for better health. We have each promoted new initiatives to improve health and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals across the region.

Building on the 13<sup>th</sup> WHO General Programme of Work, WHO/Europe has developed a new European Programme of Work "United Action for Better Health". It sets out a vision on how it can better support countries in meeting citizens' expectations regarding health and access to health care. It aims at stepping up support of its Member States in moving towards universal health coverage, protecting people better against health emergencies, and ensuring healthy lives and well-being for all at all ages.

At the same time, the European Commission has put forward several key initiatives for health: the EU4Health programme to invest in preparedness and resilience, health security, health systems and availability of affordable medicines; the strengthening of rescEU, under the Union Civil Protection Mechanism, with crisis response capacities that are immediately ready and available to support the Member States also in case of health emergencies; the research programme Horizon Europe; the Farm-to-Fork Strategy; the 2020 Zagreb Declaration and the Commission communication on the Eastern Partnership beyond 2020 that prioritises strengthening cooperation in resilience building and health with Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership countries. It envisages further initiatives: Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, the Pharmaceutical Strategy, the European health data space; and the new Digital Education Action Plan. To address the threat of climate change and promote healthier and more sustainable environments, the European Commission has also launched the European Green Deal with the ambition to make the EU climate-neutral by 2050 and set it on the path towards Zero Pollution for a toxic-free environment.

As we move forward with these initiatives and draw lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is now an opportune time to give a new impetus to our partnership. Through this Joint Statement, we recognise the synergies between our respective programmes and strategies and a willingness to deepen our collaboration.

### **Harnessing synergies to maximise impact and support to countries**

Focusing on cooperation across the EU and WHO/Europe region in public health, including food safety, we aim through this Joint Statement to:

- Strengthen our partnership and adapt it to new health priorities and emerging challenges;
- Foster technical, policy and geographical synergies;
- Strengthen citizen's voice and trust in health and food authorities, and
- Maximise the support to countries and the impact of our initiatives on health systems and public health.

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<sup>1</sup> The collaboration was framed under the 2010 Joint Declaration on Partnerships for health in the WHO European Region (Moscow Declaration) and the 2015 Declaration on the objectives, principles and modalities for continued cooperation between the European Commission and WHO/Europe (Vilnius Declaration).

## Key priorities and areas

Building upon past collaboration, we intend to expand and deepen our cooperation focusing on the following priorities:

1. **Strengthening health security against health emergencies and other threats** – The COVID-19 pandemic has put a critical spotlight on the need to boost preparedness and response capacities across the region against emergencies and notably serious cross border threats to health, including antimicrobial resistance and vaccine-preventable diseases. Activities such as the implementation of the International Health Regulations from 2005, collection and availability of population health and care systems' information, data supporting the provision of essential life-saving health services, increasing One-Health and a cross-cutting response to antimicrobial resistance, as well as addressing access to and inequities in immunisation can help to boost health preparedness and response capacities. It is of particular importance that COVID-19 vaccines are made available in the whole European region.
2. **Strengthening effective, accessible, resilient and innovative health systems** – Effective, accessible, sustainable and resilient health systems are at the core of the commitment to provide the people across Europe universal access to affordable and quality health systems. This involves supporting the implementation of new care models, universal health coverage and primary healthcare. It foresees the strengthening of health workforces for instance by developing in-service training programmes to reorient and requalify the workforce towards people-centred care, ensure an efficient public health workforce equipped with the right skills, including digital skills, and the utilisation of innovations such as e-health (e.g. telehealth and electronic health records) to provide high quality care and reduce inequalities (including gender related) while respecting safety and privacy rights (e.g. EU General Data Protection Regulation).
3. **Reducing the impact of non-communicable diseases with a focus on cancer** - The 2030 Agenda aims at reducing by one third the premature mortality from non-communicable diseases. The envisaged Europe's Beating Cancer Plan should contribute to achieving this goal. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goal targets requires addressing risk factors (such as tobacco, alcohol and unhealthy diets), as well as environmental determinants of non-communicable diseases (such as pollution, that have a harmful effect on health and/or the environment) and mental health conditions.
4. **Promoting sustainable food systems and health** - The recently adopted Farm to Fork strategy and the World Health Assembly Resolution on strengthening efforts on food safety and the food supply chain are setting new objectives for food systems, while applying the Health in all policies and One-Health approach. These include the promotion of sustainable and healthy diets for all and the transition to sustainable food production.
5. **Promoting health cooperation with non-EU-countries** - Further efforts are necessary to assist the Western Balkans, Turkey, the Eastern Partnership countries, as well as Central Asian countries, to improve regional and sub-regional health security, address health inequalities, bolster the resilience of health systems and strengthen the cooperation between WHO Country offices and EU Delegations while enhancing the partnership between the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and WHO/Europe to ensure coherent strategic approaches across the entire region.

## Working together

Within the scope of these priorities, mutual interests and considering the need for value added, we will aim to pool efforts to improve human health across the region and actively support countries in achieving the highest level of health and health protection. We will also aim to exchange information and best practices, consult with each other, coordinate activities through regular dialogues, seek synergies and consider joint actions and initiatives. A more concrete plan outlining projects and steps of our cooperation will be developed.