



July 2015

# Health 2020: Foreign policy and health

## Synergy between sectors: ensuring global health policy coherence

### Summary

The Health 2020 policy framework has been adopted by all Member States of the WHO European Region in order to address Europe's great social and health challenges, calling upon the health sector to reach out to, and work with, all the various sectors and parties in the continuous work of improving people's health and well-being. Today's greatest challenges are global and require a common, coordinated response. By working together, health and foreign affairs can contribute to improving the living and working conditions of individuals, families and communities, reduce inequalities and support human development, not only improving good health and well-being but

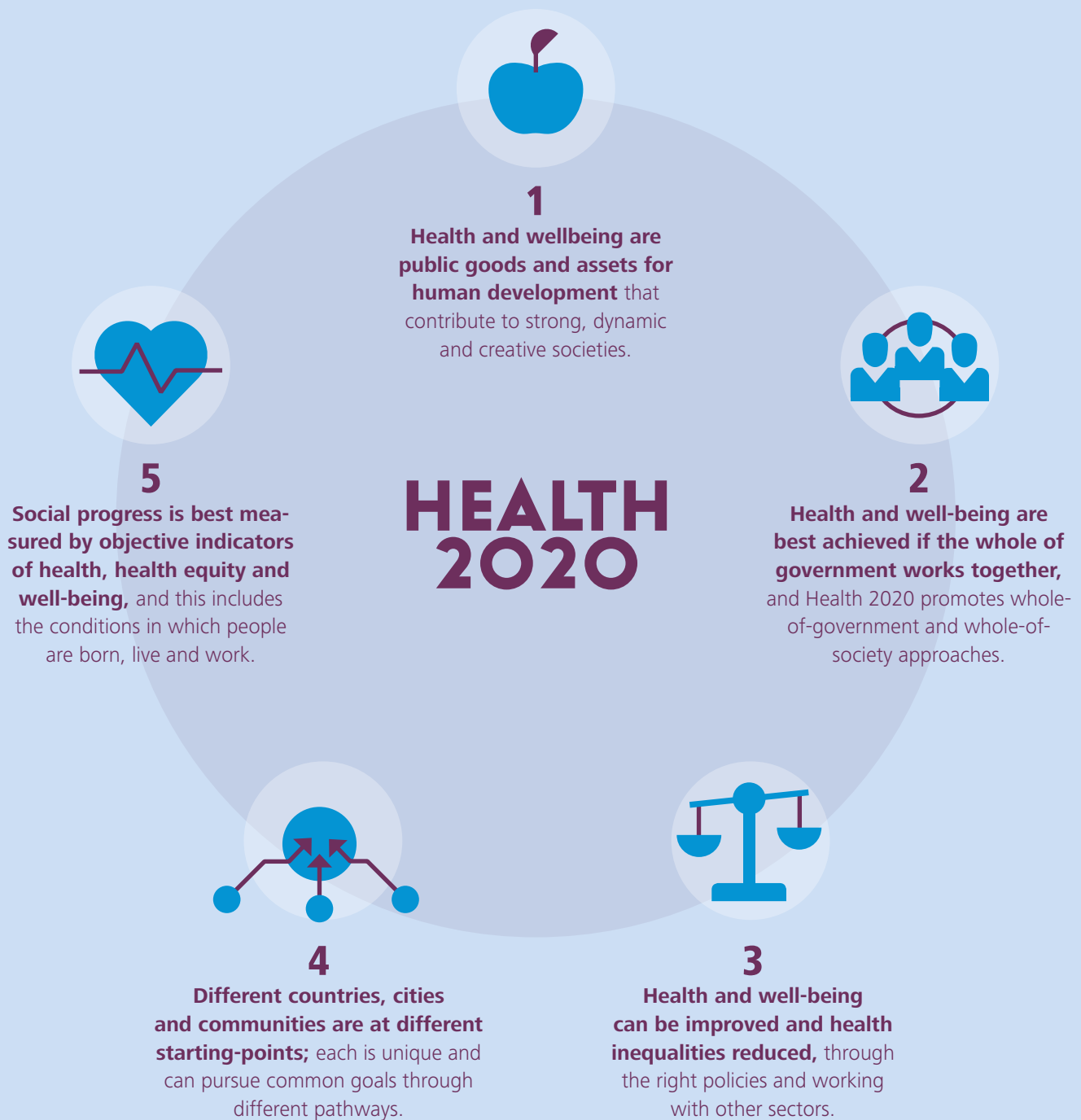
also fostering healthy and resilient communities and economies in the European Region and beyond.

Foreign policy can help to create healthier people and communities by:

- strengthening global mechanisms and processes to enable an informed and coordinated response by the international community to major challenges affecting people's health and well-being, including security issues;
- ensuring policy coherence between health, foreign policy and development, including trade policies and commercial determinants of health;
- support the mobilization of adequate resources for global disease control, universal health coverage and joint action to improve global health security;
- promote approaches within development financing that contribute to increasing health equity and address the social determinants of health; and
- working with the health sector to reduce gender-based inequalities, including sexual, reproductive health and rights, violence against women and in the humanitarian and security context.

## Key messages

The goal of Health 2020 is to significantly improve the health and well-being of populations, reduce health inequalities, strengthen public health and ensure people-centred health systems that are universal, equitable, sustainable and of high quality.





## Strengthening the link between health and foreign policy

In 2012, all 53 Member States in the European Region adopted Health 2020, the new common European health policy framework, and committed themselves to developing integrative policies that engage with all sectors in addressing the social and economic determinants of health and well-being. This cannot be achieved through domestic policy alone: health policy today requires joint action to address collective problems facing all countries. The link between health and foreign policy in a globalized world has been most obvious in the response to communicable disease outbreaks and builds on the historical tradition of sanitary agreements between states. Bacteria, viruses and parasites do not stop at national borders regardless of political or diplomatic agreements.

Globalization, including the rise of global trade in goods, environmental degradation as well as conflict and human migration, has health as a key element. As unhealthy goods and lifestyles spread around the globe, it takes a global response to counteract the increase in noncommunicable diseases. Foreign policy and diplomacy offer important instruments to address intersectoral, multilevel and multilateral policy-making and can complement and support national policy efforts. Ensuring that foreign policy supports health and makes effects on health a key consideration for foreign policy, development and investment strategies is crucial.



# Health 2020: a framework for action

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All Member States of the WHO European Region have agreed to monitor progress against six common targets:

1. Reduce premature mortality in the European Region by 2020
2. Increase life expectancy in the European Region
3. Reduce health inequalities in the European Region
4. Enhance the wellbeing of the European Region population
5. Ensure universal health coverage and the right to the highest attainable level of health
6. Set national goals and targets related to health in Member States.

What makes societies prosper and flourish can also make people healthy, and policies that recognize this have more impact.

Building awareness and capacity to make health objectives part of society's overall socioeconomic and human development is essential. All policy fields, including health, need to reform their ways of working and use new forms and approaches to policy at the global, national and local levels.

# Synergy between sectors: using foreign policy to improve health

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## Strengthening the link between foreign policy and better health

Many areas of domestic health are strongly influenced by global developments, such as trade in goods and services, intellectual property, especially in relation to medicines, migration of health professionals and climate change. Many determinants of health are subject to international treaties that require ratification and implementation at the national level. This includes not only the explicitly health-related treaties such as the International Health Regulations and the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control but also human rights treaties, trade agreements and environmental regimes. One of the most important international negotiations for health at present is the process to define the Sustainable Development Goals – given their role for all countries and not only low- and middle-income countries. Since foreign affairs ministries primarily negotiate these, it is critical that both health and development ministries be involved in preparing the negotiations so that health and health impact are considered throughout the goals.

The nexus between foreign policy has become increasingly accepted in three key global agendas: security, social and economic development and post-conflict or emergency action.

- The health component in foreign policy design to address security concerns could be seen as the most prominent interlink, particularly to mitigate and respond to the outbreak of infectious diseases such as HIV, tuberculosis, malaria, SARS, influenza A (H1N1) and Ebola. Pandemics are more likely to originate in countries with a poor health system, thus posing a threat to the international community.
- Foreign policy-makers have the opportunity to address the significance of health to economic and social development by designing and contributing to domestic and global socioeconomic policy frameworks. Good health is essential for human development. A strong health system is crucial for national and international security. Given the increased global interconnection, ensuring health is on the foreign policy agenda could ensure coherence in economic discussions including enhancing trade relationships.
- Health as a vital component in foreign policy, when engaging in post-conflict development and responding to natural disasters, has been increasingly acknowledged, mainly through humanitarian action frameworks. The impact on health has been included in foreign policy to respond to global crises including food and

energy demand. In addition, the global action to address the effects on climate change gives global health challenges an important position to be integrated into foreign policy strategies.

- Many countries implement health programmes as part of their development and humanitarian commitments. Health can also be an important instrument of soft power and relationship-building between countries, especially when cooperating in other areas of foreign policy is difficult.

The outcomes of foreign policy can significantly influence global health, the health of low- and middle-income countries and the domestic health of countries in the European Region. Health is an important component of the global portfolio of foreign ministries and relevant for many dimensions from security to stability. It is a part of science diplomacy as much as commercial diplomacy and a feature in relationship-building between countries when it is difficult to cooperate in other areas and therefore a key partner for the health sector.

# Synergy between sectors: creating policy coherence to put health high on the political agenda

## How can the sectors work together?

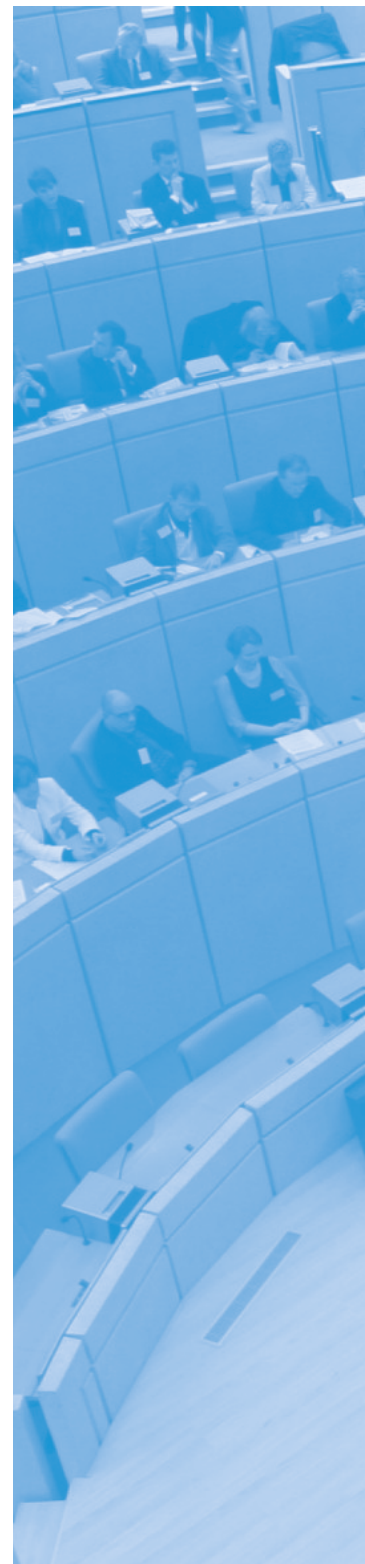
Health 2020 provides a platform for such joint working between health and foreign affairs. Working together, we have the power to intervene to address some of today's greatest health challenges, including health inequalities, social exclusion and supporting sustainable development while ensuring that individuals and communities are able to fulfil their highest potential.

### KEY AREAS TO EXPLORE TOGETHER INCLUDE:

- fostering policy coherence across health, foreign policy and development;
- ensuring adequate preparedness and response for emergency and cross-border health threats;
- strengthening global mechanisms and processes to adequately address health and health equity; and
- ensuring that health is represented in economic processes, including trade policies.

## How can foreign policy make a difference to health?

- Strengthen global mechanisms and other measures for an informed and coordinated preparedness and rapid response system
- Contribute to global, regional and subregional health governance and enhance human and social development
- Support the mobilization of adequate resources for global disease control, universal health coverage and global action on tackling shortages of human resources for health
- Affirm the interconnectedness of trade, health and development, including in formulating trade agreements
- Explore innovative approaches to improve access to essential medicines
- Ensure that global policies do not undermine public health approaches







## Collaborating to improve global health

### THE CHALLENGE

Responding to cross-border health threats, disease outbreaks and humanitarian disasters

Addressing global health inequities and the determinants of health in many global policy forums, including the Sustainable Development Goals process

Ensuring social protection, universal health coverage and health system strengthening, including access to medicines

Strengthening WHO and the global health architecture

### THE RESPONSE NEEDED

Cooperating towards establishing a permanent and efficient response to pandemic outbreaks through international agreements as well as well prepared rapid response

Providing leadership in international negotiations that have significant health impact, including such areas as environment, trade, intellectual property, agriculture and fisheries, climate change, biodiversity and biofuel production

Jointly developing coherent investment strategies in national health and social protection systems for preventing and responding to health challenges  
Contributing to developing a trade environment that is coherent with social and health objectives  
Developing joint approaches on human resources for health

Ensuring close cooperation and joint strategic goals between health, foreign policy and development  
Working together to strengthen joint accountability for greater policy coherence between health, foreign policy and development  
Working together to strengthen training on health diplomacy

## How can health make a difference to foreign policy?

- Identify gaps in the availability of essential medicines and vaccines, equipment and health professionals, including states and countries in conflict and crisis
- Support gender health equity and general improvement of global health equity to strengthen national peace and security and prevent diseases, humanitarian crises and armed conflicts
- Work together to overcome macroeconomic constraints to effective health investment (prevention and treatment)

# Using Health 2020 as a platform for joint work: a political mandate and evidence base

The Health 2020 policy framework has a political mandate. It has been adopted by all European Member States and can be adapted to the different settings and realities that make up the European Region. It describes how health and well-being can be advanced, sustained and measured through action that creates social cohesion, security, a good work-life balance, good health and good education. It calls on the health sector to reach out to the many different actors within and outside government and provides inspiration and direction on addressing the complex health challenges of the 21st century. The framework confirms values, is based on evidence and identifies strategic directions and essential actions. It builds on the experiences gained through previous Health for All policies and guides the actions of both Member States and the Regional Office.

Several European governments have since established global health policies to ensure the collaboration between national sectors and to bring together common domestic and foreign policy concerns in order to set priorities and goals that also enhance accountability between the sectors and towards civil society. Such policies can improve domestic health, strengthen health as a pillar of development policy and ensure coherence with general foreign policy. Through such strategies, countries can be equipped with instruments and mechanisms to facilitate the cooperation between health, foreign policy and other sectors that are of particular importance when negotiating within the international arena, hosting major summits or holding a presidency. These policies and frameworks define the country's engagement in global health issues, outline the value base and principles, set common objectives across sectors, create mechanisms and instruments of intersectoral consultation and ensure information flow and consultation.

A group of seven foreign ministers in Oslo in 2007 – Brazil, France, Indonesia, Norway,

Senegal, South Africa and Thailand – declared global health to be a goal of foreign policy in the Oslo Ministerial Declaration: “We believe that health is one of the most important, yet still broadly neglected, long-term foreign policy issues of our time. ... We believe that health as a foreign policy issue needs a stronger strategic focus on the international agenda. We have therefore agreed to make impact on health a point of departure and a defining lens that each of our countries will use to examine key elements of foreign policy and development strategies, and to engage in a dialogue on how to deal with policy options from this perspective”. This Declaration acknowledges health as a global public good, bringing together the negotiation process for bilateral, regional and multilateral cooperation as well as a critical approach to ensure domestic health development.

The Helsinki Statement on Health in All Policies adopted at the 8th Global Conference on Health Promotion in Helsinki in 2013 states that “In our interconnected world, health is shaped by many powerful forces, especially demographic change, rapid urbanization, climate change and globalization ... The health of the people is not only a health sector responsibility, it also embraces wider political issues such as trade and foreign policy. Tackling this requires political will to engage the whole of government in health.”

Integrating Health 2020 through whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches in designing foreign policy will enhance precautionary measurements and a comprehensive response to global health domestically and internationally. Appropriate action should be taken to reduce the vulnerability of people around the world to new, acute, or rapidly spreading risks to health, particularly those threatening to cross international borders.

# HEALTH 2020

## Reducing health inequalities

To reduce health inequalities, addressing the following is a good start:

### LIFE-COURSE STAGE

- Social protection for women, mothers-to-be and young families
- Universal, high-quality and affordable early-years education and care system
- Eradication of unsafe work and access to employment and high quality work
- Coherent and effective intersectoral action to tackle inequalities at older ages

### WIDER SOCIETY

- Improved social protection, according to need
- Co-creation and partnership with those targeted, civil society and civic partners
- Action to reduce social exclusion
- Gender equity approach

### BROADER CONTEXT

- Promoting equity through tax and transfer payments
- Long-term planning through links with other policies

### SYSTEMS

- Greater coherence across sectors
- Comprehensive responses
- Regular reporting and public scrutiny

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