

Proposals for inclusion in a political declaration on UHC from the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region

The United Nations High Level Meeting (HLM) on Universal Health Coverage (UHC) in 2023 provides countries and all stakeholders with an opportunity not only to reaffirm UHC's commitment, but also to take concrete action to build sustainable and equitable health systems. Some progress has been made since the 2019 High Level Meeting on UHC and the political Declaration, but more than half of the world's population still lacks access to basic health services. The situation was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the humanitarian crisis due to military operations in the EECA region.

Following the publication of the Zero Draft Political Declaration, organizations in the EECA region formulated the following proposals aimed at improving both the civil society engagement process and the text of the Political Declaration itself:

1. The "Sustainable financing" section should be supplemented and strengthened. While the "Financing" section of the draft Political Declaration clearly states that "...On average, more than 33 per cent of national health expenditure is covered by out-of-pocket expenses ...", in the section of the declaration calling for governments to act, titled "Sustainable financing", there are no target indicators. We call on governments to make interim commitments to reduce the proportion of health care expenditures covered by out-of-pocket expenses to 20% by 2026.
2. The "Monitoring, Accountability and Multi-Stakeholder Engagement" section of the political declaration should be strengthened. Community-led monitoring (CLM) should be listed as one of the most effective mechanisms for civil society to independently assess the effectiveness of UHC progress. Simultaneously with the prioritization of this tool, we call on governments to commit for the sufficient financial support of such monitoring mechanisms and the need to integrate community-led monitoring into monitoring and evaluation systems of health systems at the state level.
3. The section of the declaration "Health emergency preparedness" needs to be strengthened. The current version of the Declaration is extremely limited in describing the response to such situations. The text of the declaration should reflect the devastating impact of military actions and the humanitarian crisis in the EECA region in 2022-2023, which showed that at present even the health systems of the most developed countries are unable to ensure compliance with the principles of UHC for the most vulnerable categories of citizens in case of emergencies. We call on states to commit themselves to putting in place systems that will ensure access to health services for people in these situations. We are talking about people in war conflict zones, migrants, internally displaced persons, refugees, LGBTQ+, clients of opioid substitution treatment programs, prisoners, people with limited mobility and other groups. At the same time, we call on states to reaffirm their obligations to strictly ensure access for employees of international and humanitarian organizations to such territories and to reaffirm guarantees for ensuring their safety in order to provide essential services.
4. During the next hearings, the Zero Draft Political Declaration should be published simultaneously in all 6 UN languages to ensure meaningful civil society participation. The timing of the discussion of the zero draft, the 1st, 2nd and 3rd readings of the declarations should be extended to take into account the global interest of NGOs and communities to provide their comments, and give them such an opportunity not in words, but in deeds, taking into account language barriers.

We urge interested parties, despite the late deadlines for submitting proposals due to the language barrier, to pay close attention to these proposals.

At the same time, we call on civil society and all stakeholders to continue to use the UHC2030 Action Agenda in their ongoing efforts to advocate for the interests of the most vulnerable communities in the country, region and globally.

On behalf of EECA UHC communication platform

Serhiy Dmitriev

Chairperson

Health Advocacy Coalition

EECA UHC communication platform unites 30 NGOs and civil society organizations from 10 countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The aim of the platform is to promote UHC principles in the region of EECA and to empower communities to become active participants of the UHC process. The platform is coordinated by Health Advocacy Coalition (www.hac.health)