

# EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT'S LEADERSHIP IN GLOBAL HEALTH: A ROADMAP TO BETTER FUTURES



The key role  
of the European  
Parliament  
to advance  
global health



## What is global health?

Global health reflects the idea that the health of all people across the world is connected: diseases do not stop at borders and most health issues and determinants are transnational. As such, our efforts to combat them must transcend borders and socio-economic divides: collaboration is key to developing the solutions to the world's most pressing health challenges.

Advancing health equity and ensuring the human right to health for everyone is essential in this context. It is a moral imperative to leave no one behind, as exclusion and discrimination diminish the potential of both individuals and humanity as a whole. The health of humans, animals, plants, and ecosystems are deeply interconnected, making the One Health approach crucial for achieving better health outcomes for all.

2019 marked the beginning of one of the most significant health crises in recent decades, revealing the profound interconnectedness of our global community. At the same time, Europe and the world have been contending with multiple overlapping crises, including geopolitical shifts, rising inequalities, and climate change.

**As newly elected Members of the European Parliament, you have the unique opportunity to shape not only the direction of Europe but also the future of our world.**

## Did you know that?



Globally, a **woman dies every two minutes** due to pregnancy or childbirth<sup>1</sup>.



Every week, **4000** adolescent girls and young women aged 15–24 years became **infected with HIV** globally in 2022.



Almost **500 million girls and women lack access** to services and products for managing their menstruation with comfort and dignity<sup>2</sup>.



**21 million children** were either **unvaccinated** or **under-vaccinated** in 2023 – 2.7 million more than before the pandemic<sup>5</sup>.



Closing the gender health gap has the potential to **boost the global economy** by 1 trillion USD annually by 2040<sup>3</sup>.



Globally, **acute respiratory infections** such as pneumonia, along with diarrhoea, and malaria – often compounded by undernutrition – remain the **leading causes of death for children under 5**.



Research and Innovation investments in poverty-related and neglected diseases made between 2000-2040 **will save at least 40.7 million lives** and yield economic returns to society of 405 USD for every 1 USD invested<sup>4</sup>.

1 <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/366225/9789240068759-eng.pdf?sequence=1>

2 <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/water/brief/menstrual-health-and-hygiene>

3 <https://www.mckinsey.com/mhi/our-insights/closing-the-womens-health-gap-a-1-trillion-dollar-opportunity-to-improve-lives-and-economies>

4 <https://www.policycuresresearch.org/impactofglobalhealthrd/>

5 <https://www.who.int/news/item/15-07-2024-global-childhood-immunization-levels-stalled-in-2023-leaving-many-without-life-saving-protection>

## 1.

# WHY CHAMPION GLOBAL HEALTH?



Metasebia Tesfaye (25) a health professional at the SERK youth-friendly clinic in Assela, Ethiopia.  
© Brian Otieno/DSW



**Saving lives and delivering on our commitments:** strengthening global health is at the heart of the EU's dedication to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG3, and the EU's very own Global Health Strategy<sup>6</sup>. The EU has been a key architect and champion of the SDGs since their inception. Despite significant progress, the world is still falling short in crucial areas like reducing maternal mortality, expanding Universal Health Coverage, increasing childhood vaccinations, and combating neglected diseases. Investing in these areas is not just about meeting targets, it is about saving lives.



**Investing in our security and prosperity:** a healthier world means a safer and more prosperous future for all, including for people living in the EU. The COVID-19 pandemic has starkly highlighted how interconnected our world is. Health emergencies and weak health systems can lead to catastrophic loss of life and threaten global economic stability and security. Investing in universally accessible health services and technologies is not only the right thing to do, it is a strategic necessity for ensuring security, economic resilience, and global prosperity. Moreover, robust health systems are essential for advancing other EU priorities, such as advancing the digital and green transitions, fostering innovation and sustainable growth. If long-standing partners like the EU pull back now, then the gains made over the past decade are at risk.



**Maintaining our geopolitical relevance:** health, including health research, is a key area of convergence in EU partnerships, especially with Africa and serves as a powerful tool for international cooperation. Building strong, mutually beneficial relationships requires more than focusing on areas of direct interest to the EU though; it demands a holistic approach that includes health as a priority. The health sector plays a crucial role in strengthening diplomatic ties, fostering collaboration, and enhancing mutual trust between nations. Investing in health and research initiatives not only helps in creating a more stable and prosperous international community but also secures the EU's position as a pivotal actor in global governance, while at the same time contributing to enhance European competitiveness.



**Reflecting EU citizens' priorities:** health is a top priority for Europeans<sup>7</sup>, with 30% of the population believing it is the most critical area for EU and partner cooperation, second only to peace and security. This strong public support underscores the importance of health initiatives and their alignment with the values and concerns of EU citizens who elected you.

<sup>6</sup> [https://health.ec.europa.eu/publications/eu-global-health-strategy-better-health-all-changing-world\\_en](https://health.ec.europa.eu/publications/eu-global-health-strategy-better-health-all-changing-world_en)  
<sup>7</sup> <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2952>

## 2.

## WHAT TO CHAMPION IN GLOBAL HEALTH? KEY AREAS THAT ARE FUNDAMENTAL TO **ADVANCE GLOBAL HEALTH**

### Health systems strengthening:

We need to ensure that all individuals and communities have access to the full range of essential health services they need, including prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and palliative care, without facing financial hardship. This concept is known as Universal Health Coverage (UHC). To achieve this, we need strong and resilient health systems that can prevent and treat diseases and illnesses while improving everyone's well-being and quality of life.



### KEY ACTIONS NEEDED:



**Ensure adequate resources** to improve the performance of **all six components of health systems**: leadership and governance; service delivery; health system financing; health workforce; medical products, vaccines and technologies; and health information systems.



**Champion the champions**: support funding for organisations such as the WHO, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, which make substantial investments in strengthening health systems.



**Foster programmes and policies that enhance primary health care services** at the community level and back community-led and -based organisations, which are key to advancing health and equity.



**Support investments in a strong healthcare workforce**, including community health workers, which is crucial to deliver primary health care services.



**Support investments in water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services** across healthcare facilities as a key prevention measure to fight the spread of healthcare-associated infections and antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

## Health equity:

Everyone should have access to the health services they need free from discrimination; regardless of who they are, where they live, or how much money they have.

### KEY ACTIONS NEEDED:



**Take an intersectional approach:** recognising that individuals experience overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage, such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, disability, and more is crucial for ensuring health equity. By understanding these interconnected identities and the unique challenges they create, healthcare providers and policymakers can more effectively address the diverse and specific needs of different populations, thereby reducing disparities and promoting equitable access to health care and outcomes for all.



**Prioritise the rights and inclusion of people at highest risk of intersecting forms of discrimination around health services:** women and girls, children, persons with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ people, older people, migrants, refugees and internally displaced people, sex workers, and people who use drugs.



**Connect policies to maximise impact:** leverage the EU's gender equality, human rights and LGBTIQ+ policies to improve health outcomes.

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## Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR):

SRHR are an essential part of UHC and a prerequisite for achieving gender equality and sustainable development. They are critical for people's ability to lead healthy lives, to address gender-based violence and power relations, to be free to participate in social, economic and political life, and to make decisions governing their bodies freely.

### KEY ACTIONS NEEDED:



**Ensure SRHR are fully recognised as an integral part of the efforts to achieve UHC** and encourage the integration of SRH and HIV to promote the universal right to health.



**Hold governments accountable** for their regional and global commitments to SRHR.



**Be a strong voice for universal access to SRHR**, including more contested but crucial elements such as comprehensive sexuality education and safe and legal abortion, and vocally counter the global backlash against women's rights.



**Champion funding for the UNFPA Supplies Partnership and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria**, two effective investments to advance SRHR.

## Global Health Research & Innovation (R&I):

Over the past two decades, investments in the development of technologies targeting HIV & AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, and neglected tropical diseases have saved over 40 million lives, yielding a 405 USD return for every 1 USD invested<sup>8</sup>. Team Europe has been a major contributor to this, funding groundbreaking innovations such as the first-ever vaccines against malaria and chikungunya. However, over 75% of global public investments come from the US<sup>9</sup>. With additional support, the EU could lead the development of critical tools like vaccines for tuberculosis and leprosy, and a cure for HIV.

### KEY ACTIONS NEEDED:



**Increase EU investments in global health R&I**, including by exploring new finance mechanisms such as priority review vouchers or milestone prizes, that help translate R&I outputs into health outcomes and socioeconomic benefits.



**Ensure coherence between EU policies** (e.g., R&I, public health, international development, trade, and pharmaceutical), in line with the principle of policy coherence for development to deliver the objectives of the EU's Global Health Strategy.

## Why is a focus on women's health needed?

The development of health tools such as vaccines, drugs and diagnostics has historically failed to account for sex and gender differences, meaning they are not always safe or suitable for women. Furthermore, health issues that disproportionately or uniquely impact women, such as sexual and reproductive health issues like post-partum haemorrhage receive low funding relative to their burden. Closing the gender research and funding gap in health by deploying an intersectional approach is essential to ensure all individuals can benefit from scientific advancements.

### KEY ACTIONS NEEDED:



**Join the European Parliament Interest Group on Women's Health, raise awareness of the gender health gap and call for all EU action on women's health** to have a global dimension and ensure a comprehensive approach across all EU programmes and policies.



**Ensure the EU fills the gender health R&I funding gap** by increasing support via Horizon Europe, including women's health in the next research framework programme (FP10), and exploring novel funding mechanisms, such as innovation prizes or public-private partnerships.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.policycuresresearch.org/impactofglobalhealthrd/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://policy-cures-website-assets.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/08035109/2023-Neglected-Disease-G-FINDER-report.pdf>



## Access to medicines:

Pharmaceutical products are not like any other goods and everyone, regardless of location or income, should have access to effective and affordable medicines, vaccines and diagnostics. When EU public funding is used to develop biomedical countermeasures, such as vaccines, it must be accompanied by access conditions to guarantee the availability, affordability, and accessibility of medical products to all those in need, including to low- and middle-income countries.

### KEY ACTIONS NEEDED:



**Restore balance in the EU pharmaceutical sector** and set an example for other regions by **increasing needs-based medical R&I, improving transparency and introducing an EU-wide compulsory licensing mechanism** allowing the export of pandemic-related products.



**Champion reforms of pharmaceutical, trade and intellectual property systems** to mitigate inequalities embedded in them. Support the inclusion of equity and access provisions in the WHO Pandemic Accord negotiations such as conditions on public R&I investments or rapid and equitable sharing of pandemic-related products and technologies in times of crisis to prevent a recurrence of the failures witnessed during the HIV and COVID-19 pandemics.



**Provide political and financial support for the Global South's independent pharmaceutical innovation and manufacturing capacity.** Ensure that EU actions, such as the MAV+, support public sector initiatives e.g., the WHO mRNA Technology Transfer Programme, and empower developing countries, rather than focusing on expanding the market for EU industry.

## Reproductive, Maternal, Neonatal and Child Health (RMNCH):

Women, children and adolescents remain at disproportionate risk of (partially) preventable illnesses. To date, 54 low-and-middle income countries (LMICs) are off track to meet the SDG target for under-five mortality and 63 countries must accelerate progress to meet the SDG target for neonatal mortality. These trends may be further exacerbated by the impact of conflict, climate change and the cost-of-living crisis. Community access to WASH has been proven to reduce illness and death among women and children<sup>10</sup>. Currently, the highest rates of hospital acquired infections—preventable with WASH services—are found in intensive care units, and neonatal or paediatric medical wards<sup>11</sup>.

### KEY ACTIONS NEEDED:



**Ensure that no child is left behind and at risk of acquiring life-threatening illnesses**—pneumonia, diarrhoea, hospital acquired infections, and malaria, by addressing the lack of access to quality health services, including infant and young child feeding, nutrition counselling, access to clean water and sanitation, and immunisation.



**Ensure EU policies and funding on global health respond to the needs and protect the rights of adolescents**, particularly girls, who remain at disproportionate risk of early and unintended pregnancies, poor maternal and newborn health outcomes, sexually transmitted infections, and malnutrition.



**Support policies addressing the impact of climate change on women, children, and adolescents**, and integrate women's, children's, and adolescents' health and well-being into climate policies and budgets.

## Climate change and health:

The interconnection between climate change and health has never been this evident. The climate crisis poses a significant threat to global health, affecting the social and environmental determinants of health, including clean air, safe drinking water, sufficient food, and secure shelter, and impacting the range and transmission rates of vector-borne diseases by altering the habitats and behaviours of vectors like mosquitoes and ticks. Prioritising climate and health is crucial for ensuring a healthy future for everyone.

### KEY ACTIONS NEEDED:



**Integrate the consequences of climate change on health in all health-related actions** and prioritise health in climate action. The most pressing health needs are exacerbated by climate change and while these are mainly addressed in silos by EU external actions, communities face these challenges concomitantly as well as their compounding effects, also exacerbated by underlying inequalities.



**Ensure actions to strengthen climate resilient health systems**, including by investing in primary health care, WASH and community-based health systems.



**Ensure adequate support for mental and psychosocial work** to respond to the growing mental health consequences of climate change.



**Promote a One Health approach**, access to a healthy and safe environment for all in EU policies.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8417956/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://washmatters.wateraid.org/publications/counting-cost-healthcare-acquired-infections-sub-saharan-africa>

## Nutrition security:

Undernutrition remains among the most significant global public health challenges, especially in LMICs. It perpetuates a vicious cycle with other diseases and infections, creating a complex pathology. Effective action against undernutrition requires a holistic, integrated approach to health and strengthening healthcare systems.

### KEY ACTIONS NEEDED:



**Strongly promote and support the integration of nutrition into primary health care and UHC** in partner countries, in alignment with the EU's Global Health Strategy. To support this integration, advocate for sustainable, long-term Official Development Assistance (ODA) funding investing in direct and indirect health sector nutrition interventions<sup>12</sup>.



**Recommit to politically prioritising nutrition security within the EU's international cooperation agenda**, by advocating for the revision of the Nutrition Policy Framework and enhancing the EU's leadership to make progress toward achieving the World Health Assembly Global Nutrition Targets and the Sustainable Development Goals Agenda.

## Role of the private sector in health

While the involvement of the private sector can bring valuable resources and needed innovation, it is crucial that the primary focus of health interventions stays on the interests and priorities of beneficiary communities in partner countries. Development policies should continue to be guided by principles of sustainability, equity, and social welfare.

### KEY ACTIONS NEEDED:



Within the framework of the Global Gateway, the EU must ensure that the implementation of its development cooperation efforts, and of the Global Health Strategy, remain **balanced, human-rights based and free from influence by private sector interests**.



**EU's initiatives should lead to the building of strong and sustainable health systems**, including an end-to-end independent pharmaceutical infrastructure in partner countries. Public investment should always include access conditions and be assessed by the benefits it brings to public health, not to business.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.alliance2015.org/rethinking-the-eus-oda-investments-in-nutrition/>

## WHAT YOU CAN DO TO ADVANCE GLOBAL HEALTH



### Support and monitor the implementation of the **EU Global Health Strategy**, including by:

- Organising one hearing a year on the implementation and impact of the Strategy.
- Adopting a resolution to feed into the implementation of the Strategy and its mid-term evaluation.

### Strengthen the cooperation in the area of health as part of the **EU's partnerships with other regional actors**: the African Union (AU), Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and the Organisation of Africa, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS):

- Call for increased investments to regional Team Europe Initiatives (TEIs) promoting health in these regions and help build synergies among them.
- Ensure a strong human-rights based approach is at the core of the EU-AU partnership on health, with the goals of supporting African health sovereignty and advancing equitable access to health.
- Leverage your work in regional parliamentary assemblies to place health as a priority of the EU's partnerships with other regions and hold the European Commission accountable for its commitments.

### Champion EU ODA and global health investments across relevant programmes during the negotiation of the **next EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)**:

- Support an ambitious budget for external action in the next MFF, with a well-resourced Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI).
- Support the maintenance of the existing benchmark of 20% of ODA allocated to human development in the NDICI, ensure this target is met annually, and ensure timely reporting.
- Support resources for the EU4Health programme, equivalent to at least its current budget, with a significant share of funding for international challenges.
- Support the Parliament's call for a budget of at least 200 billion EUR for the next EU Research Framework Programme<sup>13</sup>, and call for the health cluster budget to again amount to at least 10% of the programme's total budget.



Three children based in Nepal that benefit from the sponsorship programming  
© Save the Children

**Adopt innovative financing instruments to support global health needs, including by:**

- Considering a Union-wide Financial Transaction Tax (FTT), which could raise between 17-29 billion EUR annually, depending on the nominal rate. If implemented globally, revenues are estimated between 162-270 billion EUR each year, five times the estimated 31.1 billion USD needed per year to prevent, prepare, and respond to the next pandemic.

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**Ensure continued financial support to successful multilateral **Global Health Initiatives**, making sure that both Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance and the Global Fund are fully funded during their upcoming replenishments and ensure continued and ambitious funding to UNFPA Supplies Partnership.**

- Commit 360 million EUR of new funding to Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance for 2026-2030 and contribute to meeting the 9 billion USD target for the next replenishment, which would help immunise an additional 500 million children over the next five years, saving 8-9 million lives.

**Champion the role of civil society organisations (CSOs) and communities:**

- Ensure civil society and communities are fully included in the design and implementation of health programmes in partner countries, as well as at regional and global level.
- Provide adequate and flexible funding to community-based and -led programmes, especially for CSOs and communities that work with groups in the most marginalised situations and neglected needs.
- Promote an enabling environment for CSOs globally and speak up against the shrinking civic space.



# ANNEX

## What is the EU Global Health Strategy?

The [EU Global Health Strategy](#), adopted in November 2022 (endorsed by [Council Conclusions](#) in January 2024), signifies a pivotal shift in addressing global health challenges amid a changing world. The Strategy aims to:

1. Deliver better health and well-being of people across the life course;
2. Strengthen health systems and promote UHC;
3. Prevent and combat health threats, including pandemics, applying a One Health approach.

## How is health reflected in regional partnerships?

Health is specifically included as a key priority of the partnership between the EU and the African Union (AU) following the outcome of the EU-AU Summit in February 2022, with the objective to contribute to the achievement of African health sovereignty. EU and AU leaders recommitted to strengthen their health partnership through High Level Dialogues in February and March 2024.

Among the key deliverables of this partnership are five Team Europe Initiatives (TEI) to promote

It aims to shape a new global health order by advocating for robust global governance and fostering international partnerships to address issues collaboratively. Leveraging the Team Europe approach, the strategy emphasises coordinated actions across Member States.

It also highlights the importance of innovative financing, resource pooling and international co-investment to ensure sustainable funding for global health initiatives.

health in the African region, addressing different priorities: i) support to Manufacturing and Access to Vaccines, Medicines and Health Technology Products in Africa; ii) Strengthening the African architecture for health security and pandemic preparedness with the 'One Health' approach; iii) Enhancing Africa-based public health capacity by supporting Public Health Institutes; iv) advance sexual and reproductive health and rights; v) promote digital health.

## What's the level of EU Development Assistance for Health?

The EU has positioned itself as a key player in global health on the global political stage, as evidenced by its actions during the COVID-19 pandemic, the development of its Global Health Strategy, and its investments in major global health initiatives. Yet, in the aftermath of the pandemic, the EU appears to have shifted its priorities, seemingly forgetting the lessons learned during COVID19.

EU ODA dedicated to health saw an increase from 4,7% in 2020 to 7,9% in 2021, mainly due to the Covid-19 response. However, in 2022 it dropped again to 5% reaching pre-pandemic levels, and this despite ever-growing needs in partner countries<sup>14</sup>. The EU has the lowest share of ODA dedicated to health among G7 countries, with the US for

instance allocating 27% of its ODA to health<sup>15</sup>. Furthermore, out of the top ten recipients of bilateral EU health ODA in 2022, only four are Least Developed Countries (LDCs), representing 44,23% of the total<sup>16</sup>. The picture is similar if we look at health as a priority in the Multiannual Indicative Programmes (MIPs) in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA): out of 46 country MIPs in SSA, only 17 include specific objectives related to health<sup>17</sup>.

The low share of EU ODA dedicated to health compared to other G7 members, coupled with the fact that less than half of this ODA is being channelled to LDCs, is clear evidence that the EU urgently needs to increase both the quantity and quality of its health ODA.



14 A short-lived priority: a look at the European Union's Official Development Assistance to health in 2022 - Action Santé Mondiale (ghadvocates.eu)

15, 16 Ibid

17 Ibid - pending the ongoing MIPs review.