

## European Commission communication on the EU Role in Global Health – COM (2010) 128 Final

### 1. Introduction:

The European Commission (EC) has published a communication on 'The EU role in Global Health'. The communication outlines an EU vision on global health, defines the guiding principles that should apply to all relevant policy sectors and presents a number of areas where the EU could be more effective. It is accompanied by three staff working documents relating to the challenges of globalisation, universal coverage of health services through development policy and the role of European research and knowledge in global health.

The main objective of the communication is to highlight ways of developing a more coordinated role for the EU in contributing to the improvement of global health, particularly in relation to helping developing countries reach the health-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Therefore, the EC proposes four approaches to address the challenges for the health sector in developing countries. They include:

- Establishing a more democratic and inclusive governance structure – particularly in relation to the health sector;
- Ensuring basic universal coverage and equity of access to health services for all;
- Improving coherence between relevant EU policies in relation to global health and mitigating potential negative consequences;
- Ensuring better coordination of EU research on global health and improving access in third countries to new knowledge and new treatments.

The communication represents an important step for EU on the road to the UN Summit on the MDGs this September.

### 2. An enhanced EU response

*An obligation to act?*

The communication asserts that with its social model and its leading role in international trade and development aid, the EU has a responsibility to take a proactive role in global health issues. Moreover, this is reinforced by the EU's legal obligation to act set out in the relevant articles in the Treaty of Lisbon:

- Article 3 states that the '*EU shall combat social exclusion and discrimination, and shall promote social justice and protection, equality between women and men, solidarity between generations and protection of the rights of the child*' while also stating '*that in its relations with the wider world, the Union shall uphold and promote its values.*' (1)

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- Article 168 commits the Union to “foster cooperation with third countries and the competent international organisations in the sphere of public health.” (2)

Furthermore, the 2008-2013 EU Health Strategy recognises the need for a sustained collective leadership in global health in order to achieve better health outcomes in Europe and beyond while under the Seventh Framework Programme for Research (FP7) (2007-2013), the Union has supported research across the entire innovation cycle.

### 3. What needs to be done?

While the EC acknowledges that positive developments have been made in the last decade, particularly in relation to the MDGs and global health financing, it also underlines that disparities in health status have increased and widened – as documented in the final report by the WHO Commission on the Social Determinants of Health (CSDH). Moreover, the communication says that progress towards the health MDGs on child mortality, maternal mortality and HIV/AIDS has stalled, with maternal health being the most off-track MDG target in the majority of developing countries. Therefore, the EC is pressing for the development of a holistic approach taking account of the multi-sector nature of health and its close links to gender, nutrition, water, sanitation, environmental quality and education. The need for more coherence between internal and external EU policies is also presented as a way to mitigate against any potential negative impacts on global health. In addition, the EC recommends seeking synergies and supporting stronger WHO leadership. This will avoid duplication and fragmentation of global health initiatives.

The communication also emphasizes, that in pursuing its aid effectiveness objectives, the EU will need to increase its levels of alignment with partner countries' own strategies and the predictability of its support. The EU will also need to improve its capacity for analysis and policy dialogue on global health challenges at all levels. A multi-sectoral approach to global health requires strong partnerships with UN agencies and other key stakeholders.

Furthermore, the EC points out that the EU could be in the best position to help create a common framework for health system research, building on the ongoing comparative analysis of and joint learning from its different health systems. To gear research priorities to “making the biggest impact on public health” and to effectively translate research findings into evidence-based policy decisions, the EU will have to adopt a multi-disciplinary research capacity at national level. (3)

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### 4. What is the EC proposing?

The following are the main proposals from by the EC. These are not legally binding but merely present possible ways toward a more comprehensive role for the EU in global health:

- **Democratic and inclusive governance:** The communication highlights the possible benefits of a closer multilevel governance structure. At global level, the EU should seek to increase coordination and effectiveness of the UN system, decrease the fragmentation of funding to WHO and gradually shift to fund the general WHO budget. At regional level, it should pursue closer cooperation and dialogues among EU agencies, such as the European Centre for Disease Control and make the inclusion of global health issues a priority. At national level, it should ensure full participation of all stakeholders in health and other relevant policies.
- **Universal and equitable health coverage:** The EU should give priority to those populations at greatest risk and with the lowest resources to access quality health care. The EU should support health systems strengthening and national policies to ensure universal health coverage. The Commission is proposing that the EU should better align aid to the health sector with developing countries' own (procurement and public financing management) systems. It further highlights the need for better coordination, predictability and effectiveness of domestic and international health financing in order to tackle global health challenges.
- **Policy coherence:** The communication states that in order to ensure greater coherence in all EU policies affecting health in the Europe and non-European countries, it is essential to carry out impact assessment analyses on the effects of policy options on global health outcomes. For example, in trade policy, the EU should ensure greater affordability and access to essential medicines, fairer EU bilateral trade agreements that do not undermine access to medicines and better global governance of health-relevant environmental agreements. On migration, EU Member States should ensure that their migration policies do not undermine the availability of health professionals in third countries, whilst respecting individual freedom of movement and guaranteeing everyone in the EU – including migrants – access to quality health services without discrimination. The communication calls on the EU to deliver the agreed commitments under the EU Strategy for Action on the Crisis in Human Resources for Health in Developing Countries and to contribute to the WHA Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel. Other global health factors that need to be taken into account include security, response to global health threats, food security, nutrition and climate change.

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- **Research and evidence-based action:** The communication emphasizes the need for better coordination at EU level of global health research initiatives. It also stresses the need to promote effective and fair financing of health research and to ensure research feeds into health policies, improve health service provisions and include mechanisms to sustain local research capacity. In addition, the EU should strengthen its cooperation with relevant bodies such as WHO, the OECD and the Health Metrics Network as well as other key stakeholders concerned with global health in order to improve information systems and allow benchmarking through comparable data and statistics.
- **Coordinating, monitoring and capacity building:** The communication identifies a mix of mechanisms that could be used to enhance the EU's role in global health. This includes setting up a platform to exchange information between member states and the EC, monitoring of EU aid for health purposes and conducting dialogues and actions with key global players.

### 5. Follow up

The **Equity Channel** will provide updates on the progress of the communication and will contribute to discussions in the EU Global Health Policy Forum and elsewhere. For more information please visit **EquityChannel.net** and don't forget to join our interactive community.

### 6. Additional information

- EC Communication - [The EU Role in Global Health](#)
- EC staff working documents:
  1. [Global health – responding to the challenges of globalization;](#)
  2. [European research and knowledge for global health;](#)
  3. [Contributing to universal coverage of health services through development policy.](#)
- **EuroHealthNet's** response to the European Commission consultation on the EU role in Global Health - <http://www.equitychannel.net/uploads/EuroHealthNet%20Response%20to%20EC%20Global%20Health%20Consultation-1.pdf>
- More information is also available on the European Commission DG development website: [http://ec.europa.eu/development/services/dev-policy-proposals\\_en.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/development/services/dev-policy-proposals_en.cfm)

### Notes

- (1) Article 3 of the Treaty of the European Union.
- (2) Article 168 of the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union
- (3) European Commission Communication on the EU role in Global Health