

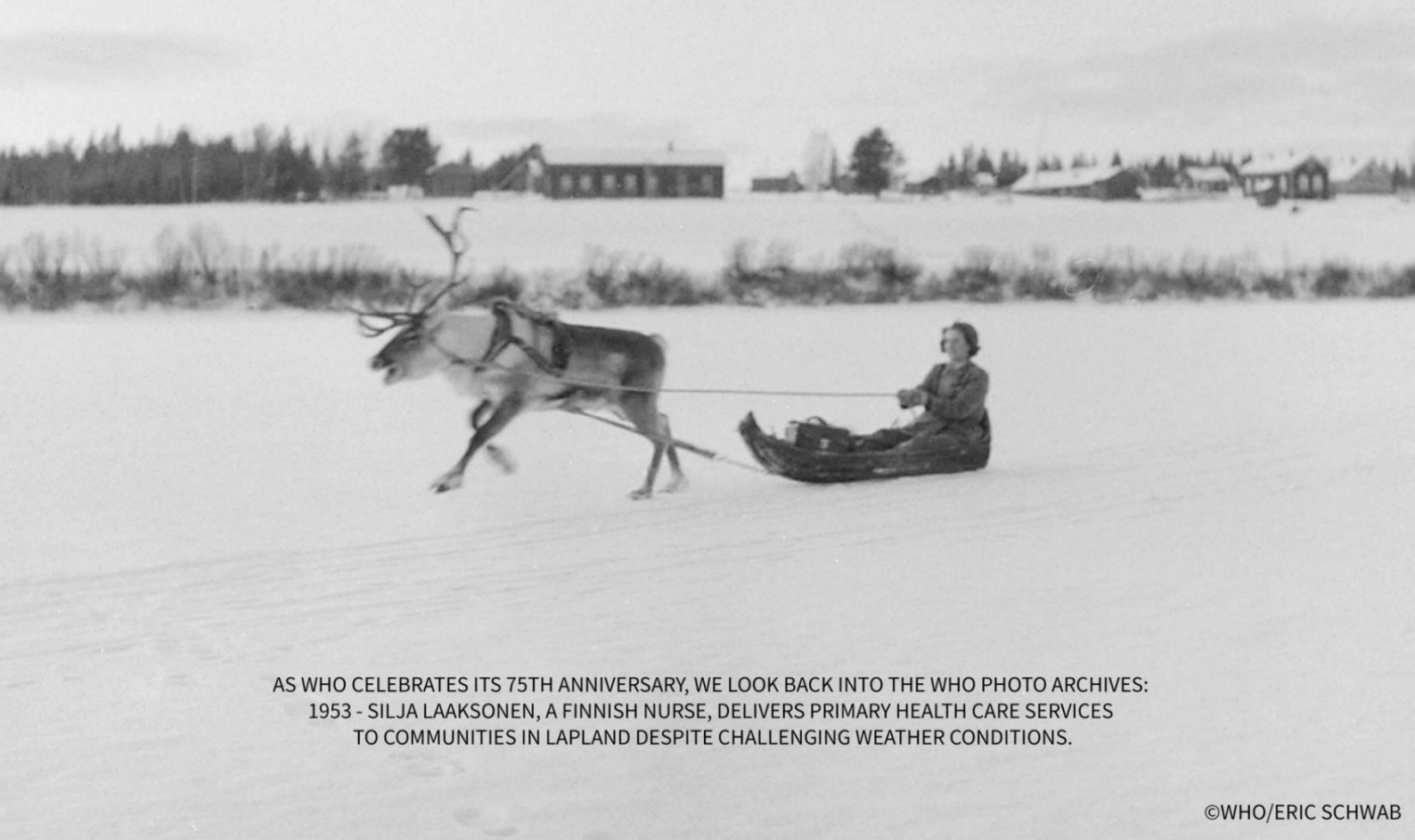
WHO Public Health Report

Bosnia and Herzegovina



75 HEALTH FOR ALL

THANK YOU FOR WORKING TO ADVANCE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING.
MAY THE NEW YEAR BRING PEACE, RESILIENCE AND HEALTH FOR ALL.



AS WHO CELEBRATES ITS 75TH ANNIVERSARY, WE LOOK BACK INTO THE WHO PHOTO ARCHIVES:
1953 - SILJA LAAKSONEN, A FINNISH NURSE, DELIVERS PRIMARY HEALTH CARE SERVICES
TO COMMUNITIES IN LAPLAND DESPITE CHALLENGING WEATHER CONDITIONS.

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UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE DAY 2023 FOCUSES ON BUILDING RESILIENCE OF HEALTH SYSTEMS



On Universal Health Coverage (UHC) Day, WHO called on governments to prioritize investments in building resilient health systems to safeguard the health and well-being of all people, everywhere.

In an increasingly turbulent world, climate change, emergencies and other shocks will take an even greater toll on health systems and the people who need them most. Over 40% of people in the world already live in areas highly susceptible to climate change. Over a quarter of the global population live in settings affected by protracted conflict, poverty and lack of access to basic health services.

Global humanitarian needs have reached record levels with 360 million people in need worldwide. At the same time, half the world's population is not fully covered by essential health services and 2 billion people face financial hardship or are impoverished due to out-of-pocket health spending. Without urgent action, these gaps will only widen.

“WHO was born 75 years ago on the conviction that health is a human right. And the best way to realize that right is universal health coverage,” said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General. *“Investing in resilient health systems, based on strong primary health care, is the most inclusive, equitable and cost-effective path towards universal health coverage.”*

Health systems that can respond to shocks and withstand pressures are crucial to effectively reduce the world's disease burden and avert the millions of additional deaths each year that are expected as a result of the climate crisis, avoidable environmental risks and complex health emergencies.

WHO is working with countries to reorient health systems towards primary health care (PHC)—an approach that can help deliver 90% of essential health services while saving 60 million lives by 2030—to accelerate progress towards UHC.

WHO and partners also held a series of events dedicated to UHC Day on 11 December 2023.

More information is available at: <https://www.who.int/news/item/12-12-2023-universal-health-coverage-day-2023-focuses-on-building-resilience-of-health-systems>.

WHO CALLS ON GOVERNMENTS FOR URGENT ACTION TO INVEST IN UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE



The World Health Organization (WHO) has published the *2023 Global Health Expenditure Report*, which sheds new light on the evolution of global health spending at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Released ahead of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) Day, the report reveals that in 2021 global spending on health reached a new high of US\$ 9.8 trillion or 10.3% of global gross domestic product (GDP). Nevertheless, the distribution of spending remained grossly unequal.

Public spending on health had increased across the world, except in low-income countries where government health spending decreased and external health aid played an essential supporting role.

In 2021, about 11% of the world's population lived in countries that spent less than US\$ 50 per person per year, while the average per capita spending on health was around US\$ 4000 in high-income countries. Low-income countries accounted for only 0.24% of global health expenditure, despite having an 8% share of the world's population.

Investments in health need to continue

The record spending on health in 2021 demonstrated how countries prioritized public health during the pandemic even as economies and societies reeled from the massive disruptions it caused. However, the report also highlights that the scale of growth in public spending on health observed during this period is unlikely to be sustained, as countries shift focus to handle other economic priorities such as slowing growth, high inflation rates and increased debt servicing obligations associated with rising indebtedness.

“Sustained public financing on health is urgently needed to progress towards universal health coverage. It is especially critical at this time when the world is confronted by the climate crisis, conflicts and other complex emergencies. People’s health and well-being need to be protected by resilient health systems that can also withstand these shocks,” said Dr Bruce Aylward, WHO Assistant Director-General, Universal Health Coverage, Life Course.

WHO publishes new data on health spending every year. The global health expenditure database (GHED) is regarded as a global public good. It provides strategic information for policy-development, national planning, and monitoring, while also enhancing the transparency and accountability of governments to their citizens with respect to the use of public funds on health. The GHED provides comprehensive information on total health spending, spending by source, and health financing arrangements for over 190 countries, with data tracing back to the year 2000.

More information is available at: <https://www.who.int/news/item/11-12-2023-who-calls-on-governments-for-urgent-action-to-invest-in-universal-health-coverage>.

STATEMENT – COP28: CLIMATE CHANGE LEADS TO SUFFERING AND DESTRUCTION – URGENT ACTION NEEDED FOR SURVIVAL

Statement by Dr Hans Henri P. Kluge, WHO Regional Director for Europe



I am delighted to see such strong representation from our Region at COP28 this year – reflecting our joint concern and ambition for climate action to protect health. Thank you for taking the outcomes of this discussion to the first-ever Climate-Health Ministerial later today.

The climate crisis is a health crisis, which carries the urgent call and responsibility to protect the health of current and future generations. This summer, for the first time, we declared the climate crisis and extreme weather a health emergency for our Region. We are witnessing an escalation of heatwaves, floods, droughts and wildfires, all heavily impacting the health of our people – and each year new and disastrous climate records are set. Over past decades the number of extreme weather events has increased by a factor of 5 in the WHO European Region. Last year alone, 62 000 deaths were attributable to heatwaves in 35 countries in the Region.

Colleagues, let me highlight 3 strategic priorities that we must take forward.

First, we need robust policies and political commitments as the foundation for urgent action.

The Budapest Declaration adopted at the Seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health in July this year is a powerful example. It prioritizes urgent, multisectoral action on health challenges related to the triple crisis of climate change, environmental pollution and biodiversity loss – and calls for strengthening prevention, response and resilience.

Second, we need to foster strong partnerships to drive change and action in countries.

In Budapest, we launched the Partnership for Health Sector Climate Action, led by Ireland, to build a regional community of practice, sharing experience and research for climate-resilient, low-carbon health systems.

Cross-regional collaboration is also essential. We are spearheading a new transatlantic initiative for high-level climate and health policy dialogues to mobilize faster and more effective action, working in partnership between the WHO regions of Europe and the Americas.

Above all, the voices, concerns and ambition of young people must be heard. The Partnership on Youth, together with the Youth4Health initiative, are advancing youth engagement in our work and decision-making processes.

The full statement is available at: <https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/03-12-2023-statement-cop28-climate-change-is-causing-suffering-death-and-destruction-concerted-climate-action-is-our-only-hope-for-survival>.

POST-RC73: FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION ON THE HEALTH AND CARE WORKFORCE IN THE WHO EUROPEAN REGION 2023-2030

In a landmark decision (26 October 2023), the WHO Regional Committee, encompassing 53 countries, unanimously embraced a pivotal resolution in support of a new *Framework for Action on the Health and Care Workforce*. This unanimous decision marks a significant stride for the European Region, symbolizing a collective commitment to addressing the pressing challenges in health systems.

The journey to this momentous achievement began at a high-level meeting in Bucharest, Romania. It was here that the cornerstone of the journey, the Bucharest Declaration, was formulated. This Declaration not only underscored the shared vision but also laid the groundwork for the subsequent Framework for Action. The development of this Framework was a collaborative effort, shaped by the insights and aspirations of health workers themselves, whose voices have been instrumental throughout this process.

The Framework for Action and the accompanying Resolution are not just documents; they are a testament to our shared resolve to transform the health workforce landscape. They outline strategic pathways and actions necessary to empower and sustain our health and care workforce, which is pivotal in our fight against current and future health crises.

For more detailed information, please refer to the following links:

WHO/Europe's 53 Member States adopt historic resolution: [Read More](#)

Newly adopted resolution as a tool for health workforce crisis: [Read More](#)

Seventy-third Regional Committee for Europe: [Read More](#)

Additional resources:

[Podcast: The voices of health workers](#)

[Health workforce EURO](#)

[Health and care workforce in Europe: time to act](#)

Various stories and news on health and care workforce at WHO: [Read Stories](#)

THE QUADRIPARTITE LAUNCHES A GUIDE TO SUPPORT COUNTRIES IMPLEMENT ONE HEALTH APPROACH



The Quadripartite – consisting of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Environmental Programme, the World Health Organization and the World Organization for Animal Health – Collaboration on One Health released *A guide to Implementing the One Health Joint Plan of Action at National Level* to support countries to strengthen their One Health actions.

Recognizing the multitude of risks that a changing climate is having and will continue to have on the health of all life on earth, the launch took place at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28) in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. The launch coincided with the first-ever health day at COP28 as well as a climate and health high-level ministerial meeting.

The Guide is an operational addendum to the 2022 One Health Joint Plan of Action, signalling a strategic objective to country-focused implementation.

The guide outlines three pathways – governance, sectoral integration, and evidence and knowledge – and five steps to achieve One Health implementation.

One Health provides the opportunity to recognise shared interests, set common goals and drive towards teamwork to benefit the health of all nations. “*One of our main principles when developing the Guide is to make it applicable to all countries, regardless of their status of One Health implementation, and acknowledges transdisciplinary and diversity of stakeholders.*” Dr Amina Benyahia, Head a.i. of One Health Initiative, World Health Organization.

The ongoing COP28 negotiations highlight the critical role of One Health approaches in responding to climate challenges. 134 countries backed a [Climate and Health Declaration to place health at the heart of climate action](#) and accelerate the development of climate-resilient, sustainable and equitable health systems. The Guide will also support countries in implementing the future accord on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response for which One Health is a guiding principle.

The Quadripartite commits to catalyse, complement, and add value to existing global and regional One Health initiatives, aimed at strengthening capacity to address complex multidimensional health risks with more resilient health systems at all levels.

[The guide to Implementing the One Health Joint Plan of Action at National Level.](#)

[One Health Joint Plan of Action.](#)

More information is available at: <https://www.who.int/news/item/10-12-2023-the-quadripartite-launches-a-guide-to-support-countries-implement-one-health-approach>.

NEW WHO TOOLS TO SUPPORT ACTION ON NONCOMMUNICABLE DISEASES AND CLIMATE CHANGE



Every year unhealthy diets cause 11 million deaths globally – and our food systems contribute to one risk factor for noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) that threatens both our well-being and planetary health. At the 2023 UN Climate Change Conference (COP28), WHO/Europe presented initial findings from the report of an expert meeting on NCDs and climate change which explores multisectoral actions and priorities to effectively tackle major health and environmental concerns.

NCDs – including cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, chronic respiratory diseases and cancer – account for more than 90% of deaths in the WHO European Region. They are closely linked to risk factors such as unhealthy diets, physical inactivity, tobacco and alcohol consumption, as well as air pollution.

“Climate change presents risks to NCDs through various pathways. For example, a significant portion of cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, including lung cancer, are attributable to exposures to ambient air pollution, which in the European Region alone is estimated to cause nearly 570 000 premature deaths per year. As climate change amplifies the health effects of air pollution, policies that mitigate climate change while reducing air pollution can have major benefits for NCDs and for climate”, said Dr Francesca Racioppi, Head of the WHO European Centre for Environment and Health.

“We can find actions that promote both human health and planetary health. Our report helps to identify beneficial and effective policies that link the most common cause of death in Europe, NCDs, to climate change”, added Dr Gauden Galea, WHO/Europe Strategic Adviser to the Regional Director, Special Initiative on NCDs and Innovation (SNI).

Better diets, physical activity and more knowledge

The report is based on an expert meeting held by WHO/Europe in Bonn, Germany on 1-2 December 2022 and explores several ideas that could both limit the impact of climate change and make us healthier.

Some of the most impactful policies highlighted in the report include:

- regulatory approaches to improving diets;
- building capacity to protect health during climate change-related emergencies such as extreme weather events like heat waves or wildfires; and
- investments in transport planning that increase daily physical activity while reducing travel by private motor vehicles.

More information is available at: <https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/11-12-2023-new-who-tools-to-support-action-on-noncommunicable-diseases-and-climate-change>.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND WHO/EUROPE SIGN €12 MILLION AGREEMENT TO STRENGTHEN HEALTH INFORMATION SYSTEMS AND BOOST HEALTH DATA GOVERNANCE AND INTEROPERABILITY IN EUROPE

WHO/Europe and the European Commission have launched a €12 million project to enhance health information systems and data governance in the WHO European Region. This four-year initiative aims to improve health data usage by health-care providers, policy-makers, and patients, and to increase the interoperability and quality of health information systems across the 53 countries in the region, benefitting nearly 1 billion people.

The project involves developing capacity-building activities and assistance to address gaps and needs in health information systems and data governance, potentially expanding successful practices at regional levels. Dr Hans Henri P. Kluge, WHO Regional Director for Europe, emphasized the importance of effectively using health data to accelerate the adoption of new treatments and products.

Ms Sandra Gallina, Director-General for Health and Food Safety at the European Commission, highlighted the significance of robust health information systems and accessible health data in improving healthcare efficiency, safety, and personalization. The initiative is aligned with the European Health Data Space proposal, which aims to enhance public health within and beyond the EU.

The project will foster cooperation among countries, the European Commission, WHO/Europe, and external stakeholders, including the establishment of the Health Information Network for collaborative decision-making and knowledge exchange. It supports the EU Global Health Strategy, the European Programme of Work 2020–2025, the Regional Digital Health Action Plan for the WHO European Region 2023–2030, and the WHO Global Strategy on Digital Health 2020–2025.

More information is available at: <https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/11-12-2023-european-commission-and-who-europe-sign--12-million-agreement-to-strengthen-health-information-systems-and-boost-health-data-governance-and-interoperability-in-europe>.

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT (EP) ENDORSES REPORT ON MENTAL HEALTH



The European Parliament made a decisive move to tackle mental health issues in Europe with a landmark vote on 12 December 2023. Championed by rapporteur Sara Cerdas, the Parliament voted in favour of an own-initiative report, which garnered substantial support with 482 votes in favour, 94 against, and 32 abstentions. This report marks a significant step in addressing the rising concerns of mental health across Europe, calling for more direct funding and the identification of high-risk populations.

Sara Cerdas emphasized the universality of mental health vulnerabilities, stating that "anyone, at any time of their life, can find themselves in a situation of vulnerability." The report she presented aims to identify social determinants of health and proposes specific actions to mitigate these issues. It comes in the wake of the European Commission's comprehensive approach to mental health, presented in June, and follows close on the heels of EU ministers endorsing a series of recommendations for improving mental health.

The urgency of addressing mental health issues has been underscored by the alarming increase in mental health problems, particularly highlighted during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. With one in two EU citizens reporting emotional or psychosocial issues post-pandemic, as opposed to one in six before it, the report stresses the economic cost of inaction, estimated at €600 billion annually. The European Parliament's report goes beyond the Commission's recommendations and calls for "sufficient funding" to match the challenge's scale, including a direct fund for mental health research and innovation.

In response to the Parliament's vote, Matt Bolz-Johnson, Mental Health & Wellbeing Lead and Healthcare Advisor, from the European Organisation for Rare Diseases (EURORDIS) lauded the report for its dedication to a comprehensive mental health strategy, while Mental Health Europe expressed satisfaction with the increased commitment but hoped for stronger investment calls. Ms Kadri Simson, European Commissioner for Energy, welcomed the report, highlighting ongoing actions such as a cross-border training programme on mental health. The European Parliament's action signifies a turning point in the EU's approach to mental health, spotlighting the need for a strategic, well-funded, and holistic approach to mental health care in Europe.

More information is available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0457_EN.html.

FAR TOO MANY HOUSEHOLDS ACROSS THE EUROPEAN REGION ARE PUSHED INTO POVERTY AFTER PAYING FOR HEALTH CARE, FINDS NEW WHO/EUROPE REPORT

Rebuilding trust in and within our health systems is critical to achieving universal health coverage; Tallinn, 12 December 2023

As health leaders from the WHO European Region gathered in Tallinn, Estonia for the landmark Health Systems Conference, marking 15 years since the Tallinn Charter highlighted that people should not become poor due to ill health, a new WHO/Europe report covering 40 countries in Europe finds that millions of people are still struggling to pay for health care.

Health systems' heavy reliance on out-of-pocket payments means many people experience financial hardship when using health care or face barriers to access, resulting in unmet need. Out-of-pocket payments also push some people into poverty or make them even poorer. Globally, 4.5 billion people – more than half of humanity – are not covered by essential health services.

Paying for health care versus paying for food

New data from 2019 reveals concerning trends in health care affordability in the WHO European Region. Out of 40 countries, only 23 cover over 99% of their population with health care. In countries with gaps in coverage, catastrophic health spending, where households can't afford basic needs due to health care costs, is three times higher than in countries with better coverage. This spending is most pronounced among the poorest quintile of the population, where it can be two to five times higher than the national average.

In 28 countries, the incidence of catastrophic health spending has increased, with an average rise of 1.7 percentage points. However, in 12 countries, it decreased by an average of 1.8 percentage points. Out-of-pocket payments for outpatient medicines, medical products, and dental care are the main causes of financial hardship, particularly for the poorest households, with medicines accounting for 60% of catastrophic spending in these households.

The pandemic has exacerbated these issues, leading to increased out-of-pocket payments for private health care and medicines due to backlogs and barriers to access. The report highlights a significant gap in primary care coverage across many countries in the region.

[Can people afford to pay for health care? Evidence on financial protection in 40 countries in Europe.](#)

More information is available at: <https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/11-12-2023-far-too-many-households-across-the-european-region-are-pushed-into-poverty-after-paying-for-health-care--finds-new-who-europe-report>.

STATEMENT – WHAT WE NEED TO DO BETTER: A HEALTH SYSTEMS CHECK-UP AND PRESCRIPTION



REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
MINISTRY OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS



Statement by Dr Hans Henri P. Kluge, WHO Regional Director for Europe, opening the Tallinn Charter 15th Anniversary Health Systems Conference; 12 December 2023

Ms Karis, Minister Sikkut, honourable ministers, colleagues and friends,

What a great pleasure it is to open this meeting with you today.

It is a common perception that the world today is less safe, more unequal, more partisan and driven by unaccountable business interests than in the past. Growing dissatisfaction with the traditional political systems and with institutions, magnified by disinformation is a threat to the very fabric of our societies.

This is why we have designed this conference in a new way: engaging the health and care workforce, policy-makers and patients in producing the evidence base, as well as participating here today.

Patients such as Mira Dzhutankeeva, a 67-year-old woman living with diabetes, from Alamedin District in Kyrgyzstan, interviewed for one of the case studies we have developed. We'll be diving into these case studies in more detail this afternoon, and I encourage you to watch all 3 accompanying videos.

Mira said, "The most important thing – visit the doctor and take care of your health. I tell this to everyone".

It's a sentiment that I think sums up what many people – particularly older generations – feel when they think about their health and health systems.

As we know, the reality today is that our health systems and our societies cannot guarantee these conditions.

And with the long shadow cast by COVID-19, the climate crisis and conflict, the context under which health systems operate is ever-more complex.

Generating more resources for health, delivering more services, and doing so more efficiently is the conundrum that keeps many of us awake at night.

When I introduced the European Programme of Work in 2020, its starting point was to respond to citizens' legitimate expectations towards their health authorities.

Read the full statement at: <https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/12-12-2023-statement-what-we-need-to-do-better-a-health-systems-check-up-and-prescription>.

WHO CALLS ON COUNTRIES TO INCREASE TAXES ON ALCOHOL AND SUGARY SWEETENED BEVERAGES



The World Health Organization (WHO) released new data that show a low global rate of taxes being applied to unhealthy products such as alcohol and sugary sweetened beverages (SSBs). The findings highlight that the majority of countries are not using taxes to incentivize healthier behaviours. To help support countries WHO is also releasing a technical manual on alcohol tax policy and administration.

Globally 2.6 million people die from drinking alcohol every year and over 8 million from an unhealthy diet. Implementing tax on alcohol and SSBs will reduce these deaths.

Half of all countries taxing SSBs are also taxing water, which is not recommended by WHO. Although 108 countries are taxing some sort of sugar-sweetened beverage, globally, on average excise tax, a tax designated for a specified consumer product, represents just 6.6% of the price of soda.

At least 148 countries have applied excise taxes to alcoholic beverages at the national level. However, wine is exempted from excise taxes in at least 22 countries, most of which are in the European Region. Globally, on average, the excise tax share in the price of the most sold brand of beer is 17.2%. For the most sold brand of the most sold spirits type, it is 26.5%.

A 2017 study shows that taxes that increase alcohol prices by 50% would help avert over 21 million deaths over 50 years and generate nearly US\$17 trillion in additional revenues. This is equivalent to the total government revenue of eight of the world's largest economies in one year.

A recent Gallup Poll, conducted in collaboration with WHO and Bloomberg Philanthropies, found that the majority of people surveyed across all countries supported increasing taxes on unhealthy products such as alcohol and SSBs.

WHO recommends that excise tax should apply to all SSBs and alcoholic beverages.

The release of the alcohol tax manual follows a suite of already existing tax manuals including on tobacco and sugar sweetened beverages.

[Technical manual on alcohol tax policy and administration.](#)

[Gallup Poll.](#)

More information is available at: <https://www.who.int/news/item/05-12-2023-who-calls-on-countries-to-increase-taxes-on-alcohol-and-sugary-sweetened-beverages>.

NEW WHO MANUAL AIMS TO CURB DANGEROUS SPEEDING ON THE WORLD'S ROADS

Managing speed is key to reducing road traffic deaths and injuries

The World Health Organization (WHO) and partners launched a revised manual to help curb the scourge of road traffic deaths and injuries through managing speed on the world's roads today.

The second edition of the *Speed Management Manual* includes new case studies, data and guidance for decision-makers on setting and enforcing speed limits, modifying roads to reduce speed, making use of in-vehicle technologies, raising awareness of the dangers of speeding and tracking the impact of policies and actions. It urges countries to develop a comprehensive set of policies based on thorough assessments of their contexts.

“We’ve known that speed kills for decades, yet there is still much work to do to convince policy-makers and the public of the huge risks posed by speeding. This is especially true for areas with high numbers of pedestrians, cyclists and other vulnerable road users,” said Dr Matts-Ake Belin, Global Lead for the UN Decade for Action for Road Safety 2021-2030 at WHO.

[Speed Management Manual](#)

More information is available at: <https://www.who.int/news/item/05-12-2023-new-who-manual-aims-to-curb-dangerous-speeding-on-the-world-s-roads>.

STRENGTHENING RAPID RESPONSE AMID EMERGENCIES IN THE WESTERN BALKANS



The first WHO Emergency Medical Team (EMT) Initiative Awareness Meeting for the Western Balkans saw 48 policy-makers and key stakeholders from the Western Balkans and the Republic of Moldova discussing how to respond more swiftly and effectively to crises, including natural disasters, disease outbreaks and conflict.

Participants at the gathering in Serbia, organized by WHO with financial support from the European Union (EU), reflected on lessons learned from the responses to mounting worldwide health emergencies, including the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the earthquakes in Türkiye and Morocco, the ongoing Libyan crisis, and the war in Ukraine. EMT technical experts and international partners shared innovative and lifesaving approaches, and discussed strengthening the sub-regionalization of the EMT initiative.

Dr Vesna Turkulov, State Secretary at the Serbian Ministry of Health, explained, “EMTs play a pivotal role in the early phases of many emergency response scenarios, fulfilling specific functions within a country’s integrated health response framework.”

She stressed, “EMTs are an essential element for strengthening preparedness, response and resilience in health emergencies and, ultimately, for saving lives and alleviating the suffering of affected people and communities.”

Dr Fabio Scano, WHO Representative in Serbia, stated, “We are here today to take stock of the common experience and legacy of medical emergency response in the Western Balkans and Moldova, while taking concrete steps to join the WHO Emergency Medical Team initiative. This is in the spirit of solidarity and coordination, and to attain the highest possible standards while strengthening our health systems during an emergency.”

The EMT initiative

EMTs are organized groups of health professionals, such as doctors, nurses and paramedics, who help to provide essential and lifesaving health care to individuals and communities affected by natural disasters, armed conflicts, disease outbreaks and other health emergencies.

The EMT initiative is a global programme led by WHO and comprising a wide and diverse network of EMTs, academic institutions, stakeholders, and partners from across the humanitarian and global health emergency sectors.

Dr Maja Vučković-Krčmar, representing the Delegation of the EU to Serbia, pointed out, “Floods, wildfires and COVID-19 were strong wake-up calls for all of us to come together and get ready to fight whatever crises come our way.”

She added that creating EMTs that work according to the same principles across the Region and worldwide ensures a reliable and quick response. “This is what we all need to do, with the help of the WHO and the EU, linking us with the EU Civil Protection Mechanism to provide assistance within and outside our own borders.”

More information is available at: <https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/06-12-2023-strengthening-rapid-response-amid-emergencies-in-the-western-balkans>.

COUNTRIES PRACTICE COMMUNICATING POTENTIAL HAZARDS AND EMERGENCIES TO WHO



If, in a worst-case scenario, an explosion occurred at a private radiopharmaceutical facility in the WHO European Region, accidentally releasing radioactive Iodine-131, what information would WHO/Europe need to assess the hazards, communicate risk, and prepare the emergency response? How should Member States' health authorities respond, coordinate internally, and communicate?

That was the scenario put to more than 150 individuals from 43 States (26 from European Union/European Economic Area (EU/EEA) countries) who participated in the 2023 Joint

Assessment and Detection of Events (JADE). The simulation exercise provided a safe learning environment in which participants could assess whether the hazards presented to them should prompt them to notify WHO of a potential public health emergency of international concern. It enabled national focal points (NFPs) to review their communication channels and the way they collaborate with relevant stakeholders and to practice operational communication with the WHO Regional Contact Point (RCP).

“The JADE exercise is a valuable tool for NFPs to practice their obligations under the International Health Regulations,” said Nicolas Isla, JADE Exercise Director at WHO/Europe. *“In addition, by identifying any gaps in their radionuclear response plans and procedures and testing their communication and collaboration channels with the relevant radiation safety authorities, countries can gain crucial insights into how to strengthen preparedness for and response to health emergencies under the International Health Regulations.”*

Risk communication channels

During the exercise, NFPs demonstrated their efficiency by coordinating quickly with experts specializing in radiation safety, the environment, civil protection, and food safety. They also paid critical attention to risk communication, so vital in times of crisis. The exercise highlighted the well-established communication channels under the IHR in most countries in the Region.

“The JADE exercise was useful as it allowed us to re-evaluate our response strategies, collaborate with colleagues, and manage internal procedures more efficiently,” said the National IHR Focal Point of Portugal.

More information is available at: <https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/07-12-2023-countries-practice-communicating-potential-hazards-and-emergencies-to-who>.

WHO RELEASES GUIDELINES ON CHRONIC LOW BACK PAIN



The World Health Organization (WHO) released its first-ever guidelines on managing chronic low back pain (LBP) in primary and community care settings, listing interventions for health workers to use and also to not use during routine care.

Low back pain is the leading cause of disability globally. In 2020, approximately 1 in 13 people, equating to 619 million people, experienced LBP, a 60% increase from 1990. Cases of LBP are expected to rise to an estimated 843 million by 2050, with the greatest growth anticipated in Africa and Asia, where populations are getting larger and people are living longer.

The personal and community impacts and costs associated with LBP are particularly high for people who experience persisting symptoms. Chronic primary LBP referring to pain that lasts for more than three months that is not due to an underlying disease or other condition – accounts for the vast majority of chronic LBP presentation in primary care, commonly estimated to represent at least 90% of cases. For these reasons, WHO is issuing guidelines on chronic primary LBP.

“To achieve universal health coverage, the issue of low back pain cannot be ignored, as it is the leading cause of disability globally,” said Dr Bruce Aylward, WHO Assistant Director-General, Universal Health Coverage, Life Course. *“Countries can address this ubiquitous but often-overlooked challenge by incorporating key, achievable interventions, as they strengthen their approaches to primary health care.”*

With the guidelines, WHO recommends non-surgical interventions to help people experiencing chronic primary LBP. These interventions include:

- education programmes that support knowledge and self-care strategies;
- exercise programmes;
- some physical therapies, such as spinal manipulative therapy and massage;
- psychological therapies, such as cognitive behavioural therapy; and
- medicines, such as non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medicines.

LBP affects life quality and is associated with comorbidities and higher mortality risks. Individuals experiencing chronic LBP, especially older persons, are more likely to experience poverty, prematurely exit the workforce, and accumulate less wealth for retirement. At the same time, older people are more likely to experience adverse events from interventions, reinforcing the importance of tailoring care to the needs of each person. Addressing chronic LBP among older populations can facilitate healthy ageing, so older persons have the functional ability to maintain their own well-being.

More information is available at: <https://www.who.int/news/item/07-12-2023-who-releases-guidelines-on-chronic-low-back-pain>.

MORE THAN A THIRD OF WOMEN EXPERIENCE LASTING HEALTH PROBLEMS AFTER CHILDBIRTH, NEW RESEARCH SHOWS

Beyond pregnancy: experts call for greater attention to the long-term health challenges of women and girls in special Lancet Series



Every year, at least 40 million women are likely to experience a long-term health problem caused by childbirth, according to a new study published today in *The Lancet Global Health*. Part of a special Series on maternal health, the study shows a high burden of postnatal conditions that persist in the months or even years after giving birth. These include pain during sexual intercourse (dyspareunia), affecting

more than a third (35%) of postpartum women, low back pain (32%), anal incontinence (19%), urinary incontinence (8-31%), anxiety (9-24%), depression (11-17%), perineal pain (11%), fear of childbirth (tokophobia) (6-15%) and secondary infertility (11%).

The authors of the paper call for greater recognition within the healthcare system of these common problems, many of which occur beyond the point where women typically have access to postnatal services. Effective care throughout pregnancy and childbirth is also a critical preventive factor, they argue, to detect risks and avert complications that can lead to lasting health issues after birth.

“Many postpartum conditions cause considerable suffering in women’s daily life long after birth, both emotionally and physically, and yet they are largely underappreciated, underrecognized, and underreported,” said Dr Pascale Allotey, Director of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Research at WHO. *“Throughout their lives, and beyond motherhood, women need access to a range of services from health-care providers who listen to their concerns and meet their needs – so they not only survive childbirth but can enjoy good health and quality of life.”*

Despite their prevalence, these conditions have been largely neglected in clinical research, practice and policy, the paper notes. During a literature review spanning the last 12 years, the authors identified no recent high-quality guidelines to support effective treatment for 40% of the 32 priority conditions analysed in their study, and found not a single high-quality guideline from a low- or middle-income country. Data gaps are also significant: there were no nationally representative or global studies for any of the conditions identified through the research.

Taken as a whole, the Series, titled *Maternal health in the perinatal period and beyond*, calls for greater attention to the long-term health of women and girls – after and also before pregnancy.

The Lancet study is available at: [Neglected medium-term and long-term consequences of labour and childbirth: a systematic analysis of the burden, recommended practices, and a way forward-](#)

[Maternal health in the perinatal period and beyond](#)

More information is available at: <https://www.who.int/news/item/07-12-2023-more-than-a-third-of-women-experience-lasting-health-problems-after-childbirth>.

RISING THREAT OF ANTIMICROBIAL RESISTANCE (AMR) IN EUROPE: INSIGHTS FROM WHO/EUROPE SURVEY



In a recent revelation, the World Health Organization's European division (WHO/Europe) has brought to light the growing challenge of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in the region. Acknowledged as one of the top ten global public health threats by WHO, AMR is responsible for an estimated 5 million deaths annually, with over half a million occurring in the European and central Asian countries.

A comprehensive survey conducted across 14 Member States in the WHO European Region, including countries in the Western Balkans, the Caucasus, and central Asia, has unearthed critical insights into the public's knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours regarding antibiotic use and AMR. The study, which is the first of its kind in these regions, mirrors the methodology of similar surveys in the European Union, enabling a pan-European perspective on this pressing issue.

The survey involved 8221 participants, with alarming results indicating a significant misuse of antibiotics. Notably, half of the respondents reported taking oral antibiotics in the past year, often for viral infections like colds and flu, against which antibiotics are ineffective. This misuse is compounded by the fact that a third of the respondents across the 14 countries consumed antibiotics without a medical prescription, a stark contrast to the 8% reported in the EU.

The lack of awareness is a concerning factor, with only 16% of respondents answering all awareness-related questions correctly. This gap in knowledge underscores the urgent need for targeted public health communication and education to combat AMR effectively.

Mr Robb Butler, Director of WHO/Europe's Division of Communicable Diseases, Environment and Health, emphasizes the need for education and stricter enforcement of regulations against over-the-counter sales of antibiotics without a prescription. He also points out the role of social and cultural norms in driving AMR, such as not completing antibiotic courses or sharing them with others.

Dr Danilo Lo Fo Wong, Regional Adviser for the Control of Antimicrobial Resistance at WHO/Europe, stresses the importance of integrating behavioural science and cultural context analyses into AMR control strategies. These approaches are vital in understanding and addressing the behaviours that contribute to AMR, such as inappropriate prescribing and hygiene practices.

The WHO/Europe survey not only highlights the critical state of AMR in the region but also underscores the need for multifaceted interventions, combining regulatory, educational, and behavioural strategies to curb the rise of superbugs and preserve the effectiveness of antimicrobial medicines.

The study is available at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpubh.2023.1274818/full>.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS: WHO HEALTH FOR ALL FILM FESTIVAL (HAFF) – FIFTH EDITION



Deadline: 31 January 2024

The World Health Organization (WHO) is thrilled to announce the call for submissions for the fifth edition of its esteemed Health for All Film Festival (HAFF). Recognizing the profound impact of audio-visual storytelling in health communication, HAFF aims to elevate the role of short films in raising awareness and driving conversations around critical global health issues. Categories for submission:

- Better Health and Well-being
- Universal Health Coverage
- Health Emergencies
- Physical Activity and Health
- Migrants and Refugees Health
- Student Film
- Very Short Film (1'00" to 2'59")

Filmmakers and video artists worldwide are invited to submit their works in the following genres:

- Documentary
- Fiction
- Animation

Film Duration: Films should be between 3 to 8 minutes, except for the Very Short Film category.

This edition of HAFF presents a unique platform for film and video innovators, particularly from the rehabilitation community, to spotlight and advocate for health-related themes within the specified categories.

Contact Information: For any queries or additional information, reach out to the HAFF team at filmfestival@who.int.

More information is available at: <https://www.who.int/initiatives/health-for-all-film-festival>.

WHO IN BIH

Fifth School of Immunisation – Communication in Conducting Immunisation

The "5th School of Immunization" conference, organized by the WHO Country Office in Bosnia and Herzegovina and held in Sarajevo on 14-15 December 2023, played a crucial role in addressing contemporary challenges in public health, particularly in the realm of immunization. This conference, under the theme "**Communication in conducting immunization**," brought to the forefront the critical issue of misinformation in the field of vaccines and the indispensable need for clear, trustworthy communication to build and maintain public confidence in vaccination programs.

Throughout the two-day event, a diverse array of topics was covered, emphasizing the need for enhanced communication strategies to effectively counteract the prevalent misinformation and scepticism surrounding vaccines. The discussions were not limited to theoretical aspects; they also included practical strategies for enhancing the public's understanding and acceptance of crucial vaccines like those for pneumococcal diseases and HPV. This focus highlighted the importance of these vaccines in public health and the necessity for their increased coverage.

The conference facilitated a valuable exchange of knowledge and experiences among health professionals and experts from various health organizations, including those from WHO. By bringing these experts together, the event aimed to foster a collaborative environment conducive to strengthening immunization programmes. This gathering was not just a platform for sharing best practices but also a think tank for generating innovative approaches to improve public health outcomes through effective immunization strategies.



HEALTH TOPICS

Climate change

The global climate is changing. This affects human health, well-being and life on earth. In the near future it will lead to an amplification of current health problems, as well as new risks and pressures for the environment and the social and economic determinants of health.

https://www.who.int/europe/health-topics/climate-change#tab=tab_1

Digital health

Digital health is the field of knowledge and practice associated with the development and use of digital technologies to improve health. Digital health expands the concept of eHealth to include digital consumers, with a wider range of smart devices and connected equipment. The following areas are commonly understood as being part of, or related to, digital health: artificial intelligence, big data, blockchain, health data, health information systems, the infodemic, the Internet of Things, interoperability and telemedicine.

https://www.who.int/europe/health-topics/digital-health#tab=tab_1

Mental health

Mental health should be seen as a valued source of human capital or well-being in society. It contributes to individual and population health, happiness and welfare, enables social interaction, cohesion and security, and feeds national output and labour force productivity. We need good mental health to succeed in all areas of life.

Yet, individuals with mental ill-health are often shunned and denied access to care, with services for promoting and protecting mental health and preventing ill-health often starved of resources. It is vital to not only address the needs of people with defined mental disorders but also to protect and promote the mental health of all people, and recognize the intrinsic value of positive mental health.

https://www.who.int/europe/health-topics/mental-health#tab=tab_1

Vaccines and immunization

Immunization is one of the most cost-effective ways to save lives and promote good health and well-being throughout the life course. Every year, vaccines save millions of lives, and millions more people are protected from disease and disability. By preventing many serious early-childhood infectious diseases, like polio and measles, immunization helps children grow into healthy adults. Other vaccines given early in life help prevent liver and cervical cancer many years later, and vaccination of older adults protects them from influenza, COVID-19 and other serious diseases.

The WHO European Region has made great progress in recent decades on many of these fronts, but there are still gaps in vaccination coverage that put especially the most vulnerable at risk. Access to vaccines, including against human papillomavirus and SARS-CoV2, is also not equitable within and among countries.

https://www.who.int/europe/health-topics/vaccines-and-immunization#tab=tab_1

WHO EMERGENCIES

Health emergencies list

The health emergencies list details the disease outbreaks, disasters and humanitarian crises where WHO plays an essential role in supporting countries to respond to and recover from emergencies with public health consequences.

[UNFPA, UNICEF and WHO Regional Directors call for immediate action to halt attacks on health care in Gaza](#)

[COVID-19](#)

[Earthquakes in Afghanistan](#)

[Syria](#)

WHO CAMPAIGNS

Universal Health Coverage Day; 12 December 2023

Universal Health Coverage Day on 12 December 2023 is the annual rallying point for the growing movement for health for all. It marks the anniversary of the United Nations' historic and unanimous endorsement of universal health coverage in 2012.

<https://www.who.int/campaigns/universal-health-coverage-day>

PUBLICATIONS

Speed management: a road safety manual for decision-makers and practitioners, 2nd edition

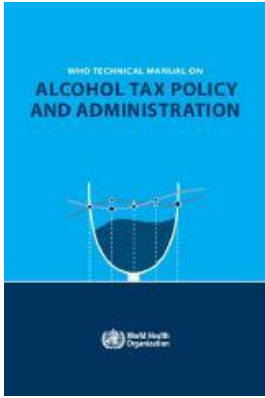


Managing speed is key to improving road safety. The speed at which a vehicle travels influences the risk of a crash, the severity of the injuries received and the chance of death.

The second edition of the Speed Management Manual includes new case studies, data and guidance for decision-makers on setting and enforcing speed limits, modifying roads to reduce speed, making use of in-vehicle technologies, raising awareness of the dangers of speeding and tracking the impact of policies and actions.

<https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/speed-management--a-road-safety-manual-for-decision-makers-and-practitioners.-2nd-edition>

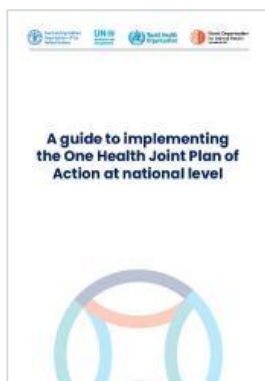
WHO technical manual on alcohol tax policy and administration



The WHO technical manual on alcohol tax policy and administration is a practical guide and a call to action for policymakers and others involved in alcohol tax policymaking to develop strong policies considering each country's unique market structure, tax administration capacity, and political economy. It also includes country case studies and summaries of evidence on alcohol tax globally.

<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240082793>

A guide to implementing the One Health Joint Plan of Action at national level



The guide for implementing the One Health Joint Plan of Action (OH JPA) at the national level offers practical steps for countries to integrate and strengthen One Health initiatives. It outlines three main pathways: Governance, policy, and advocacy; Organizational development and sectoral integration; and enhancing Data systems and knowledge exchange.

<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240082069>

Can people afford to pay for health care? Evidence on financial protection in 40 countries in Europe



Financial protection – affordable access to health care – is undermined when out-of-pocket payments for health care lead to financial hardship (impoverishing and catastrophic health spending) or create a barrier to access, resulting in unmet need for health care. This report summarizes the findings of a new study of financial protection in 40 countries in Europe, including the whole of the European Union, in 2019 or the latest available year before COVID-19. It finds that out-of-pocket payments led to financial hardship and unmet need in every country in the study and are consistently most likely to affect households in the poorest quintile of the population.

The report identifies five coverage policy choices that countries should avoid because they undermine financial protection, equity, efficiency and resilience. It also identifies policy choices that have strengthened financial protection in countries with a low incidence of financial hardship and unmet need.

<https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/374504>

WHO FACTSHEET

[Climate change](#)

WHO STORIES

The long-term casualty of conflict: mental health

<https://www.who.int/europe/news-room/photo-stories/item/the-long-term-casualty-of-conflict--mental-health>

Managing diabetes while fleeing from war – Artur’s story

<https://www.who.int/europe/news-room/feature-stories/item/managing-diabetes-while-fleeing-from-war---artur-s-story>

Knocked back by COVID-19 reinfection – the experience of Abbie, a British nurse living with long COVID

<https://www.who.int/europe/news-room/feature-stories/item/knocked-back-by-covid-19-reinfection---the-experience-of-abbie--a-british-nurse-living-with-long-covid>

WHO EVENTS

Fiftieth anniversary of the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI); 1 January-31 December 2024

Vaccines have emerged as a cornerstone of public health, preventing the spread of deadly diseases and saving countless lives.

The [Expanded Programme on Immunization](#) (EPI), an initiative launched by the World Health Organization in 1974, stands as a global endeavour to ensure equitable access to life-saving vaccines for every child, regardless of their geographic location or socioeconomic status. Over the past five decades, EPI has evolved and achieved remarkable milestones that reshaped the global health landscape.

The 50th anniversary of EPI in 2024 provides a pivotal occasion to celebrate the programme's achievements, highlight its impact on lives saved, and catalyse renewed efforts to strengthen routine immunization initiatives.

What is EPI?

Building on the momentum of the smallpox eradication effort, EPI was initiated with the goal of providing universal access to life-saving vaccines for children worldwide. This programme, which is now commonly referred to as the Essential Programme on Immunization, seeks to safeguard individuals of all ages through comprehensive immunization efforts. Today, every country has a national immunization programme, and vaccines are universally recognized as among the safest, most cost-effective, and successful public health interventions to prevent fatalities and enhance the quality of life.

[https://www.who.int/news-room/events/detail/2024/01/01/default-calendar/50th-anniversary-of-the-expanded-programme-on-immunization-\(epi\)](https://www.who.int/news-room/events/detail/2024/01/01/default-calendar/50th-anniversary-of-the-expanded-programme-on-immunization-(epi))

WHO VIDEOS

Check out our official video channel on YouTube for the latest video news on our work from around the globe:

<https://www.youtube.com/c/who/playlists>.

PODCASTS

[Global Health Matters: "Dialogues: a conversation with Vidya Krishnan."](#)

[Episode #108 - How can you protect your child's vision?](#)

SOURCES

- <https://www.who.int/>
- <https://www.un.org/en/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/c/whoregionalofficeforeurope>
- <https://www.wada-ama.org/en>
- <https://www.fda.gov/>
- <https://www.thelancet.com/>

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