

SUPPORT TO UKRAINE FOR DEVELOPING A MODERN PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEM



A project funded by the European Union and implemented by a consortium consisting of GFA Consulting Group GmbH, Hamburg, and the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, Helsinki. The project continues its activities to assist Ukraine with a focus on advancing its progress towards EU accession under Component 1 and supporting the establishment of a modern Blood Safety System under Component 2.

Project Newsletter September 2024

World Blood Donor Day: Highlighting the Importance of Voluntary Non-Remunerated Blood Donation

The World Health Organization, WHO, focuses particular attention and recognition on 9 days that WHO Member States have mandated as "official" global public health days. World Blood Donor Day, WBDD, is one of these 9 days.

Among these days, World Blood Donor Day is the only one that is not dedicated to a specific disease or health hazard like AIDS, TB, or tobacco but it is instead dedicated to recognising healthy selfless individuals who have voluntarily donated their blood to save the lives of people unknown to them.

The global theme for World Blood Donor Day changes each year but, in all cases, it is simply to say thank you to Voluntary Non-Remunerated Blood Donors, VNRBDs, for your life-saving gifts of blood.

In spite of all medical advances in treatment, there is still no substitute for blood in many medical conditions ranging from bleeding disorders to haematological malignancies to major surgeries and casualties. Despite all medical advances in genetics and biological industries, the only source of blood is still human donation.



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And in spite of all medical advances in laboratory testing, VNRBDs are still the safest source of blood, they are not only safe, but they have been and will remain the most reliable source of blood in emergencies as is now being witnessed under the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukrainian territories.

The approach for this year's WBDD was to celebrate it in Ukraine within the framework of WHO and under the leadership and guidance of the Ministry of Health of Ukraine (MoH) with the aim of uniting the efforts of the MoH, Ukrainian Transplant Coordination Centre (UTCC), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and the EU project "Support to Ukraine for Developing a Modern Public Health System" in recognising the value of voluntary unpaid blood donations.

On World Blood Donor Day 2024, representatives of the EU project "Support to Ukraine for Developing a Modern Public Health System" participated in a press conference organised by the Ministry of Health and UTCC aimed to highlight the importance of regular voluntary non remunerated blood donation. The project is honoured to be part of the campaign aimed at raising awareness of the importance of VNRBD and supporting the restructuring processes of the blood transfusion system in Ukraine. During the press conference, the new promotional video of the VNRBD campaign "Give blood and bring a friend with you" was launched to raise awareness about the importance of regular voluntary blood donation and to promote the key messages of the campaign.



World Blood Donor Day: Highlighting the Importance of Voluntary Non-Remunerated Blood Donation

This video aims to urge people to encourage their friends to donate blood. It highlights that one donor can save up to three lives, and two donors can save twice as many.

The key messages of the campaign focus on several important aspects:

- **Regular Donations Save Lives:** Consistent and voluntary blood donations are crucial for emergency situations, medical treatments, and surgeries.
- **Community Involvement:** Encouraging friends and family to donate together fosters a community spirit and increases the donor base.
- **Safety and Quality:** Voluntary donations ensure the highest standards of safety, minimising risks of infectious diseases.
- **Educational Outreach:** Educating the public about the blood donation process, eligibility criteria, and the impact their donations have on patients' lives.



Among other activities, the project supported the organisation of the Fifth Art donation 2024 Poster Contest, traditionally organised by the NGO "Blood Agents", this year with significant support from the UTCC. The theme for this year's contest was "Caring starts with yourself." Public and artists from across the country submitted a total of 162 different posters and paintings, each designed to illustrate compelling stories related to blood donation to motivate donors to prioritise their health, an essential condition for regular and long-term donation. The aim was not only to encourage blood donation but also to emphasise the importance of personal health care as the first step in the journey of giving.

The government of Ukraine pays a lot of attention to blood safety and the MoH and UTCC are leading a huge effort to restructure and rebuild the blood system on the basis of VNRBDs to ensure safe, adequate and timely blood supply to all Ukrainian citizens. As a project, we are very proud and honoured to be part of Ukraine's activities in this area.

The project remains committed to raising awareness about the importance of VNRBD and supporting initiatives that enhance the blood donation process, through continued education, community engagement, and structural improvements. We strive to ensure that every patient in need has access to safe and sufficient blood supplies.



The Project supported participation of the representatives of the Ministry of Health of Ukraine in the Polish-Ukrainian-Swedish trilateral meeting

The Ministry of Health of Ukraine (MoH) continues to work on the establishment of the single regulatory authority in Ukraine that will implement the state policy in the field of manufacturing, market authorisation, quality control, safety and efficiency of medicinal products, as stipulated by the Law of Ukraine "On Medicinal Products" dated 28. 07.2022 No. 2469-IX (State Control Authority (SCA)), based on the model of the relevant regulatory authorities of the European Union Member States, as well as other countries with Stringent Regulatory Authorities (SRAs). To achieve this truly ambitious goal, there is an urgent need to deepen relations and develop cooperation between Ukraine and the EU Member States and other countries with strict regulatory authorities in the pharmaceutical sector.



On 2-3 July 2024, following the invitation of Grzegorz Cessak, President of the Polish Registration Authority for Medicinal Products, Medical Devices and Biocidal Products (URPLW MiPB), and supported by the EU Project "Support to Ukraine for Developing a Modern Public Health System", a Polish-Ukrainian-Swedish trilateral meeting was held in Warsaw (Poland) with the participation of representatives of the Ministry of Health, the Swedish Medicines Agency (Läkemedelsverket), and URPLW MiPB.

The MoH signed two memoranda of understanding and cooperation in the pharmaceutical sector, in particular with Läkemedelsverket and URPLW MiPB.



During the visit, the MoH presented an overview of the Ukrainian regulatory system medicines and medical devices and shared a reform plan. Colleagues from Läkemedelsverket and URPLW MiPB also shared overviews of the regulatory framework for medicines and medical devices in their countries.

Summing up the visit, I would like to note that the Polish system of reforming the regulation of the pharmaceutical sector and the Polish experience are extremely interesting for Ukraine at this stage of reform, taking into account that 20 years ago Poland successfully completed its integration into the EU and joined the community as an equal member. This is the key task for Ukraine. The Swedish pharmaceutical regulator Läkemedelsverket is one of the best regulators in the EMA system. The experience of these two countries and the partnership with their national regulatory authorities will certainly help Ukraine to successfully reform its pharmaceutical regulatory system in line with the EU acquis.

On 25 June 2024, Ukraine and the EU officially launched accession negotiations in Luxembourg. Although there is still a lot of work to be done, Ukraine has demonstrated its willingness to work closely with the national regulatory authorities of the EU Member States.

Iryna Stoliarchuk

Advisor to the Deputy Minister of
the MoH of Ukraine



Alona Vydiuk

the Junior non-key legal expert of EU Project "Support to Ukraine for Developing a Modern Public Health System"

On 25 June, the first Intergovernmental Conference on Ukraine's Accession to the EU took place in Luxembourg, officially launching negotiations on Ukraine's membership in the European Union. This event was definitely a historic moment for the country as a whole. The accession process is a catalyst for reforms in all areas of life in Ukraine, including the healthcare sector, which is overseen by the Ministry of Health.

European integration processes at the Ministry of Health are currently very powerful and dynamic: implementation of the EU acquis into the national legislation of Ukraine, cooperation with the EU institutions on key topics, strengthening bilateral cooperation with the Member States, preparation for screening meetings with the European Commission, participation of Ukraine in the Health Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), etc.

As part of my remit, I am actively involved in the approximation of Ukrainian legislation with EU law in the field of mental health, including suicide prevention and drug use disorders co-occurring with other mental health disorders. In my opinion, mental health is one of the biggest global challenges of the future.

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Along with inflation, poverty, and loss of livelihoods, mental health is one of the biggest challenges of our time, according to people all over the world, including Ukraine

Olena Zelenska

First Lady of Ukraine

My area of responsibility is therefore extremely sensitive and requires great attention to detail and legal expertise. My experience as a legal expert has been rich in various areas of human relations, but the key is my attorney practice, which helps me to immerse myself in all the nuances and complexities of legal issues.

Furthermore, my project colleagues and I participated in the 35th session of the OECD Health Committee and prepared theses for the Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Health of Ukraine for European Integration on the following topics: "Mental health", "Understanding differences in health spending – Price and volume effects, and what can be learned from them" and "How do health system features influence health system performance?"



We have reached an agreement with the OECD Secretariat that Ukraine will present its unique experience in overcoming the crisis, ensuring rapid response to threats, lessons learned for building health system resilience at the next meeting in December 2024, and agreed to hold consultations on the possibility of establishing an informal group with the participation of Ukraine under the Committee to discuss these issues. In addition, we took part in a series of talks with representatives of DG Santé, heads of foreign delegations from the United States, Israel, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Romania, and Austria, during which we agreed to cooperate on the creation of a joint platform on threat response. This was the first time that Ukraine participated in the work of the Health Committee as a candidate country, taking an active position during the 35th session of the OECD Health Committee, making a significant contribution to the work of the Committee.

As part of the expert team, I am currently actively preparing for the next screening meeting with the European Commission, which is scheduled for February 2025.

We are preparing responses to the European Commission's questions on the current state and progress of approximation of Ukrainian healthcare legislation and policies to the EU acquis, developing tables of correspondence, preparing for ONE VOICE roundtables with experts from various healthcare areas (government, public sector, business, science and education), holding discussions to form a common negotiating position, preparing presentations for the bilateral meeting.

Personally, I am inspired by an inextinguishable desire to acquire new knowledge, to study the international experience of advanced European countries, and to cooperate with EU institutions. This is the main driving force that motivates me to work in the field of European integration and to participate in the negotiation process to achieve the key goal of Ukraine's accession to the European Union.

I am convinced that our expert work will lead to positive results for the entire country and, in particular, to strengthening the healthcare system and Ukraine's membership in the EU.

New stepstone established for further European integration for Ukrainian health sector with the support of our EU-funded project

The project "Support to Ukraine for Developing a Modern Public Health System" funded by the European Union has been supporting public health reform in Ukraine and alignment with the European Union since 2019. Starting from 2023, the focus of the project has been driven by the intensive process of European integration. This project is implemented by GFA Consulting Group GmbH in consortium with the Finnish Institute for health and welfare.

Preparing Ukraine for EU membership and bringing its health system closer to that of the EU Member States involves many different aspects, such as introducing national legislation aligned with the EU to improve the quality of services and patient safety, e.g. in relation to blood, tissues, medical devices, asbestos, etc. It can take the form of support to establish practical mechanisms and capacity to participate in EU cross-border health care, where patients can seek care in other EU countries. However, for many people, EU integration seems difficult to grasp in practical terms and therefore not easy to understand.

This article aims to give a practical insight into European integration by following the Deputy Minister for European Integration in the Ministry of Health of Ukraine, Ms Maryna Slobodnichenko and her team participation in the 2-day meeting of the OECD's 35th Health Committee, which took place in Paris from 10 to 12 June 2024.



It was the first time that Ukraine participated in the work of the Health Committee, marking that Ukraine obtained the status as an accession country in the OECD. This took place just a few days after the European Union announced to start membership negotiations with Ukraine and thus, formed an additional stepstone in the unbroken chain of progress Ukraine has achieved in the European integration.

As a senior expert of the EU project «Support to Ukraine for Developing a Modern Public Health System», I attended the meeting of the Health Committee in support of the Deputy Minister, together with the project's national experts Alona Vydiuk, Natalia Vasylenko and Andrii Kudria, and Yuriy Torlak, Head of the International Cooperation Department.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) was established in 1961, as the successor to the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation which organised the European recipients of Marshall Plan aid for the reconstruction of Europe after World War II. One of the side events took place in the beautiful Marshall Room in OECD's headquarters. It was in this room that the European countries signed the Marshall Plan, which was instrumental in raising Europe from the ashes after WWII and laid the foundation for today's economic prosperity, democracy, and human rights shared by most European countries. An important reminder that a better life is possible, even after the successful conclusion of a war.

The OECD is an intergovernmental organisation, with 38 member countries, including 22 EU Member States, committed to democracy and the market economy. As such, the OECD is important for Ukraine in its efforts to align its internal market with that of the EU.

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The majority of OECD members are ranked as "very high-income countries" in the Human Development Index, earning them the nickname the "club of the rich". In 2024, the total population of the member countries will be 1.38 billion people with an average life expectancy of 80 years, producing 62% of the world's nominal GDP. The OECD is an official observer to the United Nations, and Ukraine's proactive participation in the OECD provides an opportunity to further expand its participation in international organisations and the global market, including in the area of medicines and medical devices.

The EU has full participant status in the OECD, which allows it to participate on an equal footing with members countries, albeit without the right to vote. The EU is a member of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC), the body through which the OECD sets the standard for cooperation with developing countries. The EU participates through its delegations in the OECD's governing bodies, which steer and plan the OECD's work. EU counsellors and experts from the European Commission, Agencies, the European Central Bank and the External Action Service engage in regular dialogue in the OECD technical committees on taxation, agriculture, health, statistics, trade, investment, climate, digitalisation, education, employment, social affairs, innovation, development cooperation and many other issues.

To this end, Ukraine's active participation in OECD affairs provides an exclusive opportunity for Ukraine to participate in the planning and development of standards that will have an impact, including on the EU. The OECD is funded by contributions from member countries and had a total budget of €338.3 million in 2023. The EU is a major contributor and its voluntary contributions represent one third part of this type of income for the OECD.

The objective of the Health Committee is to foster improvements in the performance of Member's/ Partner's health and long-term care systems, related to:

- 1 financial sustainability, access and efficiency;
- 2 better public health policies and prevention and promotion;
- 3 provision of high-quality, people-centred health and care to all.

The Committee holds bi-annual meetings, organises regular teleconferences, hosts the annual Health Forum and organises ministerial meetings. The Health Committee includes expert groups and working parties on:

- Patient Reported Indicator Surveys,
- Health Care Quality and Outcomes,
- Economics of Public Health,
- Pharmaceuticals and Medical Devices
- and on Fiscal Sustainability of Health Systems.

It was noted that there is no group on improving the resilience of health systems in times of armed conflicts.

The OECD is a platform for comparing policy experiences, addressing common problems, identifying best practices, and coordinating the domestic and international policies of its members. The OECD is recognised as a highly influential producer of data, publications, annual evaluations and rankings of member countries.

New stepstone established for further European integration for the Ukraine health sector with the support of our EU-funded project

Participation in the work of the OECD and, in particular, in the Health Committee, is a unique opportunity for Ukraine to obtain policy support, to make Ukraine visible and to support other countries on issues where Ukraine has special experience and knowledge. In preparation for the Health Committee meeting, these topics were discussed with the Deputy Minister and the MoH, and it was agreed that Ukraine would particularly benefit from receiving best practices in human resources, mental health, supply chain, quality and efficiency. Healthcare resilience in times of armed conflicts was identified as an issue where Ukraine could bring new practices and policy advice to the OECD, based on its experience.

With the priorities set by the MoH, the topics of particular relevance to Ukraine on the agenda of the 35th session of the Health Committee, were:

- mental health,
- the use of AI in healthcare,
- accelerated use of telemedicine,
- improved cancer prevention and control,
- recent acknowledgement about HR,
- issues related to effectiveness & cost-containment,
- analysis of countries' preparedness for crisis situations.

The Health Committee meeting began by reviewing the outcome of the Ministerial Meeting and High-Level Policy Forum on People-Centred Health Innovation, held on 22-23 January 2024, as well as the results of the first meeting of the health expert group on Artificial Intelligence (AI).

During the session it was concluded that it is important to utilise AI in the health sector to ensure continuity of services.

The session on mental health highlighted the general deterioration of mental health worldwide, especially among the younger generation alongside the emergence of new technologies, including social medias. It was concluded that there is a need to strengthen the capacity of health and social services to promote and prevent mental health disorders. The need to adhere to the OECD's integrated approach to mental health was emphasised and the improvement of data on mental health was identified as a common problem. In her speech, M. Slobodnichenko informed about the adoption of the resolution on mental health in armed conflicts and disasters at the 77th World Health Assembly.

This resolution was proposed by Ukraine and the Netherlands and is an important step towards a world where everyone has access to the help they need in the most difficult moments of their lives. The Deputy Minister added that Ukraine is successfully working on three parallel tracks to support the integrated and complex transformation of mental health:

- 1 boosting the qualifications and skills of health professionals,
- 2 improving services centred on primary health care and patient-focused quality services,
- 3 promoting evidence-based improvement of access, to battle the silent epidemy.

The Deputy Minister informed the OECD, that Ukraine will be pleased to share its experience.

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During the session on how much of the increase in health care costs is due to changes in the price or volume of medical services, the Deputy Minister informed that Ukraine has been reforming healthcare financing with a focus on clearly defining the price and scope of medical services.

The session on the health workforce addressed the issues of improving the availability and quality of the workforce as well as improving data availability and analysis to address key gaps identified during the ministerial meeting. While it was concluded that increasing the number of medical students will have an impact only after many years, examples from the Netherlands show that more practical hospital-based nursing education will have an immediate effect on enlarging the workforce. Experience from Poland showed that salary incentives could be an important factor in attracting staff to areas and sectors where there is scarce health staff.

Austria added that sending doctors on short-term assignments to villages and training local residents makes it more likely that the health worker will return to work in the countryside.

The findings of a fast-track study examining telemedicine in post-pandemic settings were presented. It was concluded that the use of telemedicine is increasing and is a very important element in filling the gap of health professionals. The Committee discussed health system efficiency, based on the first results of the OECD Health Systems Characteristics Survey and a health system cluster analysis which identifies elements that contribute to health system performance.

During this session, the Deputy Minister emphasised that the 77th World Health Assembly of the WHO had recognised the stability and resilience on the Ukrainian healthcare system, even during the military aggression. Ukraine is ready to share its experience in responding to emergencies.



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Further, it was stressed that Ukraine is ready to participate in the next OECD health system studies. The final draft of the results of the study on the impact of cancer on public health, the economy and other important aspects, was presented. In addition to cancer-related costs, the report provides information on the impact of expanding policies to promote healthy lifestyles and improve cancer screening and early treatment.

In parallel to the Health Committee Meeting, the Ukrainian delegation met with the leadership of the OECD Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, which is responsible for organising the meetings of the Health Committee, to thank the OECD for granting Ukraine the candidate status. Ukraine's participation was welcomed by the Secretariat. The unique experience of Ukraine concerning health system resilience in times of armed conflict was highlighted, and the possibility of formalising this issue within the Committee was discussed, for example by establishing a working group or other platforms to assist countries in identifying relevant policies to ensure continuity of care while scaling-up capacities for emergencies. It was agreed that a step-by-step approach should be followed and that Ukraine could present its experience at the next meeting of the Committee.

It was also proposed to hold a dialogue with the Health Committee Bureau in October to discuss the possibility of involving delegates from the Health Committee in possible future sessions on topics related to rapid response and the possibility of creating an informal platform to discuss these issues.

A number of discussions took place during the breaks and in the evening, e.g. with representatives of DG Santé, USA, Israel, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Romania, Austria and others, also to seek advice on the possibility of forming a common platform on health care resilience.

These were exciting days during which the Ukrainian delegation proactively contributed to the work of the Health Committee, taking every opportunity to highlight issues where Ukraine has experience that could be useful to other OECD countries and to the development of OECD policies and strategies, e.g. health care resilience in times of armed conflict. Bilateral support was secured from many countries and from DG Santé.

While the participation in the OECD's Health Committee is a big step for Ukraine on its dedicated road for further European integration, it was also an event that in the small practical sphere facilitated the great work and cooperation between the MoH and the EU-funded project "Support to Ukraine for Developing a Modern Public Health System", which will have a great impact for further support to the integration of Ukraine's health sector into the EU.

Poul Thim

the Senior non-key legal expert of EU Project
"Support to Ukraine for Developing a Modern
Public Health System"

This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the project “Support to Ukraine for Developing a Modern Public Health System” and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

The overall project’s objective is to support the modernisation and development of a sustainable Public Health System that is able to ensure disease prevention and control standards in line with EU legislation, requirements, and practices. The project shall contribute to strengthening national leadership and capacity in Public Health policy programming and implementation. The project continues its activities to assist Ukraine with a focus on advancing its progress towards EU accession under Component 1 and supporting the establishment of a modern Blood Safety System under Component 2.

