

**Statement of the WHO Regional Office for Europe during the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region**

**Statement by Nedret Emiroglu, Director of the Division of Health Emergencies and Communicable Diseases, Special Representative of the Regional Director on the Sustainable Development Goals and Governance and Acting Director of Programme Management**

Excellency, honourable ministers, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the WHO Regional Director for Europe, I am pleased to participate in this Forum in the third year of implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

I would like to thank the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) for organizing the Forum, which comes at the right time, just before the high-level panel.

Even though good health and well-being are the primary focus of SDG 3, health is a critical component to achieving all the SDGs as a major contributor and enabler, particularly to water and sanitation, energy, cities, consumption and biodiversity, which is our focus at this Forum.

The countries of the WHO European Region are facing large health inequities that are avoidable, and investing in health helps drive equitable health improvements. We need strong multisectoral policy interventions to reduce the social, gender, environmental and economic inequities – leaving no one behind.

We also need stronger efforts by society to tackle all determinants of health, and the places where people live, eat, work, play and age must be healthy – engaging individuals, young people, communities and civil society.

For example, strengthening action on safely managed water, sanitation and hygiene services helps people, particularly children. It is unacceptable that 14 people die every day from diarrhoeal disease, and many are affected by outbreaks of infectious waterborne diseases.

Another example is managing energy consumption, production and transportation, the health impacts from indoor air pollution and general ambient air pollution, which should be reduced.

In 2030, 8 out of 10 Europeans will be living in cities, so the race to achieve the SDGs will be run in our cities. We must reduce air pollution and avoid the 600 000 premature deaths per year from outdoor and indoor air pollution.

We should also not forget access to renewable energy – especially in remote communities, including for health services and schools – which will improve health and the learning opportunities for many, particularly children.

Reducing the consumption, production and trade of substances harmful to health is another critical factor for health and well-being.

Unfortunately, the European Region ranks highest in the world for per capita alcohol consumption.

Unhealthy food consumption, lack of physical activity and many additional factors are contributing to the obesity epidemic. Currently, 21% of men and 24% of women over 18 years of age are obese, and obesity rates are rising among children. We estimate that the Region will fail to halt the rise in obesity unless actions across sectors are accelerated.

Regrettably, we also estimate that the Region will not achieve the goal of reducing tobacco use, unless urgent actions are taken in implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

WHO is committed to supporting Member States in partnership with all stakeholders

The European policy framework for health and well-being, Health 2020, is fully aligned with and instrumental to achieving the SDGs in our Region. Last year health ministers endorsed the European roadmap on implementing the SDGs, another milestone.

Now, many countries are including health into their national development plans, ensuring that health is embedded in the policies and strategies of other sectors.

WHO is an active player of the United Nations Regional Coordination Mechanism for Europe and Central Asia and is leading the Issue-based Coalition on Health, which is a strong coordination mechanism for achieving SDG 3 and ensuring interlinkages with other SDGs.

We work very closely with all partners and United Nations agencies, and I would like to specifically highlight an exemplary collaboration with UNECE.

We jointly support the Protocol on Water and Health through the joint secretariat. This enables us to support Member States in setting national targets in accordance with SDG 6 and the 2017 Ostrava Declaration on environment and health.

Another area I would like to emphasize as a strong collaboration is the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP) as a platform that promotes sustainable transport policies, for example safe cycling and walking, to maximize health and environment benefits.

We also reach further by engaging with all partners and stakeholders at the local level through networks and platforms.

To this end, cities are crucial partners in the process towards a more equitable and sustainable future. Just a few days ago, a gathering of 43 mayors and 85 high-level political representatives met in Copenhagen to share experiences and ideas for how to place health and well-being at the heart of urban development. This group adopted a vision towards a transformative approach to creating happier and healthier cities for all. The WHO Regional Director hopes to have 20 000 mayors signed up by 2020, and has encouraged members of the Healthy Cities Network to take up this challenge.

In conclusion, let us all join these efforts together and choose the world we want. By working together and investing in people's health we can make sure we implement all SDGs and leave no one behind.