



**WHO European Regional High-level
Forum on Health in the Well-being
Economy
UN City, Copenhagen, Denmark
1–2 March 2023**

/2

**20 October 2022
Original: English**

Scope and purpose

Background

Across the WHO European Region, as is the case globally, people, families, and communities are struggling to remain resilient amid multiple public health, economic and environmental crises. Not only are the health gains made over previous decades under threat, but the negative impact of these crises on personal and societal well-being – most recently with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic – have shown just how essential and precarious our health and social systems and investments are.

Across age groups, we are seeing concerning impacts. Current estimates suggest that a majority of young people aged 18–34 years are at risk of declining mental well-being, with increasing rates of anxiety and depression, and these trends are gendered. People in later life, particularly those living alone and with limited social support and resources, are increasingly reporting unmet health needs and are at higher risk of poverty and social exclusion. Moreover, the least well-off in our societies are most likely to suffer poor health and well-being. As highlighted by the 2021 Pan-European Commission on Health and Sustainable Development, convened by WHO Regional Office for Europe (Monti Commission¹), this is compounded by persistent and increasing wealth and income inequalities, increased discrimination, more people working in precarious jobs with low wages, and insufficient investments in social protection and care services, including insecure and poor-quality housing, food and fuel.

The combination of universal declines in well-being and exacerbated health inequities presents major challenges to population health and to the fiscal sustainability and resilience of health and welfare systems. Moreover, as highlighted in WHO Regional Office for Europe's European Programme of Work 2020–2025, United Action for Better Health² (EPW), failure to close the gap between the public's legitimate health expectations and their concrete experiences will erode trust and further increase pressure on political and health leaders and authorities. There is a pressing need for adaptive and innovative solutions to address these policy challenges in ways that deliver not just better health and well-being, but also strong, responsive health systems, increased resilience within communities, trust in governments and institutions, equal opportunities for decent livelihoods, and the ability to live in peace, free of fear.

This underscores the need for a paradigm shift in how we think about the relationship between health and the economy. It also further reflects an increasing recognition of the interconnectedness of economic, social, environmental and political determinants of health in line with WHO Regional Office for Europe's EPW. The well-being economy approach^{3,4} embodies such a shift in thinking and action, moving the focus away from economic growth as an objective in itself; instead, it explicitly

¹ <https://www.who.int/europe/publications/m/item/drawing-light-from-the-pandemic--a-new-strategy-for-health-and-sustainable-development>

² <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/339209>

³ <https://www.who.int/news/item/15-12-2021-10th-global-conference-on-health-promotion-charters-a-path-for-creating-well-being-societies>

⁴ <https://www.who.int/czechia/news/item/08-07-2022-who-launches-a-new-initiative-to-place-well-being-at-the-heart-of-economic-recovery>

prioritizes well-being measures and investments that provide real societal benefit⁵. However, the role of the health sector in contributing to the well-being economy has not yet been sufficiently developed – this was an area identified as an important priority by the Monti Commission.

Innovative solutions to pressing policy challenges: the well-being economy

The well-being economy approach is underpinned by the principle that public investment and spending should be guided by the extent to which a policy, service or organization can improve population and societal well-being. It acknowledges the need also to focus on and contribute to improving the environment and health in a way that is safe, sustainable and staying within the limits of the planetary boundaries.

Well-being economies cannot be achieved without better investment for health equity, along with increased spending in strong public health systems, policies and goods. Yet, this is not only about increasing direct investment in health per se, but about capitalizing on the paradigm shift in what society values most from the economy, and its role in promoting and sustaining personal and societal health and well-being. Economy of well-being approaches can be applied using various tools and at a different pace in all countries across the WHO European Region and beyond, irrespective of the size of the country or type of economy.

To enable this shift, proponents of the well-being economy are providing decision-makers with political and investment tools to go beyond the traditional siloed, budget-based thinking with competition between sectors over scarce resources. Instead, these tools promote: (i) building alliances that can mobilize and jointly advocate for distribution of fiscal and economic resources that has a positive impact on health and well-being for all; and (ii) generating a higher return on public investment and spending through a focus on improving population and societal well-being. It is important to understand that the health sector will not just be a beneficiary of this paradigm shift, but that it also has a crucial role in driving well-being economy approaches. In this spirit, the WHO Regional Office for Europe is hosting a two-day High-level Forum on Health in the Well-being Economy on 1-2 March 2023.

Aims and Objectives

The Forum will:

- ☐ demonstrate how health contributes to building well-being economies and how well-being economies can promote better health for all; and
- ☐ set an agenda for how best to support health leaders and authorities in shifting towards well-being economies.

The Forum aims to achieve certain objectives. It will:

- ☐ *show* how public health policies, public health goods and health systems are important contributors to economic and social resilience and sustainable development;
- ☐ *inspire* more countries to initiate public investments and spending focused on the well-being economy; and
- ☐ *galvanize* action, new alliances and communities of practice between health, social and economic development policy-makers, in order to:
 - promote population health and well-being;
 - strengthen trust between the public and authorities; and
 - remedy social fractures and health inequities.

⁵ <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/498e9bc7-en.pdf?expires=1660045490&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=9AE8C94F721332B8EEDEDE55DE3DAB1C>

Participants

The WHO/Europe High-level Forum on Health in the Well-being Economy welcomes participation from:

- ☐ high-level representatives of ministries of health and ministries of economic development;
- ☐ public health decision-makers, experts and representatives from civil society;
- ☐ representatives from specialized agencies of the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organizations, such as the European Union (EU) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); and
- ☐ well-being economy partners and advocates from local, national and regional levels across the whole of civil society.

Expected outcomes

Building on the conference themes, an outcome statement will be prepared, provisionally entitled *Shifting to well-being economies – investing in healthy, prosperous lives for all*. The statement will take the format of a call to action for all participants to support investment in initiatives that promote well-being economies.

The outcome statement is expected to call for:

- ☐ a *country policy initiative* to provide Member States with the know-how, investment cases and modelling of the return on investment in building economies of well-being; and
- ☐ a *forum between ministries of health and economic development* to assess progress, overcome barriers, and set the agenda for how the health sector can serve as a driver, ally and co-creator in the shift towards economies of well-being that deliver better health for all.

Following endorsement of the statement, the WHO Regional Office for Europe will advance the work outlined in the document, with a more formal presentation of the agenda, workstream and preliminary outputs to be presented at the 73rd session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe in 2023. The Regional Office will engage with partners to implement the actions in the outcome statement. This work will be led by the WHO European Office for Investment for Health and Development in Venice, Italy.