

Background information

Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is defined as a condition, when all the people have unrestricted access to the health services they need, without facing financial difficulties. Although relatively free health care is a matter of course for many countries, it is still far away from reality for a large number of people around the world. At least 100 million people are pushed into extreme poverty each year because of huge finances spent on health and over 800 million people spend more than 10% of their household income on health care. According to The World Health Organization (WHO), nowadays, at least half of the population does not receive the health services they need. The main reasons for such a situation are:

- Insufficient quality of health services.
- Absence of workers in health organizations.
- Unfavourable conditions.
- Financial hardship of the citizens.
- Poor scientific development.

The definition of UHC is based on three major objectives:

- There should be an absolute equality in access to health services. Therefore, everyone who needs services should get them, not only those who can pay for them.
- The improvement of the quality of health services has to be a priority for the countries and their governments.
- People should be protected against the risk of poverty. It must be ensured that the cost of using services does not harm people financially.

The WHO also specified that this care has to include health promotion and prevention, also treatment and rehabilitation and finally palliative care, which refers to a medical caregiving approach that improves the quality of life of patients and also their families dealing with financial or other issues associated with serious life-threatening illness.

Of course, it is important to remember that moving toward UHC is a political process that involves negotiation between different interest groups in society over the allocation of health benefits and who should pay for these benefits.

UN Involvement

Universal Health Coverage is firmly based on the WHO constitution of 1948 declaring health a fundamental human right, which is subsequently confirmed by the Health for All agenda set by the Alma Ata declaration in 1978.

The UHC is also mentioned in health-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The WHO itself, in cooperation with civil society organisations, plays an important part in shaping health systems at the national level, increasing the involvement of certain communities in the decision-making process, and in creating accountability mechanisms. The WHO offers a range of training opportunities on health financing policy, including face-to-face courses and an e-learning course, there are also annual advanced courses targeting low income countries.

Questions to consider

- What does Universal Health Coverage mean to my country?
- For a community or country to achieve Universal Health Coverage, several factors must be in place. Which? How can my country accelerate progress towards UHC?
- To what extent will Universal Health Care be provided? What services will be included in UHC?
- The question of funding. How all these benefits can be financed?
- How can we ensure help globally? How can we reach the most vulnerable?
- The question of cooperation in a national level. How can the countries help each other towards UHC?
- What are the exact economical and health benefits of UHC for the population?
- What is the policy of my country towards its citizens, when ensuring healthcare?

Resources and useful links

WHO Handbook- **Arguing for Universal Health Coverage:**

https://www.who.int/health_financing/UHC_ENvs_BD.PDF?ua=1

(Questions to consider, possible solutions and Bloc positions also included)

WHO Document- **Questions and answers according to UHC:**

<https://www.who.int/contracting/documents/QandAUHC.pdf?ua=1>

(Questions to consider and many useful possible solutions included)

WHO (official website): <https://www.who.int/>