



Why must Member States continue to invest in immunization?

Everywhere in the world, health care budgets are under great strain. Immunization managers often struggle to obtain the necessary funding to strengthen immunization programmes and introduce new vaccines. Even protecting current budgets can be a great challenge.

Decision-makers fully acknowledge the success of immunization in preventing suffering and death. But the urgent need to increase – or at a minimum uphold

investments to sustain this success and continue moving forward is often not supported.

The lack of political prioritization of immunization in some countries is alarming. If threats faced by immunization programmes in the Region are not taken seriously, past successes will be jeopardized and opportunities for new and better vaccines may be lost.

Resurgence of vaccine-preventable diseases

The Region has seen a disturbing increase in outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases in recent years. In 2013 alone, Member States reported 31 685 cases of measles and 39 367 cases of rubella¹. Wild poliovirus circulation was also detected in the Region; and, together with a large polio outbreak in 2010 with 31 deaths in four European Region countries, this demonstrates that the Region's polio-free status is under continuous threat. As many as 17 of the Region's 53 countries are considered at risk of transmission should poliovirus be imported².

High general coverage, but many underimmunized children

Even though general immunization coverage in the Region is high, large population groups remain unprotected. Of the 11.2 million children born in the Region in 2012, nearly 554 150 did not receive the complete three-dose series of diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus vaccine by the age of one year³. Variable commitment in Member States is impeding progress, innovative solutions and the actions necessary to fulfil the rights of underserved, marginalized, migrant and disadvantaged children and families.

¹ Centralized information system for infectious diseases [CISID] [online database]. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2014 (<http://data.euro.who.int/cisid/>).

² In 2014, the Regional Certification Commission deemed 14 countries in the Region to be at intermediate risk and three countries to be at high risk of transmission following importation of poliovirus [3].

³ WHO vaccine-preventable disease monitoring system, 2013 global summary. Global and regional immunization profile: European Region. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2013 (http://apps.who.int/immunization_monitoring/data/gseurprofile.pdf).

**New vaccines
– new opportunities to save lives**

At the same time, research and innovation have enabled the development of new vaccines that provide protection from more diseases. These developments represent tremendous progress. Failure to introduce new vaccines in national immunization programmes will be a lost opportunity to protect many more children and adults from suffering and death caused by diseases such as cervical cancer, pneumonia, meningitis and severe diarrhoeal diseases in young children.

Few external funding sources

Very few if any external sources of support for immunization systems exist. Most – or all – resources must be mobilized from national budgets.

Significant socioeconomic returns

In all Member States, decision-makers should be made aware of the significant socioeconomic returns that immunization represents regarding not only child health and child mortality but also poverty reduction, equity, production, education and strengthening health systems as a whole.

