



CONCLUSIONS BY THE CHAIR

The Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being (NDPHS) held its sixteenth Annual Conference (PAC) on 17 January 2024. Mr. Jakob Forssmed, Minister for Social Affairs and Public Health of Sweden hosted and chaired the Conference. Ministers responsible for health and social affairs and other high-level representatives of Partners participated in the PAC.

The PAC appraised the progress of the NDPHS since the last Conference held on 25 November 2021. The Conference discussed the NDPHS' strategic direction for the upcoming two-years period chaired by Lithuania and co-chaired by Norway, and beyond, and adopted the Declaration on celebrating the 20 years of the NDPHS cooperation and moving forward. The Conference also discussed the Partnership's contribution to combatting the threats posed by antimicrobial resistance.

Progress in 2022-2023

The PAC acknowledged with appreciation the strong resolve of the Partners to continue the work of the Partnership on all levels despite the overall uncertainty about the future of the Northern Dimension following Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. The Partnership will continue its work in accordance with the statement of the three other Northern Dimension Partners – the EU, Iceland, and Norway of 8 March 2022, announcing suspension of all Northern Dimension activities involving Russia and Belarus. All other elements of the NDPHS' composition and working modalities remain as spelled out in the Partnership's founding and governing documents.

Furthermore, the PAC appreciated:

- The NDPHS being a unique platform for cooperation, bringing together experts and policymakers from governments and organizations across the region, to provide a forum for health advocacy.
- Commitment of Finland, Norway and Sweden to leading the NDPHS Expert Groups.
- Work of the NDPHS Expert Groups and the opportunities provided by the set-up of the Partnership, allowing experts to have a direct channel of communication with policy makers.
- Adoption of the NDPHS Strategy 2023-2025 and the ambition to do meaningful and impactful work every day, to stand by our values, and to continue sharing knowledge, learning from each other, and caring for people.
- Further strengthening of cross-sectoral cooperation, including through close cooperation with the Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture (NDPC), and using the platform provided by the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR).
- Stronger focus on implementing projects – such as *MentalHealthMatters*, *Arts on Prescription in the Baltic Sea Region*, *Economy of Wellbeing of People* - which make a population level impact and contribute to a greater visibility of the Partnership.

NDPHS Strategic direction in 2024-2025

The new geopolitical realities are seen as an opportunity for this Partnership to become an even stronger regional leader, a strong alliance of the countries united by common values of promoting democracy and sustainable development in our region. Consequently, possibilities of collaboration with Ukraine will be explored together with the Ukrainian partners.

During 2024-2025 the Partnership will conduct a thorough review of the challenges and opportunities, identify solutions that are adapted to the needs of the stakeholders, and prepare a roadmap for change. This review will be conducted in an inclusive process resulting in a solution that is widely accepted within the organisation and owned by the Partners. The roadmap will be presented to the next PAC marking the end of the Lithuanian chairmanship.

In its work, the Partnership will contribute to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the WHO European Program of Work 2020-2025 “United Action for Better Health in Europe” (EPW), as well as the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR).

In the pursuit of sustainable development, a steady commitment to prioritizing health is needed to ensure a foundation for a resilient, inclusive, and prosperous future. In the complexities of the regional collaboration, the NDPHS as Policy Area Health Coordinator in the EUSBSR has a unique opportunity to advocate the placement of health at the forefront of the macroregional strategy and to engage with other policy sectors in promoting the interdependence of health, economic prosperity, social cohesion, environmental sustainability, and resilience to global challenges.

Thematically, the Partnership will continue with the topics prioritized by the Partners as useful and providing practical value. This may include themes that are long-established on the Partnership’s agenda, such as active and healthy ageing over the life-course, antimicrobial resistance, alcohol and substance use, HIV, Tuberculosis and associated infections, non-communicable diseases, occupational safety and health, primary health care and mental health, as well as, when deemed useful by the Partners, new avenues for cooperation, such as emergency preparedness and response.

Antimicrobial resistance

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is an urgent matter and one of the top 10 global public health threats. The NDPHS recognizes the gravity of the problem and has a long-standing commitment to address it, as demonstrated by the NDPHS Declaration “From strategies to action – how to tackle the challenges of Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) in the Northern Dimension area” (NDPHS AMR Declaration) adopted during the 11th PAC on 20 November 2015 in Berlin, Germany.

Almost ten years later, although there has been progress in certain areas mentioned in the NDPHS AMR Declaration, the latest data show that AMR remains a serious challenge and in the European Union, Iceland, and Norway over 35 000 people die every year from infections resistant to antimicrobials. This cost, in human lives, but also financially, is too high, and there is still much to be done to prevent and mitigate the risks. Strengthened commitment and intensified efforts are needed at all levels, from the individual to the political level, including by this Partnership, to have an impact.

The PAC appreciated the work of the NDPHS Expert Group on Antimicrobial Resistance as a forum for exchange of knowledge between experts in our region and a platform for joint international activities. The PAC requested the Expert Group to conduct a review of the NDPHS AMR Declaration,

listing the achievements and areas that lack sufficient progress, as well as any new challenges that have emerged since its adoption. This review will guide the decision on further efforts of the Expert Group, not least in supporting the Partner Countries in the actions implementing the Council Recommendation on stepping up EU actions to combat antimicrobial resistance in a One Health Approach and the WHO Roadmap on antimicrobial resistance for the WHO European Region 2023 – 2030.

The PAC also appreciated the focus of the PAC side-event, held in Stockholm on 16 January 2024, on the topic of antibiotic resistance. The event demonstrated how preventive measures can be used as an effective tool to tackle AMR and provided information that is valuable for informed policy making. The PAC requested the NDPHS Expert Group on Antimicrobial Resistance, with support of the NDPHS Secretariat, to take steps to disseminate the results of the side-event more widely and consider developing a policy brief.

Final provisions

The PAC expressed its highest appreciation to the NDPHS Expert Groups and their lead countries Finland, Norway and Sweden, the NDPHS Secretariat and the Committee of Senior Representatives for their excellent work and support to the Partnership during the Swedish Chairmanship. The PAC also thanked Sweden for hosting the NDPHS Secretariat.

The PAC appointed Lithuania as the Partnership Chair and Norway as the Co-Chair for the period of 1 January 2024 – 31 December 2025.

The PAC noted that the next ministerial-level Partnership Annual Conference is planned to be held in November 2025 in Vilnius, Lithuania and the following one in Oslo, Norway, in November 2027.