



# SUPPORT TO UKRAINE FOR DEVELOPING A MODERN PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEM

A project funded by the European Union and implemented by a consortium consisting of GFA Consulting Group GmbH, Hamburg, and the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, Helsinki. The project supports consolidation and empowerment of the Public Health Center of the Ministry of Health of Ukraine (UPHC) and supports the establishment of a modern blood safety system in Ukraine.

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The Government of Ukraine has made a strong commitment to adjust its public health system in line with the chapter 22 of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union (EU). The essence of the health care system is not only to provide services to patients and minimise disease consequences, but also to work proactively towards a healthy population and to prevent disease occurrence. In this regard, public health policy pays a lot of attention to technical cooperation with the EU as specified in the Association Agreement. Such cooperation is aiming at the development of the public health system, protection and maintenance of population health, prevention of non-communicable diseases, development of the national blood system, as well as biosafety and biological protection systems.

With the worldwide dramatic developments related to COVID-19, the project **"Support to Ukraine for Developing a Modern Public Health System"** plays an important role in sustaining the Ministry of Health's

(MoH) plans to streamline its public health system. Therefore, the MoH welcomes the EU's expertise. In the course of project implementation, Ministry staff will be working in close cooperation with the project team consisting of international and national experts to strengthen the public health system of Ukraine and to raise awareness among stakeholders and the wider public about ongoing reform and project activities.

The perfect model for public health does not exist; public health systems are developed and managed in various ways. International experience shows that an effective transformation of the public health sector is impossible without the participation of healthcare professionals who work on the "front line" with the general population. Therefore, we put a lot of emphasis on this project to improve institutional public health and blood safety capacities both at national and regional levels, and in parallel to support the process of enhancing and aligning relevant legislations and policies.



## Second Project Steering Committee meeting on interim project progress

On February 26, 2020, the second Project Steering Committee (PSC) took place. Participants of the EU Delegation to Ukraine, MoH and UPHC representatives, the project team leader and experts agreed on the work plan for 2020 and discussed the project progress report. The team leader, Dr Predrag Duric, introduced the interim project results and tasks under development:

- ✦ Focus on a draft law for public health;
- ✦ Prioritization of a list of documents received from the MoH for revision in terms of compliance with the EU Directives;
- ✦ The legal base gap analysis;
- ✦ Institutional support to the UPHC in performing public health core functions;
- ✦ Discussion of the development of a surveillance guidance for hepatitis.

Additionally, Dr Duric mentioned that the communication capacity assessment of the UPHC and regional Public Health Centers (rPHCs) was conducted, and a number of upcoming trainings in the area of communications were developed.

The Key Expert on Blood Safety System, Dr Mohammed Abouelfarag, informed the PSC about the activities of the project component 2, aiming at the implementation of a modern Blood Safety System for Ukraine. Activities focused on assessment visits to regional blood centres using the EuBIS tool (European Blood Inspection System). The results of such an assessment are supposed to guide the efficient restructuring process of the national blood system. As an advisor to the Working Group of the MoH on blood transfusion and the Committee on Public Health, Medical Assistance and Medical Insurance of the Parliament, Dr Abouelfarag provided an analysis and recommendations to the concept of voluntary non-remunerated blood donation, plasma master file, and to the new draft law on blood donation, blood components and the national blood system.

Additionally, the participants of the Project Steering Committee discussed the project's support to COVID-19, primarily with regards to the evaluation of the MoH's preparedness and response to the pandemic.



## Project assistance regarding COVID-19

The project team proactively responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and supported the MoH in areas relevant to the project's domains and technical expertise.

In terms of blood safety, the project is trying to bridge between blood safety relevant international organisations, including but not limited to, the European Commission Directorate General for Health and Food Safety, European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), World Health Organization (WHO), International Society for blood Transfusion (ISBT), US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), American Association for Blood Banks (AABB), and Asian Association of Transfusion Medicine and the project's Ukrainian partners to make sure that latest COVID-19 technical updates and guidelines are available and translated into Ukrainian. Furthermore, the project is initiating cooperation with the MoH and the UPHC to create a blood crisis management team to address issues related to limited mobilisation of donors, shortage of blood during the crisis, management of national blood stocks, blood use and case triage, technical support to blood centres, and promotion of blood donation. Besides, the project is technically supporting the development of an experimental blood bank protocol to collect and process convalescent plasma as a probable line of treatment for COVID-19 cases in collaboration with the UPHC and the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine.

With the aim of supporting the response to COVID-19 in Ukraine and sharing knowledge on treatment measures, the experts of the project are organising a series of video conferences for Ukrainian healthcare workers. On May 19 and 29, 2020, two video conferences on COVID-19 treatment practices were conducted with the participation of German physicians Prof. Ralf Reintjes from Tampere University and Dr Günter Mertens from Heinsberg Hospital, who have been involved in the treatment of COVID-19 patients. Ukrainian doctors had a chance to discuss the most relevant issues on COVID-19 treatment experience, as for example: a possible second wave and the ways of responding to it; experience of sorting patients before receiving the laboratory confirmation; antiviral therapy prescription to mild and moderate patients; healthcare workers protection. The German experts emphasized the importance of regular analyses in order to detect new outbreaks and prevent the disease from spreading.

The project is currently in the process of translating the ECDC guidelines related to COVID-19 into Ukrainian, including the third update of the COVID-19 Aviation Health Safety Protocol. This protocol comprises the guidance for the management of airline passengers in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some other guidelines define surveillance of COVID-19 at long-term care facilities in the EU/EEA, and infection prevention and control and preparedness for COVID-19 in healthcare settings.





## Overview of the EU legislation related to public health

According to the EU Treaties, membership of the EU is open to "any European state which respects the values referred to in Article 2 and is committed to promoting them". The values are: "respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities".

The Copenhagen Criteria set further requirements to the candidate countries: Membership requires that "a candidate country has achieved stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, respect for and protection of minorities, the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union. Membership presupposes the candidate's ability to take on the obligations of membership including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union".

The Madrid European Council revised the membership criteria to include conditions for member country integration through the appropriate adjustment of its administrative structures: since it is important that European Community legislation is reflected in national legislation, it is critical that the revised national legislation is implemented effectively through appropriate administrative and judicial structures.

Good health is a major concern for citizens in the EU. The EU strives for better health protection through its policies and activities, based on Article 168 in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. EU

actions on health aim to improve public health, prevent diseases and threats to health (including those related to lifestyle), as well as to promote research. More precisely, the EU provides regulation in the following nine fields: strategies on EU public health; health security; healthcare systems; risk assessment; disease prevention; endocrine disruptors; health and safety at work; health promotion; and pharmaceuticals.

The project has prepared an overview of EU legislation related to public health. This document serves as a reference document for officials dealing with health legislation in Ukraine; it can be used as a tool for baseline assessments on gaps in the legal environment of the health sector in Ukraine. This overview is not to be read from one end to the other but rather as a lexicon or reference tool where the reader can check the legal framework related to a health sector issue, in order to get an understanding of the legislation and access to the specific EU legal documents if needed.

With the aim of providing an introduction to EU legislation, including the legislation related to communicable diseases, and to reflect on governance and quality in public health, a video conference was organised on May 26, with participants from the WHO, CDC and the Delegation of the EU to Ukraine. During the video conference some of the fundamental aspects of the EU legislation related to public health were discussed, as well as various approaches to the promotion of legal approximation between Ukraine and the EU in the sphere of public health services.



## Constituent meeting for rPHCs for institutional development

On February 13, 2020, the constituent meeting for rPHCs' institutional development took place in Kyiv. The meeting, organised by the UPHC, was aimed at introducing the strategy of public health system development in 2020, discussing the transition plan for the regional levels, and integration of public health institutions into the public health reform in Ukraine.

The project team leader, Dr Predrag Duric, was invited to give a speech at the meeting and to present the project activities relevant for the rPHCs. The activities will include capacity building of the rPHCs, assessment of competencies, fine tuning of organisational structures, targeted trainings, assistance in development of national public health and prevention programmes and campaigns.



## UPHC and rPHCs' communication capacity assessment

Considering that the project aims to support the consolidation and empowerment of the Public Health Center and regional Public Health Centers, it also includes assistance in communications. As part of the communication and project visibility component, a survey was conducted between August and November 2019. It involved the UPHC and rPHCs' communication units. The aim of the survey was to assess current public health centers' capacities for communication on the institutional and individual level in order to map the current status of communication and plan the provision of the technical assistance accordingly.

The survey was developed to cover also several aspects of training needs assessment. In addition, the survey included an assessment of relevant experience

and education of the communication staff, e.g. level of skills to determine target audiences, develop key messages, define appropriate communication channels and tools, draft press materials, establish media relations, conduct briefings, develop posts for social media and website management, design information products (online and offline), design and budget information/communication campaigns.

The reports on the communication capacity assessment of the UPHC and rPHCs formed a basis for development of five training modules that will cover the needs of the communication staff of rPHCs. The assessment results will be applied when developing a communication toolkit for rPHCs' Communication Units.



## EuBIS evaluation in 13 oblasts was finalised

The assessment of blood establishments using the EuBIS tool started in January 2020 and was finalised in the first week of March 2020. The experts completed the assessment of 13 preselected blood centres nationwide: **Kyiv, Sumy, Kharkiv, Vinnytsya, Zaporizhzhya, Kropyvnytskyi, Severodonetsk, Lutsk, Ternopil, Khmelnytskyi, Ivano-Frankivsk, Chernivtsi, and Uzhhorod.**

The results of the assessment are expected to guide the legal framework under development and the conceptualisation of an efficient structure of the blood transfusion system in Ukraine. The assessment results will also be used to develop a step-by-step roadmap to address existing shortcomings in order to ensure compliance with the requirements of relevant EU Directives.







## Interview with Ms. Iryna Slavinska-Ritsner

Ms. Iryna Slavinska-Ritsner is the Head of Blood Safety and Donation Department of the Public Health Center of the MoH of Ukraine with 10 years of experience in blood donation. Since May 2018, Ms. Slavinska-Ritsner has been leading the department of blood safety and donation at the UPHC, which functions as a national transfusion centre for the country.

### WHAT ARE THE MAIN GOALS OF THE NATIONAL BLOOD SAFETY SYSTEM?

All the goals defined in the Strategy for the Development of the National Blood System of Ukraine are significant if they aim at safety and accessibility of components of donor blood for the patients who need it. This was the objective when the Strategy was being prepared. It is worth mentioning the main goals:

- ✦ Review of the valid legislation and implementation of the relevant EU acquis;
- ✦ Reorganisation of the whole system structure: the identification of national, regional and hospital levels;
- ✦ Promotion of voluntary non-remunerated blood donation aimed at achieving of 100% of such donors;
- ✦ Modernisation of blood establishments.

### WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHALLENGES OF THE NATIONAL BLOOD SYSTEM REORGANISATION?

It should be noted that for the first time in independent Ukraine the blood system is being reformed. We need to create more than we need to reform. Therefore, there are a lot of tasks to be done. The main tasks are: change of the structure, modernisation of the establishments, training of staff aimed at improvement of production and clinical transfusiology; increase of infectious and immunological safety; establishment of national donor registry; transition to 100 % voluntary non-remunerated blood donation; attraction of additional funding, etc.

### WHAT KIND OF INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE ON BLOOD SYSTEM REFORM CAN BE USED IN UKRAINE?

The EU experience in reforming blood systems is most suitable for Ukraine taking into account the obligations of Ukraine to implement European standards within the framework of the EU-Ukraine Association agreement.

### WHAT IS THE CURRENT SITUATION WITH PROMOTION OF VOLUNTARY BLOOD DONATION IN UKRAINE?

As for today, there is no state programme on blood donation promotion. There are non-governmental organisations that are professionally involved in the promotion of voluntary non-remunerated blood donation.

### HOW IS THE STRATEGY FOR DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL BLOOD SYSTEM TILL 2022 BEING IMPLEMENTED?

The Strategy is being implemented quite slowly due to political changes and quarantine measures in the country. There are some internal obstacles, but we are strongly intended to pursue our goal – to ensure quality and accessible blood components for the patients. Patients' lives are our priority.

### WHAT INNOVATIONS ARE IMPORTANT AND NECESSARY?

It is essential to implement European requirements and standards in the area of collection and use of blood components, to unify all the processes and fine-tune the quality system. We should remember that we are on the way to create the blood system itself and there will be a lot of innovations.

### WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT DO YOU EXPECT FROM THE EU FUNDED PROJECT "SUPPORT TO UKRAINE FOR DEVELOPING A MODERN PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEM"?

We do not only expect but already receive the technical assistance from the project. This is an extremely important step towards the structuring of the blood safety system and development of the legislative and regulatory acts.



## Interview with Prof. Martin Rusnak

Martin Rusnak is Doctor of Medicine, PhD, professor of Public Health at Trnava University, senior non-key expert - epidemiology

### WHAT IS MODERN CONCEPT OF PUBLIC HEALTH IN EUROPEAN UNION?

There are several definitions of public health. I favour the one from The Centre of Disease Control and Prevention in USA, which says: "Public health is the science of protecting and improving the health of people and their communities. This work is achieved by promoting healthy lifestyles, researching disease and injury prevention, and detecting, preventing and responding to infectious diseases. Overall, public health is concerned with protecting the health of entire populations. These populations can be as small as a local neighbourhood or as big as an entire country or region of the world".

It is practical and really close to what we call New Public Health. The concept is based on enhanced scope of services for population health as it is defined by the EU health policy. This focuses on protecting and improving health, giving equal access to modern and efficient healthcare for all Europeans, and coordinating any serious health threats involving more than one EU country. Disease prevention and response play a big part in the EU's public health focus including vaccination, fighting antimicrobial resistance, actions against cancer and responsible food labelling. This policy enlarges classic public health concept with areas such as equal access to care, what is component of quality, cross border health threats, efficiency and efficacy of services, etc. Altogether we call this approach as Evidence Based Public Health, i.e. use of the best scientific arguments for everyday operations.

### WHAT KIND OF INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE ON PUBLIC HEALTH REFORM CAN BE USED IN UKRAINE?

Almost every country of the European Union reforms their public health service. A major issue is to react to silent epidemics of chronic non-communicable diseases, such as heart and vascular diseases, diabetes mellitus type II, cancer, injuries, mental disorders and tackling risk factors, such as smoking, alcohol, diet, exercise, etc. This is complicated by aging of populations. Another challenge is to address inequalities in health. Also issues of patients' and clients' safety, health of minorities, migrants open numbers of new challenges. Altogether, public health in all countries of the world faces same problems. That is why the concept of international cooperation, exchange of best practices, joint programs and projects are so important. The last but not least is the need for researching the new evidence, to strengthen analytical skills of public health professionals.

### WHAT CHALLENGES IN PUBLIC HEALTH REFORM IS UKRAINE FACING TODAY?

Ukraine is confronting the same challenges as other countries of the Central and Eastern Europe in the last decade of the 20th century. Opening up to the outside world, restructuring economy, new technologies, new

challenges that all creates an increased burden on people life. The public health has to react while keeping the principle aim, to protect and to improve quality of life for people. The situation requires mobilisation of communities and application of Health in All Policies approach. On the other hand, Ukraine has already a functional network of institutions, universities and schools, solid and educated human resources.

### WHAT EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES SHOULD BE INTRODUCED TO ENHANCE THE PUBLIC HEALTH REFORM?

My major concern not only about Ukraine, but also about other post-soviet countries, is the absence of knowledge and analytical skills in technical issues used in public health. I frequently peer review articles in several international medical journals, where authors from different countries publish results of their research. The authors from Central and Eastern Europe frequently provide adequate description of situation, but discussion and conclusions are weak compared to authors from Western Europe or USA. Therefore, critical thinking is a demand for medical students. That requires also working with international literature sources, critical reading skills, discussing, and getting feedback. Combining these skills with good command of ethical thinking, we could expect new and successful public health reform.

### IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT FACTORS COULD HAVE AN EFFECT ON THE FINAL SUCCESS OF THE REFORM?

I do not consider the reform as something with the beginning and the end. The reform has its defined goals, objectives, methodology, resources, then the results come and there are immediately new challenges on the horizon. I see the reform as a cycle, which we call a continuous quality improvement. The primary factor for success in any process of change is a good planning. If it is well prepared, advocated, if people take over the ownership, and it is realistic, there are good chances to have a successful reform program and it is time to start planning the next level of reform activities.

### WHAT LESSONS FROM YOUR PREVIOUS PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES YOU THINK WOULD BE BENEFICIAL IN THE UKRAINIAN CONTEXT?

I was extremely lucky with my teachers and supervisors from Slovakia, the USA or the WHO. I also had many excellent colleagues from the UK, the Netherlands, the USA, Austria and Italy. I have several students who have already started to be international recognized scientists, epidemiologists and public health specialists. I am ready to share all experience I received from my supervisors and colleagues with people in Ukraine in terms of public health and disease prevention and treatment.



The overall project's objective is to support the modernization and development of a sustainable Public Health System that is able to ensure disease prevention and control standards in line with EU legislation, requirements, and practices. The project shall contribute to strengthening national leadership and capacity in Public Health policy programming and implementation. The project supports the consolidation and empowerment of the newly created Public Health Centre of Ukraine (UPHC) and supports the creation of a modern Blood Safety System in Ukraine.

