

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Spanish Global Health Strategy 2025-2030



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Five years after the official declaration of the health emergency caused by Covid-19, the international community has reached a significant crossroad: one path leads to perpetuation of a model whose severe limitations were laid bare by the worst global public health crisis in recent history, which would condemn us to repeat the same mistakes in a future beset with risks and uncertainty; or we can take the other path, applying the lessons learned from the pandemic and cooperating to build a global health system that is more resilient, better governed and founded on equity, scientific knowledge and multilateral cooperation.

This document –the first ever Global Health Strategy designed by a Spanish Government– reflects a firm commitment to taking the second path. Its main purpose is to ensure that our country’s efforts in the sphere of global health are effective, inclusive and sustainable, and that they contribute to improving the health of all the people of the world over the coming years. To achieve this, the Strategy aligns the capacities and aspirations of the different areas of the Spanish Administration with functions in this sphere. The Strategy also fosters participation by Spanish experts working in global health at an international level, professional groups and civil society groups, who share responsibility for its implementation.

The result is a strategy that sets out Spain’s principles, goals and lines of action in the sphere of global health for 2025-2030. The Global Health Strategy forms part of the coordinated efforts of European institutions and of the Member States of the European Union (EU) –four of which have published their own strategies, in addition to the strategy of the European Commission–. Governance of global health far exceeds the capacity of a single State, and in a world shaken by polarizing geopolitical shocks, we aspire to offer an alternative that is ambitious and inspiring, but also realistic, constructive and inclusive. Global health determines our collective prosperity, well-being and security, and we therefore consider this effort a crucial shared responsibility.

Values and political foundations: the Global Health Strategy's guiding principles

The Global Health Strategy follows a human rights-based approach. An approach in which equity and inclusion, as well as the active promotion of sexual and reproductive rights, are particularly prominent. Fulfilment of international commitments –such as the Cairo Programme of Action, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy– guides the set of proposed actions, paying particular attention to vulnerable populations, including children and adolescents, older persons and persons with disabilities, as well as groups that are traditionally discriminated against on the grounds of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status.

This is a feminist strategy, calling for transformation of structures that perpetuate structural inequalities, and informing Spain's national and international action. Empowerment of women and girls is not a mere rhetorical device; rather, it lies at the heart of feminist national and foreign policy, to level a playing field that has been historically uneven.

The Global Health Strategy is guided in all aspects by the 2030 Agenda. The right to health –enshrined in Sustainable Development Goal 3– encompasses multiple specific targets: lowering maternal mortality rates, ensuring universal health coverage fighting infectious and chronic diseases, and adopting measures to improve mental and environmental health, to mention just a few. Spain has not only ratified these commitments, it has adopted them as a central part of its political, economic and diplomatic action to further progress towards the SDGs.

Three of the guiding principles ensure the Global Health Strategy's comprehensive approach. The first of these principles recognizes the complex nature of health. Recognizing that the right to health begins with and is determined by the living conditions of individuals and communities, we have designed a Strategy that considers the social determinants of health. This approach recognizes that factors such as income security, education, access to drinking-water and protection against war and other forms of structural violence are as important for health as the best possible medical care. At the same time,

combating social inequalities in health is a necessary condition for just and sustainable human development.

The second guiding principle of the Strategy defends a health in all policies (HiAP) approach, considering that urban planning, economic, environmental and social decisions have a direct impact on public health. This multisector perspective commits to horizontal, heterogeneous, and complementary partnerships that prioritize health as a key variable in other sectors' decision-making processes.

The Global Health Strategy's third guiding principle embraces the one health paradigm, which views the interdependence between human, animal, environmental and planetary health as an unavoidable reality in the face of climate change and at a time when the planet's limits are being exceeded in an alarming manner. Planetary health is not a mere academic construct, but a scientific, political, and ethical obligation.

Drawing inspiration from the precautionary principle and from the imperative to above all do no harm, the Global Health Strategy underscores the need to base every action on patient safety and on the best available scientific evidence, to rigorously monitor results and to systematically evaluate impacts, ensuring effective, sustainable action that is tailored to the context in which it is carried out.

The Global Health Strategy reflects a decisive commitment to multilateralism, cooperation and coordination between stakeholders. Spain defends global health governance that is resilient and democratic, under the leadership of the World Health Organization (WHO) and based on principles of effectiveness, ownership, and shared responsibility. Moreover, at the national level, it champions coherent policies and collaboration between all levels of the Administration and civil society.

Global health, understood as a universal public good, requires a capacity to forge partnerships, bold policy, and a firm commitment to human rights. The Global Health Strategy sets out a path that is both ambitious and indispensable, to make health a tool for justice, equity and progress in the twenty-first century.

The Global Health Strategy in practice: strategic goals and lines of action

The guiding principles of the Strategy have been incorporated into the policy action and institutional activities of the Government of Spain through a set of Strategic Goals and lines of action that set out specific areas of work for the next five years and highlight Spain's experience in each area through key examples.

The six Goals are as follows:

Strategic Goal I. Strengthen public health systems, making them more resilient, with an approach based on universal health access and coverage, rooted in primary care and community health

Spain defends health as an inalienable human right that is inseparable from other fundamental rights, and is committed to robust, equitable and resilient public health systems. Drawing inspiration from Spain's National Health System, this Global Health Strategy prioritizes primary and community care as the backbone of universal access to high-quality services, from a universal health coverage perspective, with sufficient public funding to prevent families from falling into poverty because of unaffordable healthcare expenses.

Strengthening health systems entails improving accessibility, quality and sustainability, focusing on maintaining care over time and adapting to the needs of each community. We have learned from experience that investment that guarantees lifelong primary care reduces the need for inpatient care and mortality. Spain is also committed to resilience-building, to ensure systems can withstand health crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ebola epidemics.

As part of its foreign action, Spain will promote strong health, equitable public funding of healthcare systems and financial protection models based on risk distribution, as well as supporting resilience-building for systems in low- and middle-income countries. Equity and social justice must guide action, to ensure that no one is excluded from healthcare based on origin, gender, standing or wealth. This is both common sense and an ethical imperative.

Work will be done to contribute to provision of culturally appropriate healthcare, especially for people living in vulnerable conditions, such as migrants. The key role of education and training will be bolstered. Through initiatives such as the Programme of Training in Specialized Medicine and Healthcare, Spain promotes local capacity-building, helping to prevent brain drain and supporting long-term sustainability.

Spain's exemplary experience in organ transplant management and its leadership of budgetary support for the health sector in countries such as Ethiopia are just two examples of our commitment to innovation and international cooperation in health.

Strategic Goal 2. Foster health, well-being and living conditions with a life-course approach, and promote prevention and control of diseases with an equity-based approach, especially for people living in poverty or with vulnerable conditions

Through this Global Health Strategy, Spain is championing a model for health promotion and disease prevention, with a life-course approach based on equity and social justice. Given the crucial importance of the social determinants of health –living conditions, working conditions, education, water, diet and housing– Spain is committed to policies that transform settings, reduce inequality and promote healthy living.

This strategy entails combating infectious diseases –by supporting vaccination, universal access to water and sanitation, and protection against HIV, tuberculosis and malaria– and responding to long-term health conditions and mental health conditions, the disease burden of which is growing globally. Spain advocates a comprehensive approach, starting in the early years of life: risk factor prevention, immunization, promotion of good health in children and young people –such as care for malnutrition including obesity, and mental health– and protection of sexual and reproductive rights, with a feminist and culturally sensitive approach.

Spain aims to continue to lead the fight against cervical cancer and to spearhead support for those suffering from rare diseases, as well as promoting healthy ageing through lifelong and palliative care. At the same time, Spain will continue to work on regulation of the commercial determinants of health –including challenges such as tobacco, alcohol and ultra-processed foods– with an approach based on global public health.

Spain has accumulated considerable experience it can apply in pursuing these lines of action. Key examples include the Water and Sanitation Cooperation Fund, the Social Pact for Non-Discrimination and Equal Treatment Associated with HIV, support for Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, contributions to treatment of rare diseases, participation in the Pan-European Mental Health Coalition, and commitment to multilateral anti-smoking policies.

International collaboration, local capacity-building and the fight against stigmas and discrimination are all pillars of these activities, enabling construction of more inclusive, resilient and sustainable health systems.

Strategic Goal 3. Address environmental health and the impact of climate change on public health, with a comprehensive approach

People cannot live healthy lives if the planet itself is ill. Climate change, identified by WHO as the greatest threat to public health in the twenty-first century, has a direct impact through extreme events, infectious diseases and emerging diseases; it also indirectly destabilizes ecosystems and economies and hinders access to basic resources. With a one health and planetary health approach, this strategy proposes comprehensive action that brings together human, animal, environmental and planetary health, increasing the resilience of health systems and reducing their carbon footprint.

It is vital to adapt the health system, so that it can withstand climate shocks and reduce its contribution to crises. In this Global Health Strategy, Spain is committing to fostering sustainable technology, healthy cities and stronger community networks that can afford protection against extreme events. Spain will also step up its international cooperation, joining forces in preventing and responding to climate disasters.

The fight against antimicrobial-resistant microorganisms and zoonotic diseases, which have become more prevalent because of environmental degradation, requires an intersectoral response. Responsible use of antibiotics and plant protection products is a vital component of this Global Health Strategy, as is animal welfare, to keep ecosystems healthy.

Spain will pursue mitigation and adaptation policies that incorporate public health into each climate-related decision, paying special attention

to protecting the most vulnerable groups and building resilience in social and labour terms.

Spain has extensive experience in this area, for example: participation in the WHO Alliance for Transformative Action on Climate and Health (ATACH) to build resilient, low-emission health systems; development of the National Information System on the Carbon Footprint of Healthcare (HUCASAN); the successful National Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance (PRAN); participation in European initiatives on multidrug resistance (MDR); establishment of the Health and Climate Change Observatory (OSCC); the Strategic Health and Environment Plan (PESMA); surveillance of extreme weather events; and promotion of mechanisms for global cooperation on extreme weather events.

Strategic Goal 4. Promote prevention, preparedness and response to health emergencies and serious cross-border threats to health

If one key lesson has been learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is that in an interconnected world, we either swim together or sink together. Strengthening prevention, preparedness and response to health emergencies is a question of collective survival. The approach the Global Health Strategy takes to this challenge is based on equity and international cooperation, supporting strengthening of infrastructure, surveillance systems and rapid response mechanisms.

In this regard, Spain will back application of the International Health Regulations (IHR) and a reform of them, as well as supporting implementation of the WHO Pandemic Agreement that prioritizes equitable access to basic resources such as vaccines, personal protective equipment (PPE), diagnostic devices, medication, and other health technology. Experience has shown that solidarity is more than an ethical imperative—it is a strategic necessity when it comes to managing global crises. Spain will also champion a stronger role for WHO, foster regional cooperation through structures such as the European Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA) and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), and improve disease surveillance at the national level through a new national network and the future state public health agency.

Spain's action also includes mobilizing effective humanitarian aid, through key initiatives such as Emergency Medical Teams –a result of collaboration among cooperation agencies, health authorities and the governments of Spain's Autonomous Communities, in close coordination with WHO– and the Spanish Technical Aid Response Team (START), which can deploy field hospitals to disaster zones in less than 48 hours.

Spain's extensive experience in this area also includes a comprehensive reform of public health surveillance and its commitment to the Pandemic Fund international financing mechanism.

Strategic Goal 5. Promote a more robust and effective global health architecture and improved governance in this area, thus fostering collaboration and progress on health on an equal footing across countries

Global health governance urgently needs reforms. In response to overloaded health systems and a fragmented structure of bodies and financing, this Global Health Strategy proposes a more effective, inclusive and sustainable global health architecture, based on health as a global public good, with equity as a guiding principle. The leadership role of WHO must be strengthened, with more flexibility and resources and a stronger mandate, and there must be better alignment of the work of the different stakeholders at the international, bilateral and civil society levels, both in the Global North and the Global South.

Under this Strategy, Spain aspires to play a proactive role in shaping the global health architecture through different platforms –multiple EU spaces, the G-20 and public-private initiatives–, raising its profile within multilateral forums and organizations, promoting strategic bilateral cooperation and supporting international instruments that improve preparedness for health emergencies. The Interministerial Committee on Global Health will coordinate coherent, effective, efficient and results-oriented policies, making global health a more important issue on the international agenda and especially the European agenda.

Funding is key to success in this regard. Therefore, Spain will increase its commitment to bodies such as WHO, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and public-private initiatives such as Gavi and the Global Fund, championing transparent governance and foreseeable

funding, doing away with fragmented models and ensuring outcomes are measurable and meaningful.

These aspirations have already been reflected in different areas of work, such as promotion of the Lusaka Agenda, which redefines the role of global health initiatives; Spain's seat on the WHO Executive Board, for the first time since 2005; the Country Cooperation Strategy signed with the WHO Regional Office for Europe; and active participation in bodies such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and European health initiatives such as the EU4Health programme and the Horizon Europe research and innovation programme.

Strategic Goal 6. Promote applied research and innovation, with an equity-based approach as a cornerstone and driver of global health

The future of global health will be determined in the fields of science and innovation and by levels of equity. This Global Health Strategy proposes a global health system in which research meets global health needs, especially for people, regions and areas that have historically been overlooked: low- and middle-income countries, neglected diseases, antimicrobial resistance and vulnerable groups. Digitalization, ethical use of health data and artificial intelligence all offer unprecedented opportunities that must be seized, without this leading to greater inequality.

Spain will promote digital transformation of health systems and foster research with a feminist approach, paying special attention to the most neglected disease burdens. It will also support equitable production of and access to medication and health technologies. Science diplomacy and promotion of environmentally friendly innovation will be strategic pillars of this work.

These aims of the Global Health Strategy are based on key experiences of Spain such as the National Health System's Digital Health Strategy, which aims to make medicine more accessible; active participation in the European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP) to accelerate development of technologies to combat poverty-related diseases; the cross-cutting Global Health programme of the Carlos III Health Institute; and the work of the Barcelona Institute for Global Health in the areas of environmental health, infectious diseases and transfer of scientific knowledge.

The Thematic Interdisciplinary Platform on Global Health of the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC) applies interdisciplinary research to challenges such as pandemics. Spain is also committed to global partnerships that guarantee equitable access, such as partnerships to develop products, including Unitaid, the Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics (FINN) and the Drugs for Neglected Diseases initiative (DNDi). Spain's science diplomacy will also progress through measures in the Foreign Action Strategy and the future national strategy on technology and the global order.

Implementation, follow-up and evaluation of the Spanish Global Health Strategy

The Strategic Goals and lines of action set out in this Strategy concern regional and multilateral institutions, including those of Europe. At each of these levels, there are decision-making spaces –such as the specialised Council configurations of the EU– and financing tools that have the capacity to turn the commitments in the Global Health Strategy into action. In bilateral cooperation and regional cooperation with other countries, Spain will also prioritize complementarity and dialogue, and will have at its disposal tools such as budgetary support, triangular cooperation and knowledge transfer.

Public authorities will not be working alone to implement the Global Health Strategy. Global health policies concern a whole host of stakeholders, including non-governmental development organizations, scientific institutions, segments of society, and business sectors, all of whom have their own valuable contributions to make to disseminating the Strategy and putting it into practice.

As the Global Health Strategy itself indicates, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation and the Ministry of Health will coordinate governance of the Strategy. The governance structure will have three levels: an Interministerial Committee for the Strategy, with coordination and oversight functions; an Executive Committee for the Strategy, responsible for implementation in pursuit of the strategic goals; and an Advisory Committee for the Strategy, for consultation and support. These Committees will meet periodically to ensure that plans are followed up appropriately and to perform mid-term and final assessments of the outcomes. The entire procedure will follow strict rules on transparency and accountability to the public.



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