



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

Virtual workshop

From political will to law: Advancing universal health coverage in Africa and Asia-Pacific

2 March 2021
09:00 – 10:30 CET (Geneva)

Registration: <https://zoom.us/meeting/register/tJwsc-CurD8rEtObhHj3fMAubITQ6WI8JykX>

Concept note

Background

The 2019 IPU resolution *Achieving universal health coverage by 2030: The role of parliaments in ensuring the right to health* urges parliaments to put in place a robust legal framework for universal health coverage (UHC) and to ensure that every human being is guaranteed the right to health coverage without discrimination.

Countries worldwide committed to UHC as part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and reiterated their commitment in 2019 through the IPU resolution and the United Nations Political Declaration adopted at the seventy-fourth session of the United Nations General Assembly High-Level Meeting on UHC.

These political commitments need to be formalized through national legislation that establishes a legal mandate for governments to provide universal access to health services and products. The concept of UHC law provides for UHC principles of equity, quality, health security and financial risk protection; formulates rules and incentives to ensure health systems and its actors act consistently with the goals of UHC; establishes the relationships, organizational frameworks and partnerships needed for implementing UHC policies and programmes and for ensuring accountability; and supports health system strengthening efforts.

In 2017, 121 countries in the world – many of which were in the African and Asia-Pacific regions – had not yet passed legislation on UHC¹. Although following the adoption of the SDGs, many countries have been pursuing change by enacting legislation and developing policy frameworks, progress needs to be accelerated. According to the most recent global data available, Asia and Africa account for 98 per cent of the global population impoverished by out-of-pocket health spending.² Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and the Pacific Island Small States also have the lowest levels of health service coverage.³ Wide disparities remain among and within countries.

The first accountability report on the implementation of the IPU resolution on UHC highlights that the COVID-19 pandemic has reversed many of the development gains achieved over the past 25 years,

¹ Global Health Observatory, [https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/indicators/indicator-details/GHO/countries-that-have-passed-legislation-on-universal-health-coverage-\(uhc\)](https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/indicators/indicator-details/GHO/countries-that-have-passed-legislation-on-universal-health-coverage-(uhc)).

² Global monitoring report on financial protection in health 2019, <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/global-monitoring-report-on-financial-protection-in-health-2019>.

³ UHC service coverage index, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.UHC.SRVS.CV.XD?view=map>.

including on UHC. Parliaments reported challenges such as the diversion of resources away from UHC, the disruption of essential health services, and new barriers to healthcare coverage access to vulnerable and marginalized populations. The report notes a decrease in parliamentary momentum on UHC and UHC legislation in particular. Most parliaments remain nevertheless committed to UHC and some countries have been able to use the pandemic as an opportunity to accelerate its implementation. Now more than ever there is need to develop programmes of action to ensure access to health for all by 2030.

There is no one-size-fits all approach to UHC. Inter-parliamentary exchanges are a vital part of the process to share lessons and strengthen action at the national level. In line with the mandate of the IPU Advisory Group on Health and as part of the process to follow-up to the IPU resolution on UHC, this workshop will look more specifically into the legal framework needed to formalize UHC commitments and accelerate progress in this key area for people's and countries' well-being.

Content and objectives

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the workshop will reiterate the centrality of UHC and the role of parliaments in translating the aspiration of UHC into a reality for people through parliament's legislative function. The workshop will deepen the understanding of parliamentarians and parliamentary staff about what UHC law is and how to develop and reform legislative frameworks to support UHC. As a platform for inter-parliamentary exchanges, it will also present country examples and practical recommendations for parliamentary action.

The specific objectives of the webinar are to:

- Raise awareness on how legislation provides the capacity for UHC and provide parliamentarians and parliamentary staff with an expert briefing on UHC law.
- Promote inter-parliamentary exchanges across countries in the African and Asia-Pacific regions for mutual learning on common challenges and solutions in establishing and reforming UHC law.
- In follow up to the 2019 resolution on UHC, build accountability for the implementation of the resolution by parliaments and collect information on country efforts and best practices to inform the global parliamentary community.
- Identify specific needs and areas in which parliaments require further support in the development and reform of UHC law.

Structure (duration – 1h30min):

- Introduction and presentation of the first accountability report on the IPU resolution on UHC
- Session 1: Understanding UHC law
 - o Expert presentation on UHC law and how to develop and reform legislative frameworks to support UHC
 - o Q&A
- Session 2: Good practices in legislating for UHC
 - o Country presentation on development of UHC legislation and lessons learnt
 - o Interactive discussion with all participants
- Closing

Target audience

The workshop targets countries from Africa and Asia-Pacific. The target audience includes:

- Parliamentarians members of health committees and other committees dealing with health matters
- Parliamentary staff supporting parliamentary work on health

The workshop will also be open to other interested parliamentarians and parliamentary staff and include the IPU Advisory Group on Health members and its technical partners.

The languages will be English and French (simultaneous interpretation).

Follow up

A summary will be prepared after the workshop and made available on the IPU website. Participants will also be invited to share feedback on the workshop and areas of interest in relation to UHC. This information will help inform future IPU activities in the context of global accountability for the implementation of the IPU resolution on UHC, as well as the provision of support to national parliaments in the area of UHC.

Furthermore, parliaments will have the possibility to submit written inputs and respond to an online survey on their country experiences on the topics under discussion. The good practices and challenges shared during the workshop and through written inputs will inform future discussions of the IPU Advisory Group on Health on how to strengthen parliamentary action on UHC. This information will also feed into an annual summary of the Advisory Group where it will take stock of different national experiences and identify lessons learnt and challenges in the implementation of the IPU resolution on UHC.