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Subject:	European Court of Auditors' Special Report No 18/2024 on 'EU financial support for health systems in selected partner countries: Broad strategic objectives followed but interventions affected by coordination and sustainability issues' - Council conclusions (26 May 2025)

Delegations will find in the annex the Council conclusions on the European Court of Auditors' Special Report No 18/2024 on 'EU financial support for health systems in selected partner countries: Broad strategic objectives followed but interventions affected by coordination and sustainability issues', as approved by the Council at its 4099th meeting held on 26 May 2025.

**Council conclusions on the European Court of Auditors' Special Report No 18/2024 on
‘EU financial support for health systems in selected partner countries:
Broad strategic objectives followed but interventions affected by coordination and
sustainability issues’**

1. The Council welcomes the European Court of Auditors' Special Report No 18/2024 on EU financial support for health systems in selected partner countries. The report assesses the EU's financial support for health in partner countries in the programming periods 2007-2013 and 2014-2020, which each amounted to over EUR 3 billion, and for the period 2021-2027 until the beginning of 2024, which until then amounted to over EUR 2 billion. The Council takes good note of the findings and recommendations of the report.
2. The Council remains committed to the full implementation of the Global Health Strategy, as also supported by the High Representative , and recalls its conclusions ‘The EU Global Health Strategy – Better health for all in a changing world’¹. These involve a call for increased ambition, taking a comprehensive approach, from a focus on saving lives and reducing the emergence and spread of diseases to also promoting health and well-being, including mental health and fighting discrimination and stigma, particularly for women and girls, children and youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, LGBTI persons, indigenous peoples and persons and communities in vulnerable and marginalised situations, as well as migrant and displaced populations. The Council reiterates that global health requires effective multilateralism and inclusive multi-stakeholder partnerships, which are essential pillars of EU external policy, integral to strengthening the rules-based international order. The Council also remains committed to the EU-AU Partnership on Global Health.

¹ ST 5908/24, 29 January 2024.

3. The Council highlights the important role development cooperation plays in the area of health and the importance of close cooperation, on an equal footing, with partner countries on enhancing equitable access to health products and services, strengthening health systems towards universal health coverage (UHC) and contributing to pandemic prevention, preparedness and response. Global health is one of the key pillars of EU external policy, including Global Gateway and Team Europe initiatives on health. The Council reaffirms the leading role of the EU and its Member States in advancing global health together with partners based on solidarity, humanity, equity, gender equality and respect for human rights. Ensuring the strategic coherence of our policies and financial support with partner countries' priorities and systems is of paramount importance.
4. The Council recalls that the EU's support for health in partner countries contributes to the overall EU development policy goal of reducing and, ultimately, eradicating extreme poverty. In line with the international approach to health, in particular with United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 3, the EU provides funding to its partner countries' health systems through bilateral and regional programmes, health-related Team Europe initiatives, UN partner organisations such as the World Health Organization and other multilateral partner organisations such as the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance and the Pandemic Fund.
5. The Council welcomes the Court's conclusion that the EU supported different health interventions which were in line with countries' needs and that EU support has contributed to the functioning of their health systems.
6. The Council takes note of the Court's conclusion that the allocation of funding was affected by shortcomings, that the effectiveness of projects was hampered by issues of coordination and sustainability, and that monitoring did not provide a full picture of the Commission's activities in the health sector.
7. The Council takes note of the restricted scope of the special report's in-depth analysis of EU health support in the field, covering only three countries – Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Zimbabwe. Furthermore, the Council notes that the report focuses on global and country-level support but does not cover regional initiatives.

8. The European Court of Auditors' special report offers observations about the EU's support for health in partner countries, as well as recommendations for future support, namely: better match countries' needs and the allocation of health funding; set clear criteria for funding of global health initiatives; improve needs analysis and coordination of distribution of equipment and medicines; analyse reasonableness of management costs; avoid overlaps and ensure synergies; comprehensively monitor EU support; promote sustainability of health systems; and give increased importance to maintenance of equipment.
9. The Council takes note of the Commission's comprehensive replies attached to the special report and welcomes the fact that the Commission has accepted or partially accepted all its recommendations. The Council takes note of the additional cases of best practices outlined by the Commission in its replies to the special report.

Better match countries' needs and the allocation of health funding

10. The Council takes note of the ECA report's findings that highlight differences between the ranking of partner countries' needs and the geographic allocation of EU health aid, and the recommendation to coordinate and to rebalance, if possible, the allocation of funding between global initiatives, regional initiatives, and bilateral support to countries. The Council welcomes the Commission's intention to enhance the criteria for developing the country ranking and to look at how to adequately incorporate the ranking in the next programming exercise. The Council stresses the need to adequately take into account the needs of partner countries in the allocation of EU health funding. The Council stresses that the integration of global, regional and country-level support is key to advancing health issues through the Global Health Strategy and the implementation of the Global Gateway projects related to health.

Set clear criteria for funding of global health initiatives and improve documentation of the allocation process

11. The Council highlights the importance of setting clear, specific and, where applicable, quantifiable criteria for funding global health initiatives and improving the documentation of this process, as underlined in the ECA special report. The Council positively notes that qualitative and quantitative elements are already considered by the Commission when allocating funding to global health initiatives, as outlined in the Commission replies, and welcomes the Commission's commitment to improving the documentation process in collaboration with EU Member States.

Improve needs analysis and the coordination of the distribution of equipment and medicines

12. The Council agrees with the ECA finding that the coordination of the distribution of equipment and medicines in partner countries could be further improved. The Council highlights the Team Europe approach to coordination of health-related policies and activities, introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and also implemented in relation to the areas of cooperation analysed. The Council takes notes of the Commission's replies pointing at insufficient funding from both donors and governments leading to stock-out problems. The Council welcomes the Commission's commitment to work with partner countries to help establish their health strategies and to further increase their capacity for needs analysis, planning and coordination.

Analyse reasonableness of management costs

13. The Council takes note of the ECA special report's observation that the costs of interventions in the health sector were impacted by a cascading structure of implementation and emphasises the importance of strengthening the analysis of the reasonableness of budgeted management costs. The Council recalls the importance of adhering to the regulatory framework and the limits on management costs specified therein, but believes that applicable guidance and instructions can be improved, and welcomes the Commission's efforts in this respect.

Avoid overlaps and ensure synergies between the global health initiatives supported

14. The Council stresses the importance of avoiding overlaps and ensuring complementarity and coordination between global health initiatives to ensure effectiveness, in full implementation of the Lusaka Agenda. The Council highlights the positive contribution to synergies and complementarity of the global health-related Team Europe initiatives, acknowledges the Commission's work in this respect, and welcomes the Commission's renewed effort to ensure synergies between global health initiatives supported. The Council urges the Commission services and the EEAS, with the EU Delegations, to work with Member States to enhance the visibility of EU funding among targeted populations in partner countries.

Identify indicators to monitor in a comprehensive manner the EU support for the health sector

15. The Council recalls the ECA special report recommendation for the Commission to identify comprehensive indicators for EU interventions in the health sector and to assess the feasibility of applying a proportional method for reporting the results of EU interventions in multi-donor funds. The Council welcomes the Commission's intention to align with existing indicators and frameworks in line with the Lusaka Agenda. In this regard, the Council emphasises the need to ensure that efforts to monitor and attribute results are undertaken in close coordination with all partners and carefully balanced with the need for ownership and available capacities. The Council also welcomes the Commission's intention to further assess the feasibility of applying a proportional method for reporting evidence-based, co-constructed, appropriate and gender-sensitive results of EU interventions.

Take action to promote the sustainability of health systems

16. The Council underlines the importance of designing clear transition and exit strategies to ensure the sustainability of health systems and progress towards UHC and the Sustainable Development Goals, and recognises the key role of the Lusaka Agenda in this respect. The Council highlights that discussions on health systems should involve all relevant actors, including the governments of partner countries, and encourage domestic resource mobilisation, while recognising the difficulties of operating in challenging environments. The Council welcomes the ongoing work by the Commission to improve the sustainability of health systems and encourages the streamlining of sustainability, domestic resource mobilisation and adequate exit strategies in the planning and programming of EU actions and Team Europe initiatives.

Give increased importance to maintenance of equipment delivered by projects

17. The Council agrees with the ECA special report recommendation to include maintenance aspects in the procurement of equipment, and to take action to help establish a culture and routine of maintenance among stakeholders. The Council welcomes the Commission's intention to take this recommendation forward in its dialogue with implementing partners and partner countries, and in the elaboration of terms of reference for tenders directly managed by the Commission. The Council acknowledges the challenges of changing behaviour and culture in relation to maintenance of equipment, and welcomes the Commission's commitment to raise awareness and integrate maintenance training into the delivery of equipment.
18. The Council invites the Commission to follow up on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the special report in a timely manner. The Council encourages the Commission to analyse, identify and, if needed, address possible systemic challenges, wherever the challenges identified in the Court's recommendations may point to recurrent issues in the Commission's programme implementation.