



MilanMUN 2024 Research Report

Safeguarding Access to Life-Saving Medicines

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Introduction

Since prehistoric times, the world has always suffered from illness and sickness, such as the Black Death, or the 2020 pandemic of COVID-19.

Nowadays, the meaning of the term “medicine” itself can vary considerably from one continent to another, therefore safeguarding access to pharmaceuticals does, too. At any rate, In today’s world, this subject has become of vital concern for millions of people worldwide. For instance, It is important to remember the unstoppable spread of numerous diseases throughout the world like malaria, paludism, and HIV/AIDS. However, safeguarding access to medication is not without challenges, mostly because of the high cost of healthcare. Furthermore, adequate physical infrastructure and training healthcare professionals are crucial to sustaining robust healthcare systems and not leaving lives hanging in the balance.

This introduction leads us to understand the facts this issue will be addressing, such as affordability, availability, and regulation. Fixing these issues is not only a moral imperative but also a global duty for governments, non-governmental organizations, and pharmaceutical companies.

Definition of Key Terms

Life-saving medicine: refers to medication or treatments essential for preventing or treating life-threatening conditions or diseases.

Vaccine coverage: refers to the percentage of a population that has been immunized with a specific vaccine. It is calculated by dividing the number of individuals who have received the vaccine by the total number of individuals in the target population. To ensure effectiveness, it is recommended that at least 80% of the population be vaccinated.

ICU (Intensive Care Unit) healthcare: refers to the medical care and close monitoring given to patients who are severely ill and need continuous medical attention and intensive therapy. Typically, the ICU is a specialized area within hospitals specifically designed for providing this level of care.

Abortion: is a common health intervention to stop pregnancy, it can be done by medication or by surgery. It is safe when carried out using a method recommended by WHO, appropriate to the length of pregnancy, and by someone with the necessary skills.

Health insurance: insurance that provides coverage for medical and surgical needs by an individual. It takes the form of a contract where the individual regularly pays a certain amount of money to a company no matter their health condition. In exchange, the company protects and pays for the needs of the individual. The coverage can vary depending on the type of plan, and it may include services like doctor visits, hospital stays, prescription drugs, and preventive care.

[based on

https://books.google.fr/books?hl=en&lr=&id=r5_FppS3Vc4C&oi=fnd&pg=PA113&dq=%22social+security%22+french+&ots=eEtNFEKRAR&sig=actx9IPij26eHelwqXdbBYZhckM&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=%22social%20security%22%20french&f=false page 113]

Intellectual property rights: this refers to the legal protections or rights granted to individuals or organizations for their creations or inventions. They include patents. These rights ensure that the creators can legally control its use, distribution, or reproduction.

Generic medicines: these are pharmaceutical drugs that are produced and marketed after the expiration of patent protection on the original brand-name drug. Generic medicines are typically sold at a lower cost compared to brand-name drugs.

Patent protection: it is a legal right granted to inventors that allows them to exclude others from making, using, or selling their invention for a certain time.

[<https://doi.org/10.4103/0975-7406.62694>]

Price Transparency: refers to the disclosure of information about the pricing of goods or services. Price transparency aims to provide more information to individuals so they can make informed decisions about their healthcare choices.

Background Information

Different Types of Life-Saving Medicine

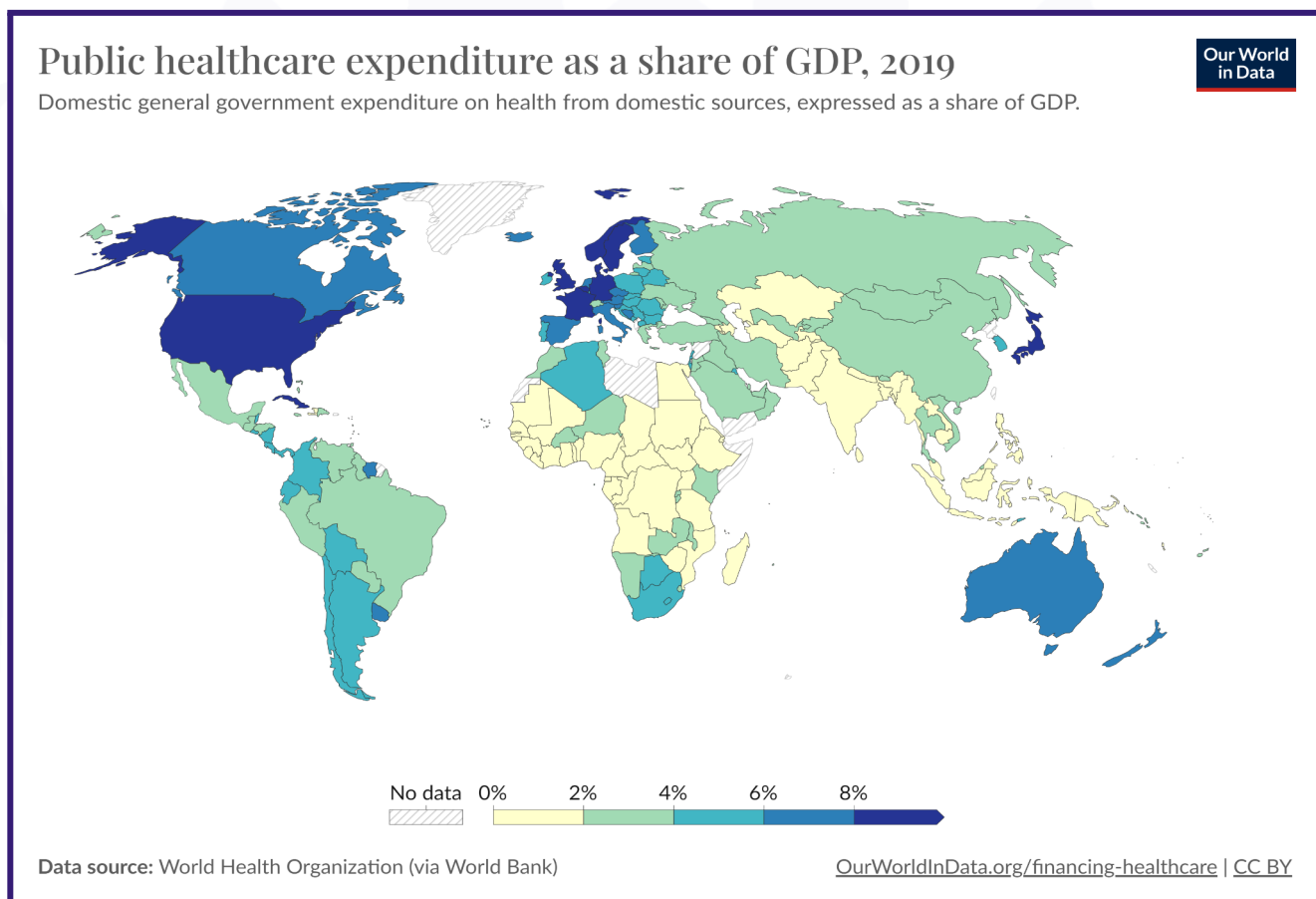
[Essential Medicines and Health Products PROMOTING ACCESS, QUALITY AND INNOVATION TO SAVE AND IMPROVE LIVES. (n.d.)

https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/204469/WHO_EMP_2016.01_eng.pdf

There are numerous types of life-saving medicines, such as, but not limited to:

- Vaccines: these are meant to prevent the spread of diseases. Their goal is to avoid epidemics and/or pandemics and to reduce mortality rates.
- Antibiotics: these are the main treatments given for bacterial infections to prevent their development and complications.
- ART (Antiretroviral Therapy): these are the drugs used to treat HIV and AIDS, to help the affected individuals live longer and healthier lives.
- Chemotherapy drugs: used in case of cancer for their ability to target and kill cancer cells.
- Auto-injectors (and epinephrine): This is a direct medication for individuals to use at home in case of severe allergic reactions. It is meant to maintain life first and stop the reaction, but then the consultation with a doctor is mandatory.
- In different cultures, traditional medicine is considered crucial and life-saving.
- Abortion is also an essential treatment in some pregnancies, where women's lives can be threatened.

The Distribution of and Public Expenditure on Medicines



We can remark that most MDCs (More Developed Countries) spend a large portion of their GDP on healthcare systems. For instance, since most of the European Union members have public healthcare systems, EU States and Governments spend a lot on their public health administration, which keeps most of the people healthy and alive.

The situation in LMIC (lower and Middle Income Countries) is starkly different. Most Asian and African countries spend less than 5% of their GDP on healthcare. In many Sub-Saharan countries, this percentage drops even further to less than 2%.

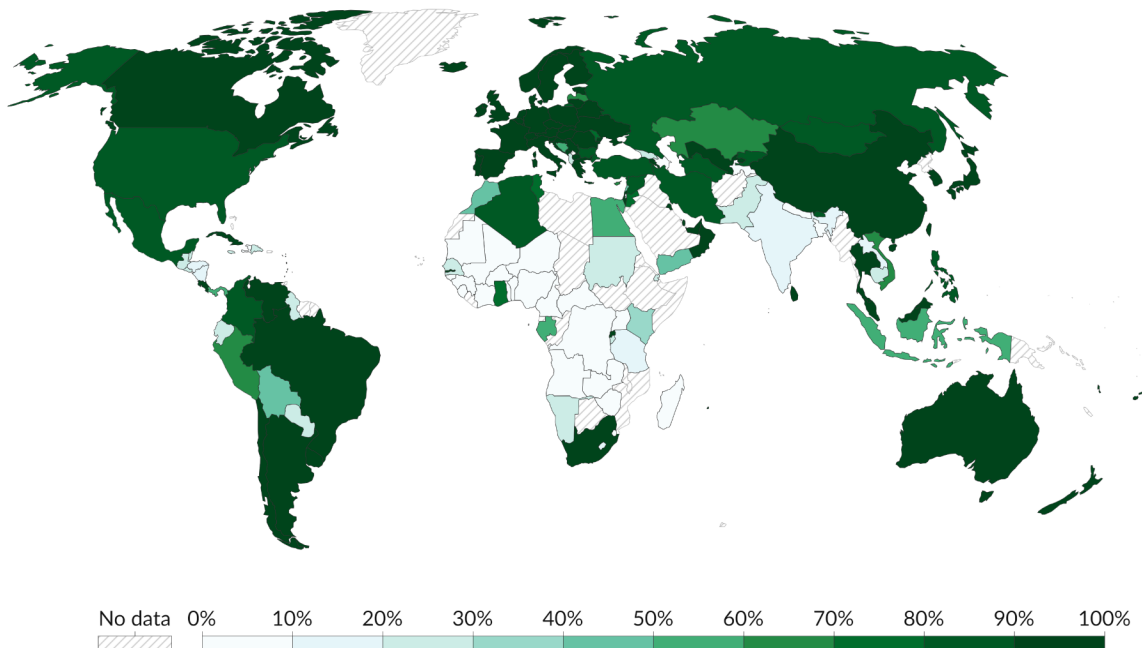
There are two reasons for this disparity.

- First of all, developing countries focus their attention on issues other than basic healthcare. Most of them try to develop their economies by turning a blind eye towards the population, and countries with enormous populations, such as India, don't focus on the healthcare for their populations.
- Secondly, there is less wealth available for these countries to distribute between fields of studies and research to maintain lives.

Percentage of population covered by health insurance, 2011

Our World
in Data

Estimate of health insurance coverage as a percentage of total population. Coverage includes affiliated members of health insurance or estimation of the population having free access to health care services provided by the State.



Data source: OWID based on ILO (2014) and OECD (2017)

OurWorldInData.org/financing-healthcare | CC BY

According to the platform “Our World in Data”, most developed and developing countries have +70% coverage of health insurance. However, one shouldn’t forget that these insurances’ prices and quality can greatly vary depending on the countries you live in if you choose private or public systems, and if you have other options than just insurance.

In many MDCs like the United States of America, health insurance and health care are very costly, hence the poorest people cannot afford to cover even the most basic healthcare needs. We should add that in those countries, pricey health insurance goes with pricey healthcare. That is a problem. Because not being able to afford health insurance is a problem, not being able to afford healthcare is even more urgent.

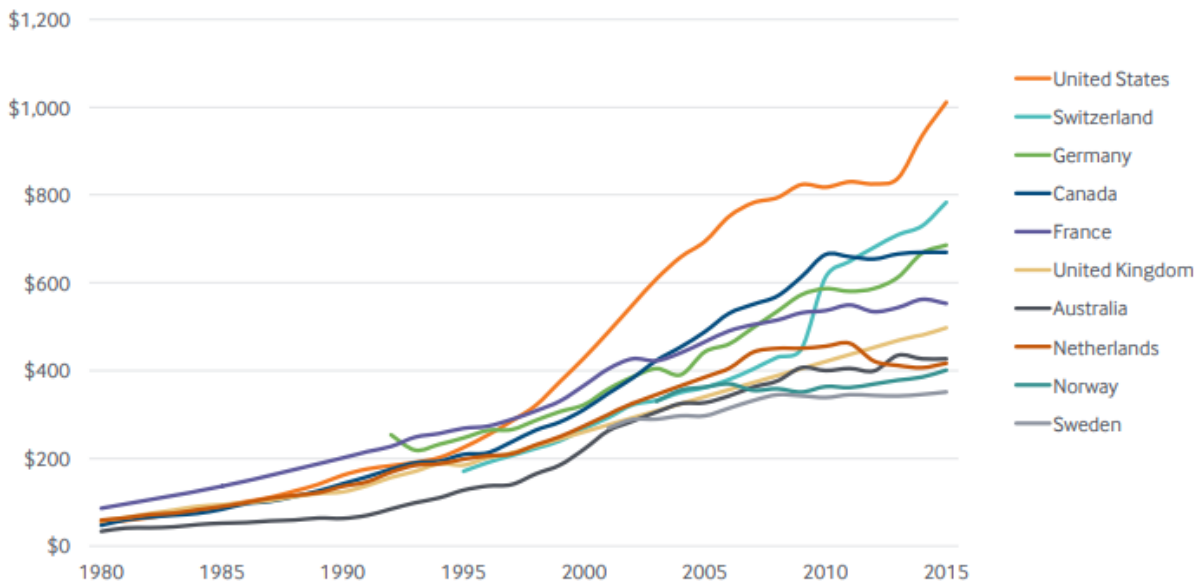
In addition, we should notice that most of Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia are zones where few people have insurance. In these areas, only the economic elites can afford insurance, and that is especially true in Africa.

The Price of Medicines Around the World

As medical research (mostly based in MEDCs) and patent owners need more and more resources to keep their studies going, they generally increase the medicines and essential medicines prices. However, increasing these prices too much would close the markets in LEDCs. Indeed, if prices go

too high, the majority of the people in LEDs will not have enough resources to buy medical care. Thus, the markets will not provide enough benefits and will have to close, which will end up in making less money than is already the case and researchers will not be able to finance their studies. Therefore, a global equilibrium price has to be found not to be too high or too low.

Exhibit 1. National Trends in Per Capita Pharmaceutical Spending, 1980–2015



Notes: Final expenditure on pharmaceuticals includes wholesale and retail margins and value-added tax. Total pharmaceutical spending refers in most countries to "net" spending, i.e., adjusted for possible rebates payable by manufacturers, wholesalers, or pharmacies. Data from all countries include only the portion spent on retail prescription medications, except for the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, where spending on pharmaceuticals includes prescribed medicines, over-the-counter medications, and other medical nondurable goods. Pharmaceuticals consumed in hospitals and other health care settings are excluded.
Data: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2017. Data for Australia and Canada from 2014.

commonwealthfund.org

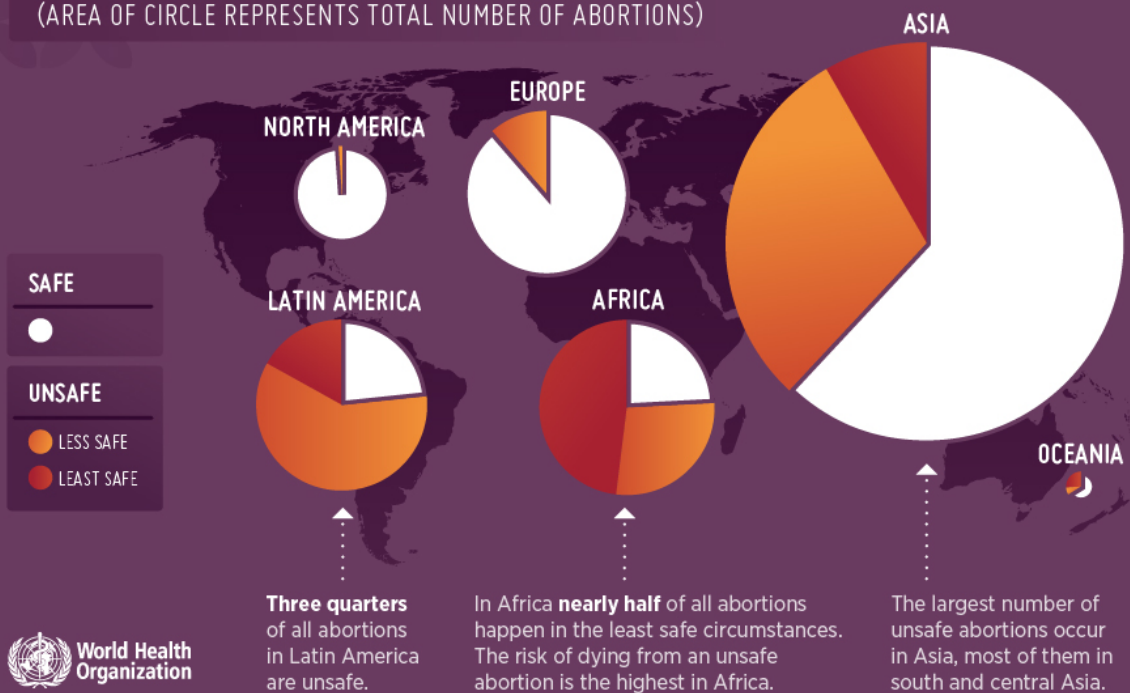
Issue Brief, October 2017

The Case of Abortion

Abortion is the act of terminating a pregnancy. It can be done in case of pregnancy resulting from rape or incestuous sexual activity, or in the case of maternal health concerns, fetal health concerns, or mental health concerns, but also because the parent can't afford a baby, poor timing, a lack of maturity, career concerns, or an already high number of children.

DISTRIBUTION OF ABORTIONS

(AREA OF CIRCLE REPRESENTS TOTAL NUMBER OF ABORTIONS)



It is recognized that six out of 10 of all unintended pregnancies end in induced abortion in the world and that 45% of these abortions are considered executed in unsafe conditions of which 97% occur in developing countries (mostly in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.) [WHO: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/abortion>]

Unsafe abortions are the main cause leading to maternal deaths, morbidities, and co-morbidities. Both physical and mental health can be affected. In addition to this, the cost is also prohibitive and sometimes results in damaging the financial stability of a family.

Abortion is recognized as a human right by the UN, therefore it should be protected by the Member States.

Major Parties Involved

World Health Organization (WHO)

The World Health Organization (WHO) is an organization that operates under the United Nations. It holds the crucial role of being the global authority when it comes to public and global health matters. It sets standards and formulates policies that serve as guidelines for nations worldwide.

in their efforts to tackle health issues effectively. Furthermore, the WHO extends its assistance to countries in strengthening their health systems. By offering guidance and technical expertise, the organization helps nations enhance their capacity to deliver quality healthcare services to their populations. This support encompasses various aspects, including healthcare infrastructure, workforce development, and the availability of essential medical supplies. By advocating for equitable access to healthcare, the organization strives to ensure that every individual, regardless of their socio-economic background, geographical location, or even family situation, has the opportunity to attain the highest possible level of health.

To sum up, the World Health Organization plays a vital role in promoting and safeguarding public health.

Africa

As seen in the overview, the African continent has major struggles concerning the subject of healthcare.

Traditionally, African countries have used traditional and herbal medicines. Since the Europeans and Westerners entered the medical market in Africa, new medicines and drugs have entered this African medical market. However, Africa is known to struggle with its access to essential and life-saving medicine. For instance, during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, this inequality became evident with a lack of COVID-19 tests, widespread food insecurity stemming from the global lockdown and economic crisis, and an insufficient number of beds in intensive care units.

For example, while China had 3,6 care beds per 100,000 people (which still needed to be improved), Malawi had only 25 for 19 million people.

To conclude, Africa experiences a critical situation when it comes to healthcare, especially pandemics. Every life has equal worth, yet some are forced to wait. It seems even more the case for African lives.

[\[https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736\(20\)31093-x\]](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736(20)31093-x)

European Union and France

The healthcare system in the European Union ensures that every citizen of a country in the European Union has the right to free emergency healthcare no matter where they are in the Union.

The French principle of “sécurité sociale” is that this is a national insurance mostly paid by income tax. Moreover, it is paid by the majority of the French workers and citizens and it benefits all the French citizens in need. It has several parts, with different goals and which provide different

means of financial help. This gives access to all types of free medicine and services in France, such as healthcare, maternity, disability therapy, old-age healthcare, and occupational accidents for all individuals, regardless of their social or financial situation. A notable exception is psychological health care provided by psychologists which is not reimbursed by the social security system.

[https://books.google.fr/books?hl=en&lr=&id=r5_FppS3Vc4C&oi=fnd&pg=PA113&dq=%22social+security%22+french+&ots=eEtNFEKRAr&sig=actx9IPij26eHelwqXdbBYZhckM&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=%22social%20security%22%20french&f=false from page 113]

The Particular Case of the USA

- The USA is one of the only four countries to have rolled back the legality of abortion (with El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Poland). As of 2024, each state in the USA is allowed to choose whether or not to make abortion legal.
- The USA is one of the two countries with an abortion law that changes according to the state you're in (together with Mexico).

Possible Solutions

As demonstrated by this background paper, the concern of safeguarding access to life-saving medicine is an enormous issue for the World Health Organization committee.

- Encouraging member states to tax corporations, and the wealthiest individuals to create an equity fund to help the poorest people have a chance to save their life when the moment comes.
- Encouraging all member states to set free access to some medications by all governments. If it can be done, the idea of national health insurance can be put into place too.
- Since education about medicine plays an important role in the issue, the WHO urges Member states to take measures concerning the education of their population about essential medicines, hospitals, clinics and the fundamental right to be taken care of by healthcare professionals.
- WHO urges Member States to lower the prices of their public healthcare and to review the regulation of the private healthcare markets, to lower the costs for individuals and groups in need of quick and cost-effective medicine.

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