

Fourteenth meeting of the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on the Prevention and Control of NCDs on COVID-19 and the NCD-related SDGs

Date of meeting: 10 July 2020

Participants: Around 40 participants joined, representing 11 Task Force member organizations, along with a number of United Nations Volunteers (UNVs) involved in UNDP HIV, Health and Development projects.

Subject: UN Volunteers and their work on COVID-19 and NCD-related SDGs

1. The session was facilitated by Dudley Tarlton from the UNDP Health, Gender and Environment Group. The objective was to: (i) present an overview of the UNDP HIV, Health and Development Group's activities and achievements cooperating with volunteers; (ii) showcase major projects developed by United Nations Volunteers; (iii) identify linkages between UNV work and ongoing projects from Task Force members. The presentations are attached.
2. Dudley Tarlton explained that the Group had received over 600 applications during the COVID-19 pandemic and nearly 200 had provided inputs into several activities to support the Group's work. 45% of the UNVs were based in the Global South and there was a 2:1 female to male ratio among volunteers. A few of the activities were being presented to this meeting. UN Agencies can benefit from engaging with this group and should avail themselves of this resource.
3. NCD-Vulnerability Index and accompanying dashboard. The volunteers have developed an index that measures the vulnerability of populations of UN-member states to severe outcomes of COVID-19, in terms of NCD and risk factor prevalence, with the aim of raising awareness and informing policy decisions.
 - a. The index consists in a weighted average of indicators comprising behavioral risk factors, metabolic risk factors and NCD prevalence, selected and weighted in accordance with existing literature on NCD and COVID-19 linkages. To encourage data exploration and analysis using the index, a dashboard (available at [this link](#)) was developed using the Domo¹ Business Intelligence platform.
 - b. The index points to increased NCD-related COVID-19 vulnerability in the regions of Europe, North America, Northern Africa and Pacific Island Countries. As noted, the index should be interpreted with care, as it does not (1) include other major established COVID-19 risk factors, such as HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, age and the male gender, (2) take into account the capacity of health systems to respond.
 - c. In order to ground the interpretation of the index, correlations were explored between the index and other health variables. Countries with high overall burdens of disease (40K DALYs or more per 100 000 population) were shown to display low NCD vulnerability, whereas for countries within the 20K to 40K band the index exhibited high variability. Countries with higher NCD vulnerability also tended to be the ones with better equipped health systems.
 - d. The UNVs plan to include further health conditions in the index and/or the dashboard, such as age, tuberculosis and mental health indicators, as appropriate. The index will also be tested against COVID-19 data for adherence and compared to development indicators,

¹ Domo (<https://www.domo.com/>) is a business software company for data analysis. Domo kindly offered the UNDP Health, Gender and Environment a free license for the NCD Vulnerability Dashboard.

for additional insights. Further work is required to shed light on additional vulnerability factors not accounted for in the present index.

4. Health tax modelling and how the tax revenue can be allocated. The team developed an economic model to forecast revenue along with a report describing the country context, methodology, revenue predictions and recommendations. The model and associated findings is planned to eventually be included in country NCD investment case reports.
 - a. Volunteers developed an economic model to assess revenue implication from increasing taxes on tobacco, alcohol and sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) as a measure for NCD prevention. So far, they have used the model in two target countries: Bahrain and Uganda.
 - b. The model forecasts the percent increase in GDP from the increased excise taxes, as well as the additional revenue from each taxed product: tobacco, SSBs, beer, wine and spirits. The model forecasts revenue until 2030 showing benefits accumulate when increased levels of taxes are sustained long term.
 - c. Revenue from health taxes offer opportunities to invest in the health sector to support SDG3. Governments could finance NCD treatment and prevention strategies as well as COVID-19 response. It was highlighted that this stream of revenue can continue to support NCD prevention and control post COVID-19.
 - d. Volunteers are planning to refine this model to adapt it to other countries as an NCD prevention strategy. Next steps include exploring options for an interactive online platform, increasing advocacy for health taxes, and researching further target countries to implement this model.
5. COVID-19/NCD Literature Review. The aim of the review was to summarize main data trends on COVID-19 interactions with NCDs and their risk factors, closing an existing knowledge gap. The review process can be challenging, as the vast universe of over 30,000 COVID-19 publications and 1,000 on risk factors, is heterogeneous and rapidly evolving. Furthermore, the quality of studies can be inconsistent, evidence is often conflicting or on unsure footing, and LMICs are systematically underrepresented in the studies.
6. There was a detailed discussion on the health tax model including the importance of considering tax structure when increasing taxes and linking them to the health sector. There were questions on the methodology and findings of the tax model. Task Force members offering advice and support to help develop the model.
7. Nil Memişoğlu, Country Coordinator, UN Volunteers Turkey, expressed appreciation for the work of the volunteers.
8. A discussion on NCD cost analysis work was postponed to a future Task Force meeting.

Other issues

1. Launch of the Task Force-WHO-PATH Access Initiative for Quitting Tobacco (AIQT) to be launched 10 July 2020 during the WHO Director General's Press Conference on COVID-19 17:30 to 18:30 CET <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>.

Actions

1. Vulnerability Index UNVs to share the access link and theoretical framework for the NCD Vulnerability Index dashboard with Task Force Members by 15/07
2. Health Tax UNVs to discuss health taxes and methodology with Evan Blecher from WHO at next meeting.
3. UNV presentation on NCD Cost Analysis within the COVID-19 Pandemic to take place a future Task Force meeting.

Next meeting

Building on this session the next meeting will be Health Taxes: policy and practice.

Friday 17 July 2020, 16.00 – 17.30 CET: (note an extra 30 minutes is being proposed for this session).

15 July 2020