

NEWS FROM BRUSSELS



Word from Senior Policy Advisor Dr. Theodoros Koutroubas

Dear friends,

Many European countries are raising healthcare expenditure; the European Commission is co-operating with the Pan-American Health Organisation to respond to serious cross-border public health threats; it is very possible that the cardiovascular health plan will include new taxes on highly-processed high fat sugar and salt foods. Last but not least, congratulations to the President of our Observer Member, TruMerit, Peter Preziosi, for his election as President of the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations. As always, your feedback is important for us.

Kind regards,
Theo

NEWSLETTER HIGHLIGHTS

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Healthcare in 2023

PAHO and European
Commission's Health Emergency
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Preparedness for Cross-Border
Health Threats

EU Wants to Tax Unhealthy Food,
Alcopops Under Draft Heart
Health Plan

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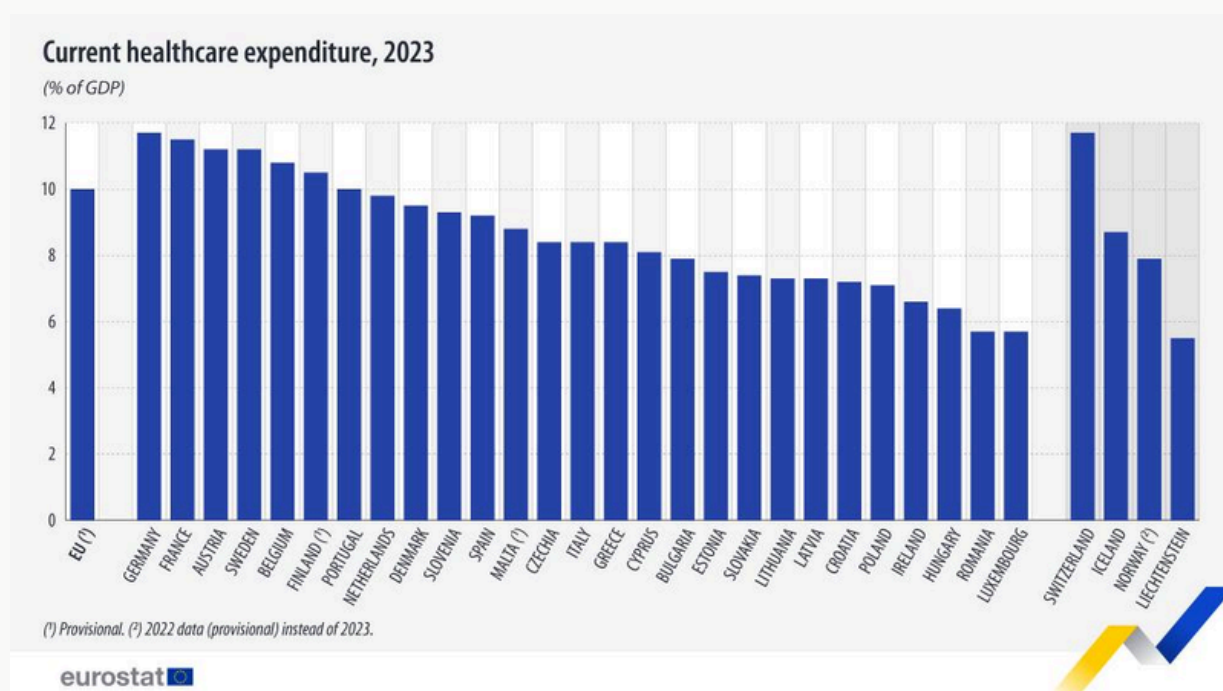
10% of the EU's GDP Went to Healthcare in 2023

eurostat 

In 2023, the EU spent €1 720 billion in healthcare expenditure, equivalent to 10.0% of the EU's gross domestic product (GDP).

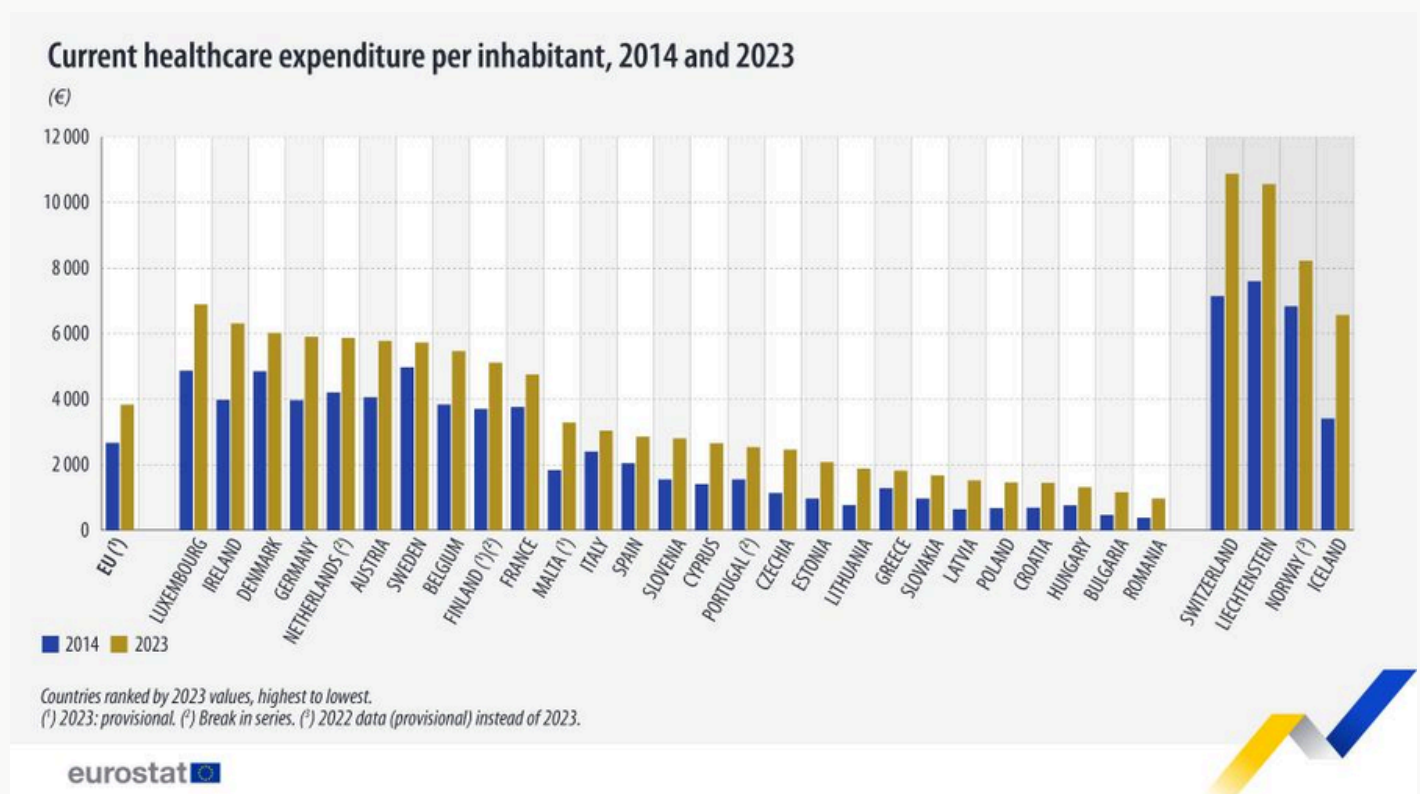
Germany recorded the highest level of current healthcare expenditure among EU countries, valued at €492 billion in 2023, followed by France (€325 billion), Italy (€179 billion) and Spain (€138 billion).

Relative to their GDP, Germany also registered the highest ratio, as current healthcare expenditure was equivalent to 11.7% of the GDP. The other highest ratios were in France (11.5%), Austria and Sweden (both 11.2%). By contrast, current healthcare expenditure accounted for less than 7.0% of GDP in 4 EU countries: Luxembourg, Romania (both 5.7%), Hungary (6.4%) and Ireland (6.6%).



Current healthcare expenditure in the EU increased from €2 668 per person in 2014 to €3 835 in 2023 (+43.7%). The same trend was registered in all EU countries.

Between 2014 and 2023, Romania recorded the largest increase in overall healthcare expenditure, with average spending per inhabitant increasing by 155.6%. This ratio had also at least doubled in Bulgaria (+148.9%), Lithuania (+143.8%), Latvia (+135.8%), Poland (+116.6%), Czechia (+116.2%), Estonia (+114.6%) and Croatia (+108.9%). The smallest increase was observed in Sweden (+15.2%).



PAHO and European Commission's Health Emergency Authority Make Deal to Boost Preparedness for Cross-Border Health Threats



Santa Marta, Colombia, November 7, 2025 (PAHO) — The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA) of the European Commission have signed an administrative arrangement to enhance cooperation in prevention, preparedness, and response to serious cross-border public health threats.

The arrangement, signed by Dr Jarbas Barbosa, Director of PAHO, and Florika Fink-Hooijer, Director-General of HERA, was witnessed by European Commissioner for Equality, Preparedness and Crisis Management, Hadja Lahbib, who oversees HERA within the European Commission. It sets out a framework for collaboration in the area of medical countermeasures (MCMs)—including vaccines, diagnostics, therapeutics, and other essential health technologies—between the European Union and the Region of the Americas.

The arrangement was signed in the context of the European Union–Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (EU–CELAC) Summit, held in Colombia, reflecting the regions' shared commitment to joint action in health emergency preparedness and response. Signing the arrangement during the Summit added further significance, highlighting the strategic importance of bi-regional cooperation in achieving health security and strengthening collective preparedness and response—a key priority for both regions.

The cooperation will focus on:

- **Exchange of information** on medical countermeasure priorities, availability, and procurement practices;
- **Strengthening of laboratory capacities** through a One Health approach that integrates human, animal, and environmental health;
- **Procurement of medical countermeasures**, including cooperation on procurement mechanisms, models, and innovative contracting, as well as the sharing of experience and expertise on capacity reservation strategies; and
- **Preparedness and stockpiling methodologies** to support coordinated responses during health emergencies.

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that effective preparedness requires close international cooperation,” said Dr. Jarbas Barbosa, Director of PAHO. “This arrangement will help strengthen the exchange of information, technology, and expertise between our regions, improving our collective capacity to detect and respond to future health emergencies.”

Hadja Lahbib, Commissioner for Equality, Preparedness and Crisis Management, said: “Stronger cooperation is the best defense against the next health crisis. This arrangement between HERA and PAHO shows what partnership means in practice: sharing expertise, building resilience, and making sure no region is left alone when an emergency hits. It is a clear signal of our joint commitment to protect lives through solidarity and preparedness.”

The arrangement foresees joint technical activities, including training, preparedness exercises, and participation in regional and international health fora. It will remain in effect for five years from the date of signature.

EU Wants to Tax Unhealthy Food, Alcopops Under Draft Heart Health Plan



The European Commission wants EU-wide levies on ultra-processed foods and alcopops by 2026, according to a first draft of the Cardiovascular Health Plan obtained by Euractiv.

In December, the Commission is set to unveil the EU's first dedicated plan to address its biggest health burden – cardiovascular disease. According to the text seen by Euractiv, Health Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi will structure the plan around three “pillars”: prevention, early detection and screening, and treatment and care.

The plan has long been expected as a follow-up to the Commission's former European Beating Cancer Plan and will be launched alongside the EU's upcoming Biotech Act and a revision of its medical devices rules.

Big on prevention?

The draft notes that the bloc has not acted sufficiently on preventing risk factors – specifically alcohol, tobacco and new nicotine products, and ultra-processed foods – even though prevention is described as the most cost-effective way to address heart disease.

According to the draft, and **as first reported** by Euractiv, Várhelyi wants to implement “EU-wide levies on highly processed, high fat, sugar and salt foods, and alcopops in 2026.”

The EU executive is also looking to propose a revision of tobacco control rules by 2027, with the goal of reducing adult tobacco use to below 5% by 2040.

The Commission also wants stronger action on vaccination targets and reducing inequalities in women's health.

The first draft specified that it has the following targets by 2035:

- A 20% reduction in cardiovascular mortality
- 70% diagnosis and control rates for hypertension
- 80% diagnosis and control rates for diabetes and obesity

To meet these goals, the Commission will launch a project called “EU cares for your heart”, designed to support a “lifelong, personalised, and digitally enabled approach.” The flagship initiative will help national governments develop cardiovascular disease (CVD) plans by 2027.

The Commission says it aims to scale-up existing AI and data-driven systems, improve dietary habits, and to launch a new study on ‘highly processed foods’, as well as a new comprehensive food-processing assessment system.

Screening, AI, innovation

In terms of screening, the Commission will propose new Council recommendations in 2026 on improving health checks for CVD, with screening-specific targets.

As with the European Beating Cancer Plan, the Commission aims to set up a network of specialised cardiovascular health centres across the EU. The EU executive will also establish a €20 million ‘incubator’ for experimenting with AI use and data-driven tools for early detection and personalised medicine.

In terms of research, the Commission will launch a new Cardiovascular Disease Research and Innovation Roadmap, with a €2 million budget, €65 million allocated to innovative healthcare, and €12 million for healthy and sustainable diets.

TruMerit's Peter Preziosi Elected President of the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations



(NEW YORK, October 30, 2025) – TruMerit President and CEO Peter Preziosi has been elected President of the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations, also known as CoNGO.

CoNGO is an international non-governmental organization founded in 1948 that relates to the United Nations through its General Consultative Status granted by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). It has 525 member organizations from around the world and 106 associate members.

Dr. Preziosi was elected to serve for the 2025-29 term this week at the 28th CoNGO General Assembly, which took place in New York with the virtual participation of organizations from around the world. He succeeds the Rev. Dr. Liberato C. Bautista, the main representative to the UN for the General Board of Church and Society of The United Methodist Church, who has served as CoNGO's President since 2017 and also held the post from 2007 to 2011.

TruMerit has been a member of CoNGO since 2018 and is active in the organization's affairs, having served as the organization's Secretary to the CoNGO Board and as chair of its Membership Committee.

Dr. Preziosi is the first Registered Nurse to serve as CoNGO President. He is a nonprofit executive who since early 2023 has led TruMerit, formerly known as CGFNS International, a health workforce development organization committed to advancing the ethical mobility and professional growth of health workers worldwide. Previously, he was employed by the World Health Organization to help establish its technology-driven global learning center, the WHO Academy.

Dr. Bautista, the former President of CoNGO, extended his warm congratulations to Dr. Preziosi on his election. “His experience at TruMerit and at WHO, coupled with his profound dedication to multilateralism and his engagement with civil society, provide a basis for optimism regarding CoNGO’s future. In an era where the voice and influence of civil society are of paramount importance in shaping a shared future that upholds human dignity and rights, as well as planetary sustainability, Dr. Preziosi’s leadership is expected to enhance CoNGO’s role as a pivotal supporter and advocate for democratic and equitable participation within the United Nations and beyond,” he stated.

“CoNGO has long been a vital convener of NGOs, a bridge between civil society and an advocate for their engagement at the United Nations, as well as a steadfast champion of inclusive multilateralism—a concept that, unfortunately, is increasingly under attack,” said Preziosi.

“In response, let us assert civil society participation at the United Nations not as a plea, but as a principle—one that is essential to legitimate, effective, and ethical multilateralism, and thereby is critical to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals and adherence to the rule of law,” he said.