

# Local solutions to local challenges: Regional Director witnesses progress on health reforms in Azerbaijan



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BY [WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION](#)

Building on the lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic, strengthening access to quality health care through financial reforms, and highlighting life-saving vaccination as the Region marked European Immunization Week, formed just some of the issues on the agenda during a recent 2-day visit to Azerbaijan by Dr Hans Henri P. Kluge, WHO Regional Director for Europe.

“The pandemic has underlined the importance of ensuring everyone has access to quality health services, and I am very pleased to see the concrete steps that Azerbaijan is taking in this direction through its health financing reform, with the strong backing of His Excellency President Aliyev,” said Dr Kluge.

“Being in Azerbaijan during European Immunization Week 2022, I was pleased to speak to medical and nursing students – the immunization leaders of the future – and learn from them how to overcome barriers to vaccination so that all can enjoy this life-saving protection. Working together to find local solutions to local challenges is at the heart of the European Programme of Work 2020–2025 – ‘United Action for Better Health in Europe’, which all countries in the Region have signed up to,” he added.

During a visit to a training centre and a demonstration project in Shamakhi district, the Regional Director saw first-hand the progress made on primary health care in the country. The project is undertaken with the State Agency for Mandatory Health Insurance (SAMHI), the Management Union of Medical Territorial Units (TABIB) and the Ministry of Health, in collaboration with the Heydar Aliyev Foundation and the Shamakhi local government.

WHO, along with partners in the European Union (EU) and the United States of America, has been working with health authorities in Azerbaijan since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic to provide support to health systems in responding to the acute phase of the pandemic and rolling-out life-saving vaccination. This is part of a long-term agreement with both the EU and United States which seeks to strengthen societies' resilience when faced with health emergencies – an issue central to the European Programme of Work.

In addition to speaking to medical and nursing students, the site visits also offered a chance for Dr Kluge to observe the high level of acceptance by the community of the primary health care drive, and allowed him to reiterate the importance of immunization against COVID-19 and other vaccine-preventable diseases.

Meeting with President Aliyev, Dr Kluge thanked him for his support for WHO's pandemic response efforts and the COVAX facility.

Dr Kluge also congratulated the country for its efforts to decrease out-of-pocket expenditures for health and assure quality health services for all through health financing reforms. He emphasized WHO's willingness to continue its strong collaboration with Azerbaijan in the areas of health system strengthening, primary health care and human resources for health.

A meeting with the prominent national health authorities, focusing on the European Programme of Work, was hosted by Dr Teymur Musayev, Minister of Health. Here Dr Kluge emphasized the importance of a national health strategy with a strong vision for strengthening human resources for health and a roadmap on health system transformation – with primary health care at the core – and the need to continue the fight against tuberculosis, HIV and noncommunicable diseases.

Dr Kluge met with staff at the WHO Collaborating Centre on Prevention and Control of Tuberculosis in Prisons – the only collaborating centre of its kind – on the second day of his mission in Azerbaijan.

In addition, the visit offered the opportunity to speak with United Nations counterparts in the country, who cooperate with WHO/Europe on a range of health issues including: One Health and antimicrobial resistance, food safety, the rights of refugees, inclusion of people with disabilities in society, immunization, and tackling COVID-19 – all

building towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

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