

Concept Note

Special Focus Session on Polio Eradication, 2024 First Regular Session of the UNICEF Executive Board United Nations, New York – 8 February 2024 at 10 a.m.

Context

The Special Focus Session on Polio Eradication at the UNICEF Executive Board in February 2024 aims to apprise Member States of the critical final stages in the fight against polio, emphasizing the urgency of bold actions to eradicate polio by 2026. The eradication of smallpox, the only human disease ever eradicated, emphasizes the power of vaccines when they reach every child. Polio can be the second disease to be eradicated, aligning with the 2030 targets for the Immunization Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Despite the challenges posed by the recent pandemic, the [Global Polio Eradication Initiative](#) (GPEI) has intensified efforts, annually vaccinating over 400 million children and maintaining a 99% reduction in global polio cases. The poliovirus is now concentrated in the subnational regions of Afghanistan, Pakistan, eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, northwestern Nigeria, south central Somalia, and northern Yemen. Conflict, insecurity, climate disasters, weak health systems and poverty have made children living in these places exceptionally vulnerable and hard to reach. The international spread of polio has been declared a [Public Health Emergency of International Concern](#) by the World Health Organization since 2014, and its reappearance in previously polio-free countries in 2022 underscores the global risk.

The midterm review of the [2022-2026 Global Polio Eradication Strategy](#) indicates that wild polio can be eradicated by 2026, while variant poliovirus-free certification may extend until 2028. The polio eradication window is closing fast, and UNICEF and GPEI are striving for high quality vaccination campaigns and supporting the "Big Catch-Up" initiative to reach every child. Additionally, a post-certification plan is in development to sustain a polio-free world after the sunset of GPEI, leveraging gains for enhanced routine immunization and other life-saving interventions for children.

Objectives of the Session

- Urgently call on Member States for support and action to prioritize childhood vaccination and polio eradication, aiming to achieve wild poliovirus eradication certification in 2026.
- Discuss the value and return on investment in polio eradication, focusing on sustaining gains and utilizing assets for children's health and well-being beyond the eradication efforts.

Guest speakers

- Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General, World Health Organization (pre-recorded remarks)
- Mr. Iftikhar Ali Shallwani, Secretary, Ministry of National Health Services (MoNHS), Pakistan (virtual participation)
- Dr. Elizabeth Mukamba Musenga, Coordinator, Polio Emergency Operations Center (PEOC), Democratic Republic of the Congo
- Mr. Michael McGovern, Chair, International PolioPlus Committee, Rotary International
- Dr. Christopher Elias, President, Global Development Programme, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF)

Run of show (60 mins)

- Opening Remarks by Ms. Catherine Russell, Executive Director, UNICEF (3 mins.)
- Special Remarks by Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General, WHO (pre-recorded remarks; 3 mins.)
- Presentation on the Status of Polio Eradication by Mr. Steven Lauwerier, Director, UNICEF Polio Eradication (5 mins.)

[Country Perspectives]

- Remarks by Mr. Iftikhar Ali Shallwani, Secretary, MoNHS, Pakistan (virtual participation; 3 mins.)
- Remarks by Dr. Elizabeth Mukamba Musenga, Coordinator, PEOC, Democratic Republic of the Congo (3 mins.)

[Global Perspectives]

- Remarks by Mr. Michael McGovern, Chair, International PolioPlus Committee, Rotary International (3 mins.)
- Keynote speech by Dr. Chris Elias, President, Global Development Programme, BMGF (3 mins.)

[Statements by Member States] (30 mins.)

- Closing remarks by President of the Executive Board 2024 (3 mins.)