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IBERIAN MUN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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*Research Report on the question of implementing economic regulations on the healthcare market to guarantee its accessibility and affordability.*

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), during the SarsCov2 Pandemic, half of the global population does not have access to necessary health services. As stated in the article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human rights, “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services…” (United Nations) As a result, health care is a fundamental human right which is denied to at least half of all humans. The need for the fulfillment of this right globally is exacerbated by the current pandemic where the entire world is in need of health services. Although all Member States have vowed to follow the Sustainable Development Goals (a set of goals devised by the UN which msut be completed to achieve a sustainable future), including the third goal, calling for ensure health care accessibility and affordability, this is not an issue that can be solved overnight – it requires tremendous amounts of dedication and creative solutions.

It is important to distinguish between the terms “accessibility” and “affordability” in the context of healthcare. Health care accessibility is defined as the “the availability of good health services within reasonable reach of those who need them and of opening hours, appointment systems and other aspects of service organization and delivery that allow people to obtain the services when they need them” (WHO). Healthcare accessibility can be divided into three parts: Physical (the physical location and functioning hours of medical centers), informational (the accessibility of health information), and economic accessibility (healthcare affordability). To avoid any confusion during the debate, delegates are encouraged to be specific in their usage of such key terms.

The goal of this debate is to ensure accessibility and affordability. This is usually addressed as Universal Healthcare Coverage. Most people believe that having Universal Health Coverage means that healthcare is free for all, however, this is a common misconception. The concept of Universal Health Coverage is that all people can afford necessary health care without struggling financially. The health services considered necessary by the WHO are “health promotion, prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and palliative care.” ("Universal Healthcare Coverage Factsheet." *World Health Organization)* Throughout the debate delegates should keep this concept in mind and draft solutions to make it a reality. Furthermore, the question of which medical services and medicines are essential is a controversial topic, thus, delegates must avoid discussing this question at length to keep the debate focused on the issue at hand.

The delegates should focus their debate on clauses aimed at implementing economic regulations on the healthcare market. Healthcare accessibility and affordability are extremely wide-ranging issues, which can be tackled in a variety of different ways. Thus, it is important to keep the debate focused on the economic nature of the issue. Also, delegates should keep in mind that their measures should regulate the healthcare market in a way that preserves its natural competitiveness.

Delegates should also keep in mind that although the economy and money will be a large part of the debate, at IMUN no specific amounts of money can be discussed. Instead, delegates should focus on the sources of money, who it will be allocated to, and conditions or exceptions for the distribution of said funds.

In addition, during the debate delegates should pay close attention to the fact that different nations require very different approaches to this issue. This is due, not just to different economic statuses but also to large discrepancies in between nations’ health systems structures. For example, some nations favor the private sector – “all for-profit businesses that are not owned or operated by the government” (Investopedia) - over the public sector - “all levels of government and government-controlled enterprises” (Encyclopedia Brittanica) - or vice versa. Thus, delegates should research the structure of their delegation’s health system in order to gage which is the most beneficial solution for them, and simultaneously draft clauses which are appropriate for all types of health systems with universal benefits.

Moreover, delegates should consider how health costs are distributed through all socioeconomic classes. It is important to remember that although all can be affected by health costs, the sickest and those with less financial means are the ones who suffer the most. In order to compensate for this imbalance, delegates could propose tools such as premium subsidies for the more affected parties. While doing this, delegates should take great care in deciding factors such as the conditions for granting this financial aid.

Free Health Care Policies (FHC), also known as “politiques de gratuité”, are a possible solution for the issue being debated. These entail forgoing payment for certain medical services rendered. The goal of Free Health Care Policies is to remove financial barriers which prevent citizens with fewer economic means from seeking health services. There is a lot of flexibility with FHC seeing as the exemption of fees can be applied to specific groups of people or specific services. It is important to use simple socio-demographic criteria such as age, sex, pregnancy, or geographical location. Furthermore, one of the benefits of this solution is that it allows more people to access necessary services while helping to ensure their financial protection. Nonetheless, caution is necessary when using Free Healthcare Policies seeing as they can sometimes benefit more well-off people more than the people with less financial means that they were designed to help. Also, without proper funding these policies can undermine efforts made to increase health affordability and accessibility. Potentially, these measures could overwhelm medical centers by exhausting medical professionals and supplies, thereby deteriorating the quality of health services. As a result, to extract the necessary benefits from these policies delegates should take extreme care in deciding which services and which demographics will receive this advantage.

The WHO offers a wealth of information on the topic, so it is the most useful for gathering context, information and global statistics but not nation specific information. For African delegations there is an NGO which strives to improve health service accessibility for women and children: the African Medical and Research Foundation (AMREF). There are many other Non-Governmental Organizations which strive to solve this issue, including: Health Lead, Medic Mobile, International Medical Corps, and Mothers2Mothers. It is also encouraged to research chapter 6 of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and of the United Nations on Environment and Development Agenda 21, which are both crucial to the achievement of health affordability and accessibility. Lastly, the country’s government health website is usually a good information source for details on the delegation’s health system. Some nations may withhold information due to international scrutiny, being an autocratic regime, or facing a national crisis. Consequently, in some cases government sources are not completely accurate.

Although all Member States should take a stance on this issue, there are some delegations that will take a more prominent position. For example, Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs) will most probably lead the debate regarding the accessibility of healthcare seeing as they lack the infrastructure. On the other hand, as a result of a larger wealth disparity in their population, More Economically Developed Countries (MEDCs) will most probably take a stronger position on the affordability of healthcare. Finally, the WHO should take a leading role in the debate seeing as it is the authority in charge of overseeing global health, as well as the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund due to their ability to provide financial support.

While debating this issue, delegates should focus on devising feasible solutions to ensure healthcare accessibility and affordability for all, pursuant to the 25th article of the UDHR. Member States must recall that the issue is economic and financial in nature, thus, it is important that delegates focus their solutions on this aspect while abiding to the Assembly’s procedure for discussing funds. Nations should also keep in mind the structure of their health system to asses which solution is most beneficial. Lastly, it is paramount that delegates consider the effects of their solutions on the different socio-economic strata.

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