Thank you

UNITE Secretariat would like to thank all partners and organizations who contributed to this year’s activities, allowing the network to grow exponentially and reach higher and measurable impact worldwide. Thank you for your continued and strong support to UNITE and its members!

UNITE would also like to thank all members of Parliament who commit to ending infectious diseases and take time from their heavy schedules to work together for a common global health agenda. UNITE relies on their commitment, and at the Secretariat we are very grateful to work with a dynamic group of global health champions, expressing ideas, initiatives and strong will to help the communities they serve.

In those critical times we are living, UNITE Secretariat would also like to thank all frontline and community workers for their tireless efforts since the break of the pandemic, and their strong support in the worldwide vaccination campaign, both essential pillars for global recovery.
1 - **Introduction** – The next Pandemic, preparing for Disease X

A century ago, the “Spanish Flu”, the worst pandemic in recorded history, killed over 50 million people. Since then, about one new disease is emerging each year. Not all have human-to-human transmission, although we can name a few such as the severe acute respiratory syndrome, Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus, Ebola virus disease, and of course COVID-19.

Our understanding of health threats has evolved, even though we are still extremely vulnerable to sudden attacks by unknown pathogens such as Disease X. “Disease X represents the knowledge that a serious international pandemic could be caused by a pathogen currently unknown to cause human disease. It was first included in the WHO’s list of priority pathogens in 2018. COVID-19 represents the first occurrence of Disease X since its designation was established”.

While we still respond to the current pandemic, we acknowledge that future outbreaks of Disease X are inevitable. Globalization has made us more vulnerable than ever to the rapid spread of new emerging diseases. We don’t know when or where it will emerge, but we know it will. We need to be prepared for it, and to accelerate our efforts in building strong and resilient health systems to ensure efficient pandemic preparedness and response in the future.

As 2021 draws to a close, and vaccination is underway in most parts of the world, UNITE has chosen to direct its 2022 activities towards answering this question: **what can parliamentarians do to help better preparing for future pandemics?**

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2 - 2021: A year in figures

Over the past year, UNITE has grown its membership rapidly to:

- **201 MEMBERS** (+ 41% since January 2020)
- **IN 76 COUNTRIES** (+ 17% since January 2020)
- Connecting **+100 Partners and CSO representatives** with Members of Parliament from all regions

**UNITE MP Network around the world**
We have seen an exponential growth of the network within the last months, due to the multiplication of events and partnerships built at the national and international level.

These events and activities include:

- **Hosting** 15 high-level meetings with parliamentarians, in 4 different continents
- **Participating in** nearly 50 events as speakers or contributors all around the world
- **Organizing the UNITE Global Summit 2nd Edition** on December 6, 7 and 8 with a total of 1035 registrations, 150 policymakers and 110 speakers involved during the three days
3 - 2021 Highlights

JANUARY

In January 2021, UNITE resumed its activities, starting off the year by the publication of the handbook of the UNITE Global Summit. This handbook provides an overview on the current state of infectious diseases, from a policy perspective, and offers clear steps to address their elimination by 2030.

Following this publication, UNITE organized the first Steering Committee meeting of the Drug Policy Desk, in partnership with the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Drug Policy reform. Additionally, and as part of its official launch, the Drug Policy Desk published 3 position papers. The UNITE/APPG Drug Policy Desk aims to support and promote the adoption of evidence-based drug policies focusing on principles of public health and human rights. Its Steering Committee is composed of staff from both UNITE and the APPG, as well as members of Parliament, representing the four target countries of the desk, Kenya, Morocco, Portugal, and Zimbabwe.

By the end of January, several members of UNITE, including Diana Stoica (Romania) and Lisa Cameron (UK), joined an online event on “Rethinking EU healthcare delivery models for chronic patients” co-hosted by Friends of Europe and UNITE, to discuss the gaps in providing continuity of care for chronic patients during the COVID-19 pandemic.

VIRTUAL EVENT

FRIENDS OF EUROPE

Rethinking EU healthcare delivery models for chronic patients

UNITE MEMBERS

Diana Stoica
Member of Parliament, Romania
Leader of the Group for Coherence and Well-Being in Health, the Romanian Chamber of Deputies

Diana Ruasiano
Leader of the Group for Coherence and Well-Being in Health, the Moroccan Chamber of Deputies

Lisa Cameron
Member of the House of Commons, UK

February 2021 marked UNITE’s four-year anniversary and started off with another webinar focusing on “harnessing the COVID-19 response towards hepatitis C elimination”, co-organized by UNITE, the Treatment Action Group (TAG), Médecins du Monde (MdM), and the Hep C Coalition.
In the following days, UNITE Network officially joined HIV Outcomes as an observer member, working together to keep HIV/AIDS high up the political agenda and demand a better quality of life for every person living with HIV/ AIDS in Europe. This collaboration started by the publication of a common input on the proposal of the European Commission to expand the mandate of the European Centre for Disease and Control (ECDC). While COVID-19 has shown the need to increase the capacities and resources of the ECDC to prevent, control, and respond to emerging health threats, both UNITE and HIV Outcomes believe that a strengthened mandate for the ECDC is an opportunity to consider how the Centre may continue supporting the fight against prevalent communicable diseases with a high burden, including HIV, and viral Hepatitis B and C.

Later in the month UNITE members also took part in two main events focusing on vaccine distribution and equity around the world, held by both the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Parliamentary Network and the Parliamentary Network on the World Bank & IMF.

With the beginning of March came new partnerships for UNITE and the official start of a joint-collaboration with Policy Cures Research, focusing on the impact of neglected and underfund infectious diseases on the health of individuals and communities.

Still in March, UNITE took part in the World Health Organization (WHO) campaign on vaccine equity, calling on global leaders to step up and prioritize the equitable rollout of COVID-19 vaccines.

Later in March, members of UNITE participated in a policy roundtable hosted by the European Health Forum GASTEIN, to discuss the case for a European Health Union, and another critical conversation on confidence in vaccine roll out, in partnership with the Pandemic Action network.

A few days after, on March 24th, UNITE’s President, Ricardo Baptista Leite, co-chaired a session on political response at the European Union HCV Policy Summit, focusing in securing wider EU commitment to the elimination of HCV.

The month came to an end with two important meetings, the second Steering Committee meeting of the Drug Policy Desk and the UNITE first Global Board meeting of the year, both on March 26th.
As the vaccine equity campaign continued throughout April, several members of parliament and members of UNITE signed the vaccine equity declaration carried by the WHO, culminating with the celebrations of World Health Day, on April 7th.

April was also the month of the launch of the new G-FINDER data and neglected disease report. On April 15th, Policy Cures Research and UNITE co-hosted a webinar to accompany the launch of the G-FINDER report, providing a detailed analysis of the neglected disease R&D funding landscape in 2019 and associated funding gaps in the lead-up to the COVID-19 pandemic.

A few weeks later, on April 23rd, UNITE’s President participated to the Interactive Multi-Stakeholder Hearing on Ending AIDS and addressed the audience on building synergies and manage critical gaps to end HIV by 2030.

In April, UNITE network grew its membership to 175 parliamentarians, expanding its presence in the Western Africa region with new countries represented such as Angola, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Cameroun.

The Panel for a Global Public Health Convention (PGPHC) was officially launched on May 5th, with the publication of “a global public health convention for the 21st century” on the Lancet Magazine. The Panel calls for a new multilateral order and the development of a legal binding document to unite countries in preventing and responding to pandemics. Several board members of UNITE took part in the development of the Lancet article and the recommendations of the Panel.
As a result of that, UNITE organized an informal side-event during the World Health Assembly, in partnership with the PGPHC, Aids Healthcare Foundation (AHF) and the International Association of Providers of AIDS care (IAPAC), to alert on the need to establish efficient and binding mechanisms to ensure pandemic preparedness, global health security and multilateral collaboration. The one hour and a half virtual webinar, gathered a panel of high-level policymakers and specialists including, five members of Parliament from Argentina, Angola, Georgia, Portugal and the Philippines. The webinar was a success, with a total of 347 registrations and 147 participants from 25 different countries.

Later in the week, on May 26th, UNITE hosted a session on sustainable development goals and drug policy reform with Kenyan members of parliament. The two-hour roundtable focused on identifying opportunities to implement progressive policy innovation in the scope of national drug policy reform.

Closing the month and leading up to the United Nations High-Level Meeting (UNHLM) on HIV, UNITE members joined forces with other relevant stakeholders to sign a letter calling on Boris Johnson to focus on global health and put action to end HIV/ AIDS on the G7 agenda.

For this year’s UN High-Level Meeting (UNHLM) on HIV/AIDS, marking the 40th anniversary since the first cases of patients with HIV/AIDS were detected, UNITE partnered with UNAIDS and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in promoting an official side event at the margins of the High-Level Meeting, on June 7th. During the side meeting, which counted with the participation of keynote speakers such as Representative Barbara Lee and Ms Winnie Byanyima, UNITE’s Founder & President, Ricardo Baptista Leite, addressed the audience to mobilize political commitment and ensure COVID-19 recovery applies the lessons learned from HIV and other colliding epidemics, in order to build strong and resilient health systems for the future.

On the other side, UNITE was actively involved in leading a key meeting alongside the All-Party Parliamentary Group on HIV/AIDS, the Global Fund to Fight
AIDS, TB and Malaria, UNAIDS and StopAIDS, on assessing policy recommendations to be taken post UN HLM and post G7 meetings in the UK.

UNITE also developed its regional work with a strong follow-up advocacy in Kenya after a successful event held in May, which promoted the signature of a letter to the Head of State and Government to reconsider the Narcotics, Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Control Amendment to the 2020 Bill. On June 22, President Uhuru Kenyatta announced the creation of a commission for reviewing the bill. If deemed fit by the commission, it will be reintroduced for voting and editing in Parliament.

In the Asia Pacific region, UNITE held a closed-doors policymaker roundtable, in partnership with the Asia Centre and Harm Reduction International, drawing attention on the management of the COVID-19 pandemic in the region, and gathering more than 10 policymakers from the region, including two Ministers.

On July 7, the Drug Policy Desk continued its regional work with the organization of an onsite policymaker roundtable, with Youth Rise Nigeria. The Policy Desk invited and briefed five Nigerian MPs and UNITE members on effective alternatives for drug policy reform.

Within the following weeks, UNITE members also joined forces with the Pandemic Action Network to promote World Mask Week from July 8th to July 12th.

Lastly, on July 20th, Both UNITE Chapter Chair from South America, Gisela Scaglia and UNITE Chapter Chair from Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Mariam Jashi, joined an online discussion held in collaboration with the World Hepatitis Alliance on the role of policymakers in eliminating Hep C: “Policymakers can’t wait – moving from global commitment to national action on viral hepatitis”.

UN High-Level Meeting (UNHLM) on HIV/AIDS
August was a turning point in UNITE’s membership, with a total of 70 countries represented in the network and nearly 200 members joining our ranks. August was also a busy month to establish partnerships with more than 12 Parliamentary assemblies and networks around the world to set up a common platform to work on global health.

On August 24, President Emmerson Mnangagwa announced the creation of the inter-ministerial committee on Tackling Substance Abuse Menace Among the Youth. UNITE accompanied the process, producing campaign materials and fostering debate among MPs, leading, on September 14, the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare of Zimbabwe, to announce a work proposal on Substance and Drug Abuse Among Children, Youth (and General Population).

As a result of the work established building partnerships across different parliamentary assemblies, UNITE and the Parliamentary Network on the World Bank & IMF launched the International Forum on Global Health (IFGH) on September 24th. The IFGH is a working group of selected parliamentarians from different regional and global parliamentary networks and assemblies gathered under a common global health and economic agenda. Led by UNITE and the Parliamentary Network on the World Bank & IMF, the group met to agree on the way forward to incentivize and increase investments in global health, to build resilient health systems and prevent future epidemics and pandemics. The launching event was a promising meeting, gathering more than 20 MPs from Angola, Argentina, Cameroon, France, Gabon, Ghana, Japan, Kenya, Lebanon, Mexico, the Philippines, Senegal, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and Zimbabwe, as well as representatives from 12 parliamentary networks and assemblies, covering all continents and a great diversity of topics and perspectives.

September was also marked by an important workshop on evidence-based drug policy for members of Parliament in Zimbabwe. The event gathered more than
80 members of Parliament and his excellency Minister of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare, Paul Mavima. The meeting, organized by UNITE, provided an overview of drug use trends and the current approach to drug control in the country, and proposed possible pathways toward reform and more efficient and humane regulation through presentations of best practices adopted in the region and beyond.

Within September and building up to the United Nations General Assembly, UNITE supported the Panel for a Global Public Health Convention's efforts to raise awareness on the need to adopt a legally binding document to prevent and respond to future pandemics, by sharing a letter from its Chair, Barbara Stocking, to the whole network and supporting members who manifested the willingness to take action in their countries.

By the end of September, UNITE also officially became a member of the Transform Health Coalition, marking the beginning of the network’s focus on digital health policies.

October started off with the delivery of an open letter addressed to the Health Commission within the Portuguese Parliament. The letter gathered the supporting signatures of 67 high-level national personalities, defending the regulation of Cannabis for non-medical purposes in the country. The letter was the result of the advocacy campaign developed since March 2021 by the citizen's initiative for cannabis regulation in Portugal in partnership with GAT (Treatment Activist Group).

It was also in October that the “UHC2030 Parliamentarian Guide: 6 action steps to achieve universal health coverage” was officially published, with the collaboration of UNITE who partnered in its elaboration.

Later in the month, Gisela Scaglia, Chapter Chair for South America, was invited to present UNITE to a group of parliamentarians attending a class of Parliamentary Diplomacy at the Austral University. A few days after, UNITE and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness and Innovation (CEPI) partnered in the
organization of a parliamentary roundtable gathering more than 20 members of Parliament from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Uruguay, Dominican Republic and Mexico. Parliamentarians present discussed together the CEPI 2022 replenishment and the need to increase investments in pandemic preparedness and innovation in the region.

Following this successful roundtable, UNITE also co-hosted with UNAIDS and the German Health Alliance, its first in-person event since the beginning of the pandemic at the World Health Summit in Berlin. The meeting gathered different parliamentarians, NGO representatives and communities, and was moderated by Andrew Ullman, Chapter Chair for the Western Europe region, focusing on the role of policymakers in digital health innovation.

On the same day, UNITE and the Panel for a Global Public Health Convention co-hosted an official side-diner at the Bundestag fostering the conversation around the need to adopt a Pandemic Treaty.

November was a turning point in 2021 for UNITE with two main highlights for the network.

From the 10th to the 12th of November, UNITE’s members including its President, Ricardo Baptista Leite, Mariam Jashi, Eastern Europe and Central Asia Chapter Chair, and Lynn Ruane, member of Parliament from Ireland, participated to the European Harm Reduction Conference in Prague, hosting two official side-meetings with other members of parliament attending the conference and representatives from WHO, UNODC, Harm Reduction International and IDPC.

A few days after this event, Ibtissame Azzaoui, Chapter Chair for the Middle East and North Africa region, travelled to Rome for the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM) Bureau Meeting, to sign an official Memorandum of Understanding between PAM and UNITE, delimiting the direction of the partnership between the two assemblies and the way forward in the next years.
November was also the month of the last Steering Committee Meeting of the Drug Policy Desk, closing a successful and promising first phase, which succeeded in achieving meaningful impact and change in its four target countries.

UNITE's focus for December was its Global Summit second edition. From December 6 to 8, over 1000 elected members of parliament, government officials, policymakers, global health experts, practitioners, representatives of civil society, and activists have gathered to discuss the current and persistent challenges infectious diseases pose to people worldwide. For three days, 110 speakers explored how COVID-19 has transformed global health and modern politics and how the international architecture could respond to current & future pandemics while serving the most vulnerable and not losing sight of other infectious diseases. The UNITE Global Summit results from cooperation and partnerships between UNITE and 20 international organizations working on different fronts related to public health.

The program focused on three central topics. The first day had presentations on the overall topic of building back better our communities. Hosted by Prof. Jeffrey Lazarus, and had four panels with timely discussions moderated by partners from UNAIDS, the International Aids Society, Harm Reduction International, Hepatitis Partnership for Control and Treatment, Médecins Sans Frontières; Drugs for Neglected Diseases initiative; FIND, the global alliance for diagnostics; Treatment Action Group, and UNITAID.

On the Second Day, the program focused on science & innovation as the hope for an equitable future. With the hosting of Eloise Todd (Pandemic Action network, Co-founder), partners from Global Antibiotic Research and Development Partnership (GARDP), Uniting to Combat NTDs, Wellcome Trust, Harm Reduction International, the Global Drug Policy Index, Open Society Foundations, Transform Health, and the Pandemic Action Network, hosted a total of four panels addressing matters regarding leadership in accelerating the response to antimicrobial
resistance in the pandemic era, building political will to end neglected tropical diseases, securing funding for harm reduction programs, and tackling the silent epidemic of hepatitis C.

The third and last day invited participants to rethink global health & multilateralism. The agenda was hosted by Katja Roll (Senior Advisor on Global Health Diplomacy at the Joep Lange Institute) and had three panel discussions moderated by GAVI (The Vaccine Alliance), Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB & Malaria, UHC 2030, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), The panel for a Global Public Health Convention. The third day was also the occasion to sign and endorse the Joint-Declaration of the International Forum on Global Health, developed and signed by parliamentary assemblies and networks involved in the working group.
4 – Targets for the next cycle

As 2021 unfolds, UNITE’s Global Board, supported by UNITE Secretariat, is currently developing the strategic plan for 2022 – 2025 with a particular focus on the following points:

- **A stronger network**

To accelerate elimination of infectious diseases and reach higher impact in its regions of intervention, UNITE aims at gaining stronger representation by 2025:
- increasing its network to 500 parliamentarians;
- having representation in 120 countries;
- connecting regularly with 20 parliamentary networks and assemblies;

- **An essential source of information**

In the following years, UNITE ambitions to become one of the main sources of information for members of parliament who want to act in global health at national and regional level by:
- developing a fellowship program to sustain the quality and quantity of information regularly delivered to UNITE’s members;
- finding innovative solutions to communicate information to members of Parliament around the world;
- Increasing UNITE’s capacity to host and collaborate in roundtables and workshops specifically focused on policymaking and; continuing to develop the UNITE Global Summit as a yearly mark in the global health agenda.

- **A higher impact**

By combining a stronger network, to a reliable platform of information for policymakers, UNITE aims at reaching higher impact, at a global, regional, and national level by:
- developing the International Forum on Global Health as a central platform to raise global health in the agenda of parliamentary networks and assemblies adhering;
- expanding the secretariat at a regional level, with the support of regional advisers;
- shaping a strong network of focal points in the countries and regions where UNITE is acting.