

The United States confirms its withdrawal from the World Health Organization. What this means for global health and Europe

The United States decision to withdraw from the World Health Organization marks a significant moment for global health governance. It comes amid sustained pressure on multilateral institutions and growing politicisation of public health. While the decision has prompted strong reactions, it aligns with recent trends in US health and foreign policy.

The withdrawal was formally confirmed after the completion of the one-year notice period required under the WHO Constitution. US authorities issued the confirmation through official government channels. It was not announced at an international forum. This confirmation marks the effective end of US membership in the organisation.

For several years, international cooperation on health has been questioned in parts of the US political debate. Skepticism toward global institutions, combined with the spread of health related disinformation, has weakened trust in shared rules and collective action. From this perspective, the withdrawal is less an abrupt break than a continuation of an existing line. It reflects a preference for national decision making over multilateral coordination, even in areas where health risks cross borders by definition.

The implications for global health are serious. The WHO plays a central role in disease surveillance, emergency coordination, standard setting, and technical guidance. Its effectiveness relies on broad political support and predictable funding. The absence of a major contributor risks weakening collective preparedness and response, especially in regions with limited resources. It also creates uncertainty at a moment when health systems are still absorbing the lessons of recent crises.

For Europe, the decision raises both concerns and responsibilities. European countries have long been strong supporters of multilateral health cooperation and evidence based policy. The current context calls for renewed commitment to these principles. Reduced engagement by one major actor increases the importance of others stepping forward, both financially and politically. It also reinforces the need for clear, independent scientific input to support public debate and counter misinformation.

European academies of medicine and science have a role to play in this landscape. They provide expertise grounded in research, clinical practice, and public health experience. Their contribution is essential to maintaining trust in health institutions and to ensuring policies remain anchored in evidence rather than short term political considerations. In times of uncertainty, independent science advice gains weight.

From FEAM's perspective, this moment underlines the relevance of its ongoing work. Initiatives on One Health, preparedness, digital health, and trust in science all speak directly to the challenges exposed by the current situation. Strengthening links between science, policy, and society is a practical necessity for resilient health systems in Europe and beyond.

The US withdrawal from the WHO is a reminder of the fragility of global health cooperation. It is also a call for Europe to reaffirm its commitment to multilateralism, scientific integrity, and

shared responsibility for health. European academies stand ready to contribute to this effort through independent advice, collaboration, and long-term engagement.

