

B2. Which international agreements and declarations mandate the right to health and international mechanisms to hold government to account?

Beyond the WHO Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights referred to above, the first major covenant agreed upon by countries is the **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** (33), which was ratified in 1966, of which Article 12 states:

1. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.
2. The steps to be taken by the States Parties to the present Covenant to achieve the full realization of this right shall include those necessary for:
 - (a) The provision for the reduction of the stillbirth rate and of infant mortality and for the healthy development of the child;
 - (b) The improvement of all aspects of environmental and industrial hygiene;
 - (c) The prevention, treatment and control of epidemic, endemic, occupational and other diseases;
 - (d) The creation of conditions which would assure to all medical service and medical attention in the event of sickness.

Other international treaties that mandate some aspect of the right to health are (31):

- the 1965 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination: article 5 (e) (iv);
- the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women: articles 11 (1) (f), 12 and 14 (2) (b);
- the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child: article 24;
- the 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families: articles 28, 43 (e) and 45 (c); and
- the 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: article 25.

An important declaration at the International Conference on Primary Health Care in Alma Ata in 1978 provided a huge impetus to rapid advancement towards the right to health and UHC.

The declaration of Alma-Ata affirms the crucial role of primary health care, which addresses the main health problems in the community, providing promotive, preventive, curative and rehabilitative services accordingly (article VII). It stresses that access to primary health care is the key to attaining a level of health that will permit all individuals to lead a socially and economically productive life (article V) and to contribute to the realization of the highest attainable standard of health.

This was reiterated 40 years later as the **Astana Declaration 2018** (25). The Global Conference on Primary Health Care in Astana, Kazakhstan, in October 2018 endorsed a new declaration emphasizing the critical role of primary health care around the world. The aim is to refocus on primary health care to ensure that everyone everywhere enjoys the highest possible attainable standard of health. This Declaration further emphasizes that primary health care is the cornerstone of a sustainable health system for UHC and health-related SDGs to achieving UHC, so that all people have equitable access to the quality and effectiveness of the health care they need, ensuring that use of these services does not expose them to financial hardship.