

## The WHO constitution:

"Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."



I need that my best friend

and my best friend is my best friend

and my best friend



# Social connection, social isolation, and loneliness



**WHO Member States Information Session  
Session no.9 – Commission on Social Connection  
7 March 2024**

# Social connection: why is it a global public health priority?



**Scale of  
problem**



**Severity of  
consequences**



**Promising  
solutions**

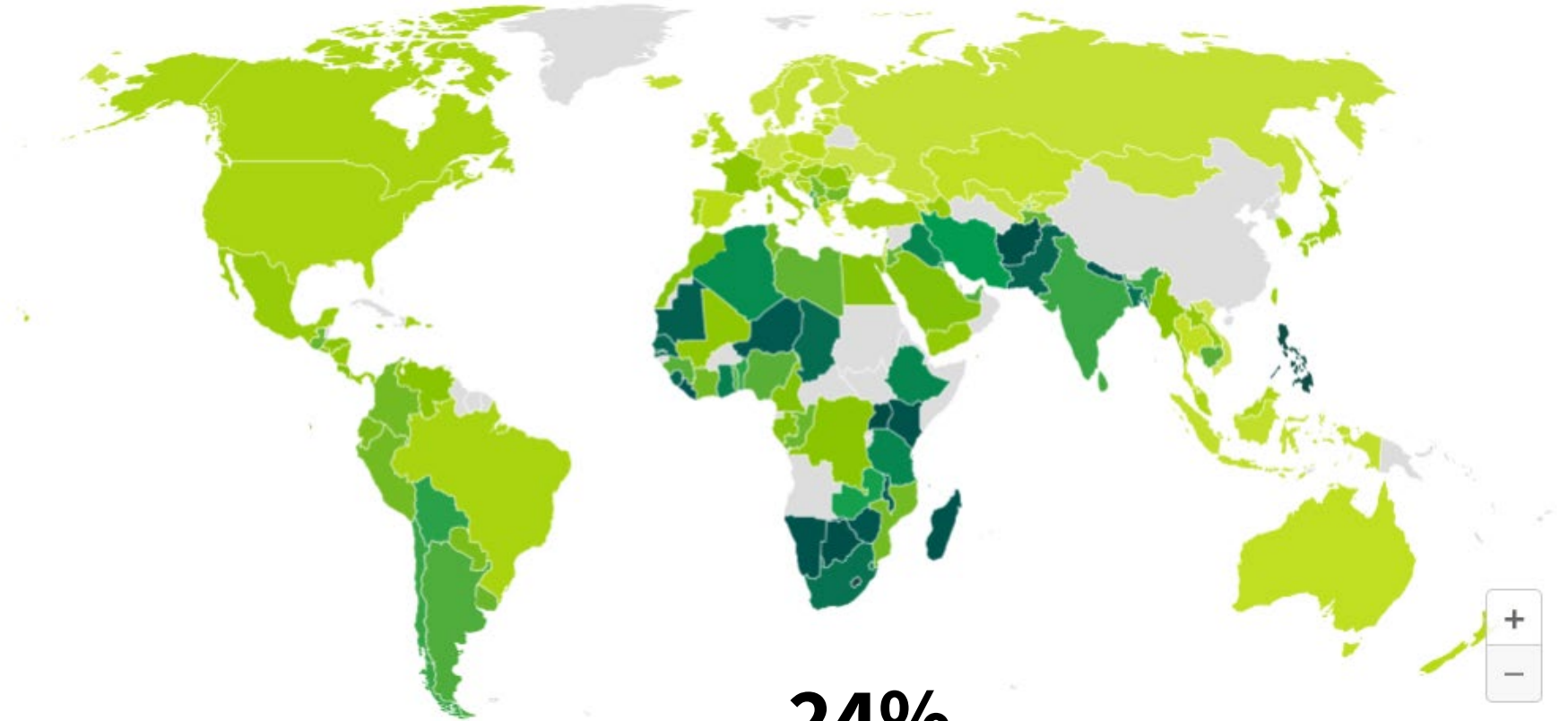
# First, some definitions

- **Social connection** : Relates to feeling close and connected to others. An individual's position on three dimensions:
  - Structural (number of relations)
  - Functional (support)
  - Qualitative (positive to negative)
- **Social isolation**: A form of social disconnection. The objective state of having an insufficient number of social roles, relations, and interactions.
- **Loneliness**: A form of social disconnection. A subjective and negative experience arising from a discrepancy between needed/desired and actual social connections (quantity and quality).

# Scale of the problem

**Recent Gallup-Meta survey: “In general, how lonely do you feel?”**

In general, how lonely do you feel?	
	Very + Fairly lonely
Age 15-18	25%
Age 19-29	27%
Age 30-44	25%
Age 45-64	22%
Age 65+	17%



**24%**

of the global population felt "very lonely" or "fairly lonely".

# Severity of consequences – risk of mortality

Increased risk of early death

**14-32%**

## Similar to:

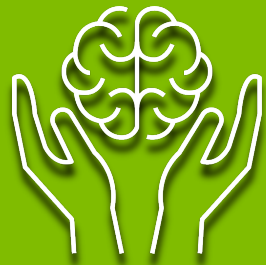
- **Smoking**
- **Excessive drinking**
- **Physical inactivity**
- **Obesity**
- **Air pollution**

# Severity of consequences for individuals

## Health outcomes



**Physical Health**



**Mental Health**

## Other outcomes



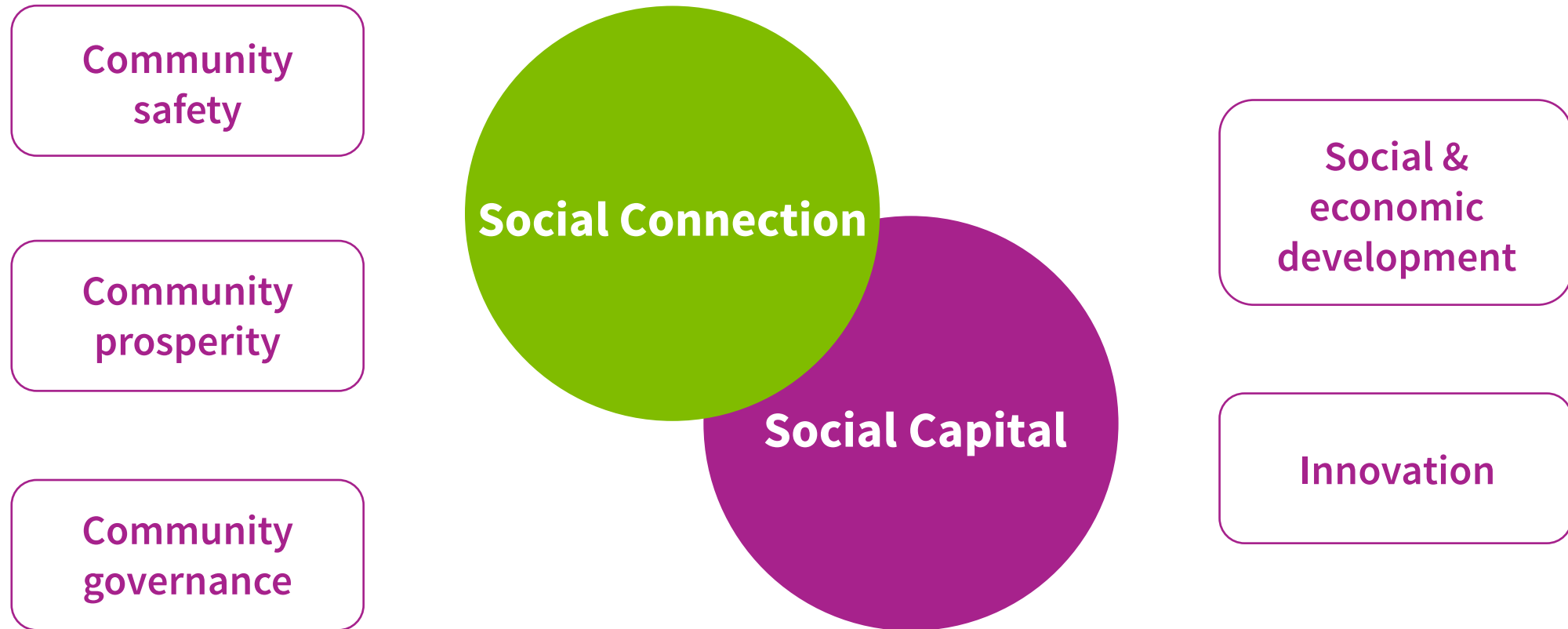
**Educational**



**Economic**



# Severity of consequences for communities and society



# Costs

## Costs in countries - two examples



Total cost of loneliness per year (healthcare and loss of productivity):

- € 14 billion
- 1.17% of GDP



Cost per year of stress-related absenteeism due to loneliness:

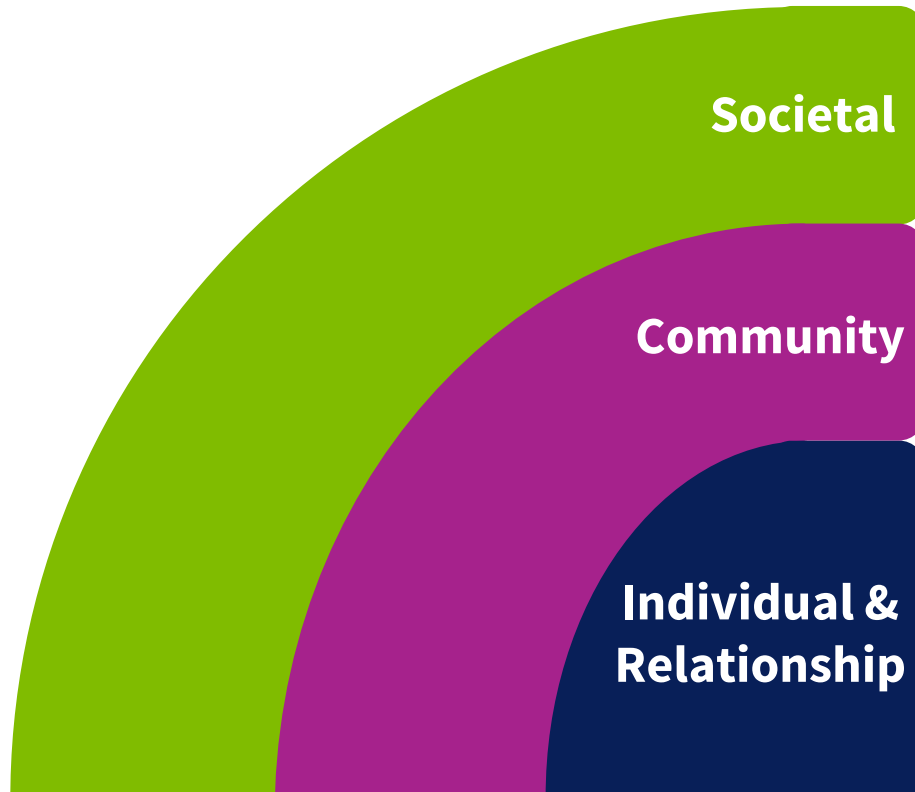
- US\$ 154 billion

# Determinants – some examples of risk factors

Individual	Interpersonal	Social groups	Community & societal
Physical and mental health	Difficult relationships	Ethnic minorities	Public transport
Personality	Life transitions	Immigrants	Built environment
Age (younger and very old)	Marital status	Disability	Digital technology
Social economic status	Living alone	LGBTQI+	Poverty

# Promising solutions

## Available solutions:



- Laws and policies that address:
  - Discrimination and marginalization
  - Social cohesion and norms

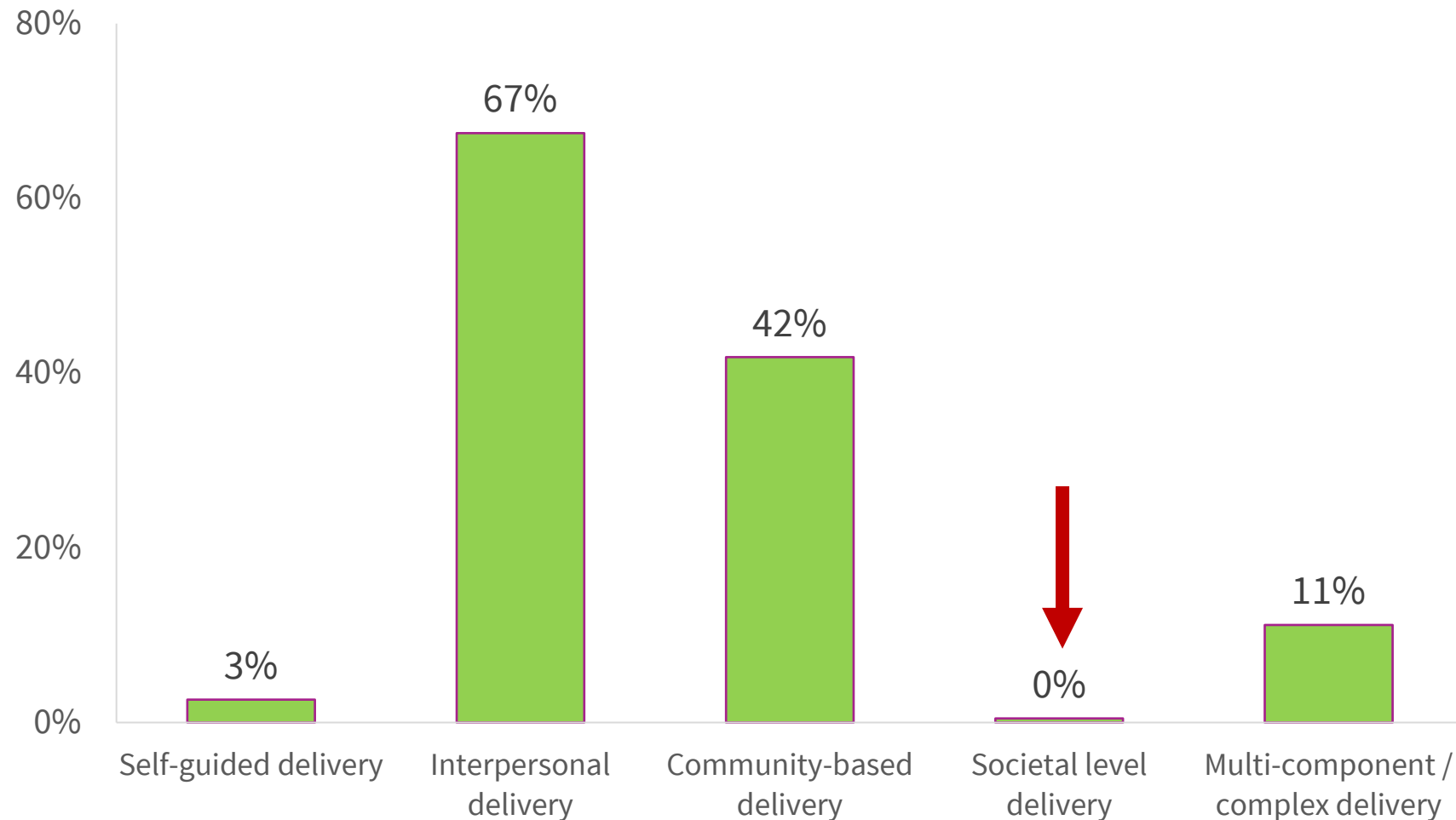
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- Improving infrastructure
- Volunteering

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- Social prescribing
- Cognitive behavioral therapy
- Psychoeducation

# Promising solutions

Hundreds of interventions evaluated



421 evaluations of in-person interventions by type

Welch et al. (2023)

# WHO's efforts to increase social connection



**Commission**



**WHO Secretariat**



**Technical  
Advisory Group**



# WHO Commission on Social Connection



# Commissioners



1. Vivek Murthy (co-Chair), Surgeon General, United States
2. Chido Mpemba (co-Chair), Youth Envoy, African Union
3. Ayuko Kato, Minister for Loneliness, Japan
4. Khalid Ait Taleb, Minister of Health and Social Protection, Morocco
5. Jakob Forssmed, Minister for Social Affairs and Public Health, Sweden
6. Cleopa Mailu, Permanent Representative to the UN, Kenya
7. Ralph Regenvanu, Minister for Climate Change Adaptation, Energy, Environment and Disaster Management, Vanuatu
8. Ximena Aguilera Sanhueza, Minister of Health, Chile
9. Haben Girma, Deaf Blind Advocate and Activist, United States
10. Hina Jilani, Elder and Human Rights Lawyer, Pakistan
11. Karen Desalvo, Chief Health Officer, Google, United States





# Vision

A world where everyone  
has quality social  
connections that benefit  
their health and wellbeing

# Aims – 3-year tenure



**Increase  
visibility and  
priority**

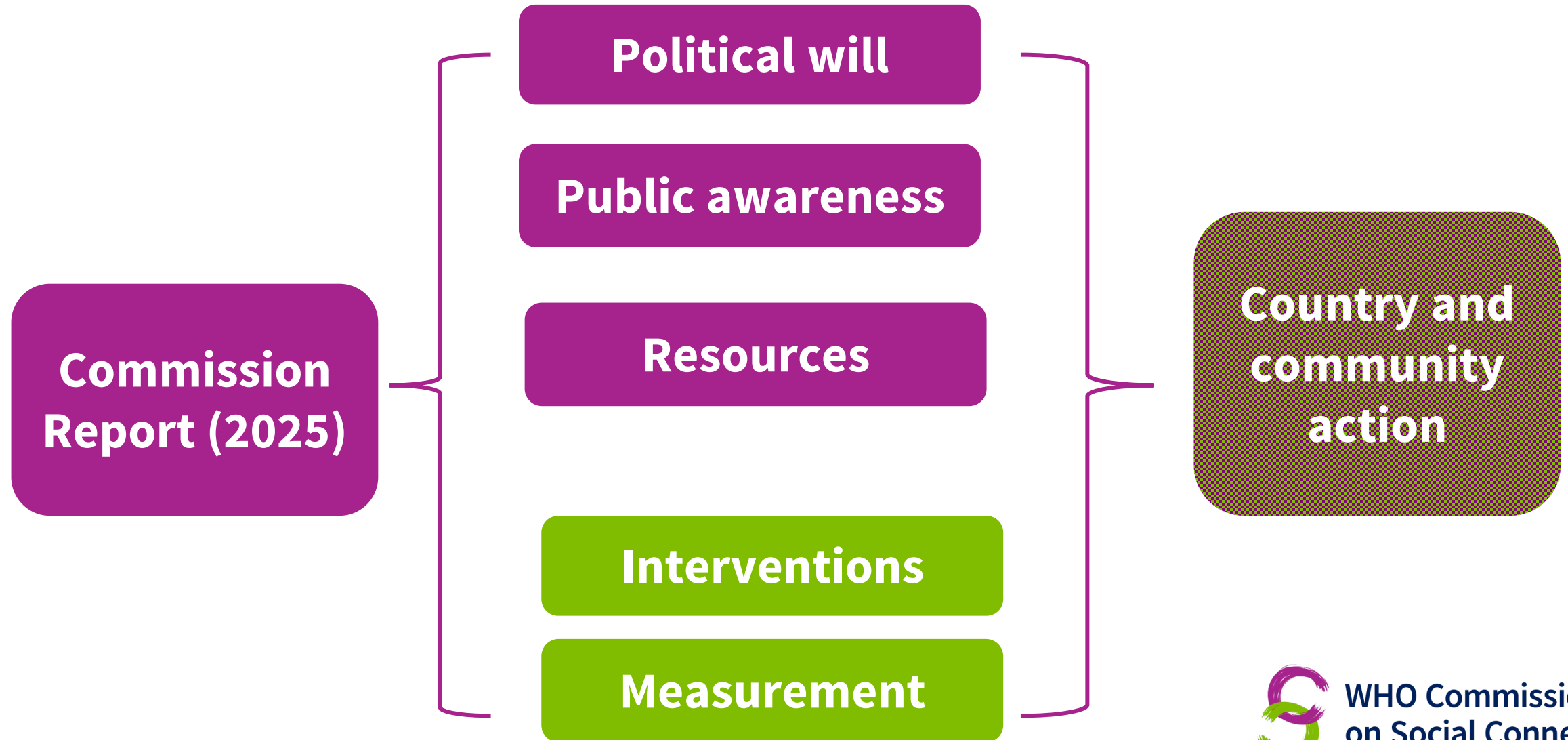


**Reposition  
issue**



**Scale-up  
solutions**

# Main outcomes





**Thank you**



**WHO Commission  
on Social Connection**