

Report of the regional committees to the Executive Board

Report by the Director-General

1. This report summarizes the proceedings of the WHO regional committees, based on the reports of the chairpersons. It has been prepared pursuant to the proposals for enhancing alignment between the regional committees and the Executive Board, and the decision by the Health Assembly that chairpersons of the regional committees should routinely submit a summary report of the committees' deliberations to the Board.¹ The report focuses on the key issues and outcomes, particularly those that are of global significance and those that respond to decisions of the Health Assembly and Executive Board.

2. The six regional committees met between 28 August and 13 October 2017 as follows:
 - sixty-seventh session of the Regional Committee for Africa, 28 August–1 September, Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, chaired by Dr David Pagwesese Parirenyatwa, Minister of Health and Child Care, Zimbabwe;
 - seventieth session of the Regional Committee for South-East Asia, 6–10 September, Malé, Maldives, chaired by Mr Abdulla Nazim Ibrahim, Minister of Health, Maldives;
 - sixty-seventh session of the Regional Committee for Europe, 11–14 September, Budapest, Hungary, chaired by Ms Katalin Novák, Minister of State for Youth and Family Affairs and Minister of State for International Affairs, Hungary;
 - 29th Pan American Sanitary Conference of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)/sixty-ninth session of the Regional Committee for the Americas, 25–29 September, Washington, DC, United States of America, chaired by Dr Antonio Carlos Barrios Fernández, Minister of Health, Paraguay;
 - sixty-fourth session of the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean, 9–12 October, Islamabad, Pakistan, chaired by Dr Saira Afzal Tarar, Federal Minister for National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination, Pakistan;

¹ See decision WHA65(9) (2012), paragraph (4)(d).

- sixty-eighth session of the Regional Committee for the Western Pacific, 9–13 October, Brisbane, Australia, chaired by Ms Glenys Beauchamp, Secretary Australian Government Department of Health, Australia.

3. Summary reports of the chairpersons of the regional committees are posted on the WHO website.¹

TOPICS FOR GLOBAL DISCUSSION

Implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005)

4. In May 2017, the Seventieth World Health Assembly adopted decision WHA70(11) requesting the Director-General “to develop, in full consultation with Member States, including through regional committees, a draft five-year global strategic plan to improve public health preparedness and response, based on the guiding principles contained in Annex 2 of document A70/16, to be submitted for consideration and adoption by the Seventy-first World Health Assembly, through the Executive Board at its 142nd session (January 2018)”. The draft plan was accordingly submitted to the regional committees.

5. The regional committees welcomed the draft document and expressed appreciation of their involvement in the ongoing consultative process. Overall they endorsed the 12 guiding principles and three pillars outlined in the draft strategic plan for public health preparedness and response. They noted several areas for review.

6. The Regional Committee for Africa underscored the need for technical and financial support for the implementation of national action plans, as well as for multisectoral collaboration in preparing for and responding to outbreaks and emergencies.

7. The Regional Committee for the Americas emphasized that strategic pillar 1 should link the core capacities required by the International Health Regulations (IHR) (2005) with essential public health functions and should reflect the variation across States Parties with respect to both the maturity of their health systems and the status of their implementation of the Regulations. There was broad agreement that the IHR (2005) Monitoring and Evaluation Framework should be presented as a stand-alone document, separate from the draft global strategic plan, for consideration and adoption by the Seventy-first World Health Assembly in May 2018.

8. The Regional Committee for South-East Asia emphasized the underpinning role of WHO’s leadership and governance. WHO was requested to advocate that countries place the Regulations at a higher level of their governance mechanisms in order to help to strengthen the national IHR focal points in collaboration with the many stakeholders.

¹ See <http://www.who.int/gb/statements/rc/>.

9. The Regional Committee for Europe emphasized that the IHR self-assessment tool must be complemented with additional instruments, such as a voluntary external evaluation, carried out in a way that accommodates Member States' potential sensitivities, including the need for a resource-efficient preparatory process. Member States requested the Secretariat to explore and find possible areas of common ground, especially in the area of monitoring and evaluation, before the formal consultation with Member States in November 2018, and emphasized that it was important to agree on the way forward at the Seventy-first World Health Assembly.

10. The Regional Committee for the Western Pacific emphasized the need for the proposed five-year global strategic plan to be consistent with regional health security efforts, such as the Asia Pacific Strategy for Emerging Diseases and Public Health Emergencies, which has been revised in the light of health security lessons learned over more than a decade, from not only the disaster- and outbreak-prone Western Pacific Region but also global experiences such as the Ebola virus disease outbreak. Subsequent drafts of the global strategic plan should be monitored to ensure that duplication of effort is avoided and to limit the reporting obligations on Member States. The final draft should be disseminated in advance to allow for adequate Member State consultation.

11. The Regional Committee for the Western Pacific also proposed areas in which the draft could potentially be developed: greater emphasis on the importance of integrating the animal health sector into public health preparedness and response efforts; the need to strengthen the role of national IHR focal points through technical guidance and training; the need for self-assessment tools, accompanied by clear guidance and a consultation mechanism; and consideration of novel approaches to collective action, especially in small countries or small island States, and the formalization of such approaches in technical fields, such as laboratory capacity. It also sought clarification of the working targets and the relationship between the three pillars and the six proposed areas of action, suggesting that some of the guiding principles could be more clearly articulated. The Regional Committee also expressed concern that the global strategic plan should be implemented flexibly, in a manner adapted to the Pacific context and to national health security priorities.

Global vector control response

12. The Seventieth World Health Assembly adopted resolution WHA70.16 (2017) requesting the Director-General to develop, in consultation with Member States and through regional committees, as appropriate, regional action plans aligned with WHO's technical guidance on vector control, including the priority activities described in document A70/26 Rev.1.

13. The Regional Committee for South-East Asia approved the development of a regional action plan for vector control and requested the Secretariat's support and collaboration in several aspects of vector control, including surveillance of resistance to insecticides. The importance of vector control was highlighted in a regional report on defeating neglected tropical diseases.

14. The Regional Committee for Europe expressed its support for the strategic approach to integrated global vector control and response in the light of the increasing burden of vector-borne diseases also being seen in the European Region. It was suggested that the Regional Committee hold an in-depth discussion at its sixty-eighth session, in 2018, of the added value to be gained from the development of a regional plan on vector control response, alongside the discussion of the first report on implementation of the regional framework for surveillance and control of invasive mosquito vectors and re-emerging vector-borne diseases, 2014–2020.

15. The Regional Committee for the Western Pacific confirmed the value of the global vector control and response approach in the ongoing implementation of regional action plans endorsed the previous year to combat malaria and dengue. The Committee also requested that an item on neglected tropical diseases be included on the provisional agenda of its sixty-ninth session in 2018 in the context of implementing the global vector control strategy.

Programme budget 2018–2019

16. Following approval by the Seventieth World Health Assembly of the Programme budget 2018–2019, three regional committees discussed its implementation. The Director-General endorsed the proposal raised in the Regional Committee for South-East Asia that WHO's programme budget should be used to leverage and tap domestic resources for larger programme implementation. The Regional Committee for Africa discussed, in particular, alignment of the budget with the five strategic priorities of the regional transformation agenda. Considering the increasing burden of noncommunicable diseases in the African Region and the new initiatives being planned to address this burden, that Regional Committee noted that the allocation for noncommunicable diseases appeared to be low. It appreciated the 3% increase in assessed contributions, and advocated increased efforts to mobilize domestic and other resources, which might be more flexible. The Regional Committee for Europe noted that funding for noncommunicable disease programmes in the Region had increased, despite the decline in total funding for that category across the Organization. It also raised concerns about the overall financing of the Programme budget 2018–2019, particularly the mobilization of flexible funding, as the proportion of highly earmarked resources is increasing.

Draft thirteenth general programme of work 2019–2023

17. The regional committees discussed the draft concept note on the thirteenth general programme of work 2019–2023. They supported the proposed accelerated timeline and process for development of a draft document outlining WHO's strategic vision for 2019–2023 to be considered by the Health Assembly in May 2018. The Regional Committee for Europe expressed strong support for the vision and focus on strategic priorities in the guiding principles, but called for the identification of activities and initiatives being given lower priority. It requested additional information on the methodology for assessment of WHO's contribution to health outcomes and on options for resource mobilization. Despite some concern over the proposal to make WHO more operational, given the Organization's core function as a normative and technical agency, that Regional Committee supported operationalizing WHO in certain circumstances, including the early stages of an emergency. It also raised concerns over accountability. The Committee noted that operations at the country level should be set in a context of close cooperation with other United Nations entities, and emphasized the value of expanding partnerships, including with a broad range of non-State actors.

18. The Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean highlighted the importance of taking a quality management approach, measuring performance and monitoring progress. It emphasized the need to strengthen the capacity of countries and of WHO's regional and country offices, particularly with regard to multisectoral action. It also emphasized the need to include strategic positioning of WHO in relation to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and to partners in the United Nations system, and to include Health in All Policies as a key principle for achieving the Goals and implementation of universal health coverage.

TOPICS OF REGIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

19. The Regional Committee for Africa discussed the implementation of the Transformation Agenda of the WHO Secretariat in the African Region 2015–2020, aimed at accelerating the implementation of WHO reform in the Region. An independent evaluation of the first two years of implementation, conducted in January 2017 by the WHO Evaluation Office in Geneva, showed considerable progress in the four focus areas, namely pro-results values, smart technical focus, responsive strategic operations, and effective communications and partnerships. Member States noted with appreciation the improvement in WHO's communication and engagement with countries and partners, leading to the establishment of structures for effective response to natural disasters and outbreaks. They also noted improvements in accountability and financial management and discussed next steps. The Committee also considered agenda items on: a framework for health systems development towards universal health coverage in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals in the African Region; a strategy for the management of environmental determinants of human health in the African Region 2017–2021; a framework for implementing the global strategy to eliminate yellow fever epidemics, 2017–2026 in the African Region; reducing health inequities through intersectoral action on the social determinants of health; and a proposed regional implementation framework for the global health sector strategy on sexually transmitted infections, 2016–2021. It approved several related resolutions.

20. The 29th Pan American Sanitary Conference/sixty-ninth session of the Regional Committee for the Americas re-elected Dr Carissa Etienne for a second term as Director of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau, and submitted her name to the Executive Board for appointment as Regional Director for the Americas for the same period. The Regional Committee for the Americas approved several amendments to the Strategic Plan of the Pan American Health Organization 2014–2019 and adopted the PAHO Program and Budget 2018–2019. The Committee adopted the Sustainable Health Agenda for the Americas 2018–2030, which sets out goals and targets to be achieved in that period. The Committee also discussed the implications of the global shortage of inactivated poliovirus vaccine and adopted a resolution authorizing the Regional Director to conduct negotiations with a view to ensuring an adequate supply of the vaccine through the PAHO Revolving Fund for Vaccine Procurement. The following instruments were also approved or adopted: a policy on ethnicity and health; a plan of action for the sustainability of measles, rubella, and congenital rubella syndrome elimination in the Americas 2018–2023; a plan of action for the strengthening of vital statistics 2017–2022; a strategy on human resources for universal access to health and universal health coverage; and a strategy and plan of action to strengthen tobacco control in the Region of the Americas 2018–2022.

21. The Regional Committee for South-East Asia, discussing governance reform, supported the recommendations of the Working Group on the alignment of the process of nomination of the Regional Director with that of other regions, and the introduction of a code of conduct and a standardized curriculum vitae in addition to existing processes. It adopted the related amendments to its Rules of Procedure and the Code of Conduct for the Nomination of the Regional Director. The Committee endorsed the Malé Declaration on Building Health Systems' Resilience to Climate Change and a related regional framework for action 2017–2022. The Committee approved a regional action plan for viral hepatitis 2016–2021 and a plan for implementing and monitoring the Delhi Call for Action to End TB in the WHO South-East Asia Region by 2030. It also discussed access to medicines, the Sustainable Development Goals and progress towards universal health coverage, and progress towards construction of the new Regional Office building.

22. The Regional Committee for Europe adopted a road map to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, building on the Health 2020 policy framework, together with a joint monitoring framework. It endorsed the Declaration of the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, with its associated compendium of possible national actions and revised institutional arrangements for the European Environment and Health Process. It endorsed a framework for action towards a sustainable health workforce in the European Region, and adopted a decision on strengthening Member State collaboration on improving access to medicines in the Region. It also discussed accelerating implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005) and strengthening laboratory capacities for better health in the Region. The Committee decided to establish a procedure to grant accreditation to international, regional and national non-State actors not in official relations with WHO, so that they might participate in its meetings. In the area of governance, it agreed that key messages from its meetings should be the subject of a brief oral presentation to the Executive Board, although that would entail changes to the Board's programme of work. It also agreed on new procedures for its endorsement of the outcome documents or declarations of high-level regional meetings and for web-based consultations on the documents for its regular sessions.

23. The Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean endorsed a regional framework for action on cancer prevention and control and a framework for action on climate change and health, and adopted resolutions on operationalization of the adolescent health component of the Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health (2016–2030) and on antimicrobial resistance.

24. The Regional Committee for the Western Pacific endorsed a regional strategy and plan of action on measles and rubella elimination, and requested the Secretariat to develop, through a consultative process, a regional plan of action on protecting children from the harmful impact of food marketing. It also endorsed: a regional action plan on health promotion in the Sustainable Development Goals; regional frameworks for action on food safety, on transitioning to integrated financing of priority public health services, and for the triple elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, hepatitis B virus and syphilis in Asia and the Pacific 2018–2030; and a regional action agenda on regulatory strengthening, convergence and cooperation for medicines and the health workforce.

ACTION BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

25. The Board is invited to note the report.

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