

---

## **Health, environment and climate change**

### **Draft global plan of action on climate change and health in small island developing States**

#### **BACKGROUND**

1. Climate change undermines the environmental determinants of health – clean air and water, sufficient food and adequate shelter – and can increase the risks of extreme weather events. Although all populations are at risk, some are more vulnerable than others. Small island developing States are in the front line, encapsulating the full range of acute to long-term risks, including (a) more extreme floods, storms and drought; (b) increased risks of water-, vector- and food-borne infectious diseases; (c) increased risks of noncommunicable diseases; (d) sea-level rise threatening fragile health care facilities, mainly but not exclusively situated in coastal areas. These additional stresses presented by climate change combine with the existing challenges of communicable and noncommunicable diseases, resulting in a triple burden of disease that causes high morbidity and mortality. The special report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change on global warming of 1.5 °C further underlines the particular vulnerabilities of small island developing States to climate change if warming exceeds 1.5 °C and the likely increasing impacts if it reaches 2 °C or higher.
2. Since the establishment of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 1992, protecting “human health and welfare” has been recognized as a priority in responding to climate change. The 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change acknowledges “the right to health”, presenting the opportunity to implement the Agreement as a public health treaty, and recognizes the particular vulnerability of small island developing States, which have made minimal contribution to global carbon emissions but are among the most susceptible countries to the health impacts of climate change. Similarly, resolution WHA61.19 (2008) on climate change and health recognizes the particular vulnerabilities of small island developing States and least developed countries.
3. In recognition of the severe and urgent threats to the health and well-being of the people of the small island developing States, at the twenty-third session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, held in Bonn in 2017, WHO launched a special initiative on climate change and health in small island developing States, in collaboration with the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Fijian presidency of the Conference; the initiative, which is also a platform within the Thirteenth General Programme of Work (2019–2023), was one of the main outcomes of the Conference.
4. In 2018, the Executive Board adopted decision EB142(5) on health, environment and climate change. In that decision, the Director-General was requested, among other things, to develop “a draft action plan for the platform to address the health effects of climate change initially in small island developing States, and to submit the draft action plan for consideration by the Seventy-second World

Health Assembly in May 2019, through the Executive Board at its 144th session in January 2019". This draft global plan of action on climate change and health in small island developing States was developed following the recommendations of the Third Global Conference on Climate and Health 2018, which was organized as a series of three separate events dispersed across three regions with a focus on small island developing States. Regional plans of action were agreed upon for small island developing States in the Western Pacific Region at ministerial-level meetings held in Nadi, Fiji, on 15 and 16 March 2018 (later launched by Pacific health leaders at a side event during the Seventy-first World Health Assembly); for small island developing States in the African and South-East Asia regions in Mauritius on 21 and 22 March 2018; and for small island developing States in the Region of the Americas in St George's, Grenada, on 16 and 17 October 2018. These regional plans describe the specific actions that should be taken at the national and regional levels, as well as associated indicators.<sup>1</sup>

5. The aim of this draft global plan of action is to provide the overarching support needed to deliver on the regional plans of action; its design is closely aligned with the support that the Secretariat provides to all Member States through the revised WHO workplan on climate change and health, as approved in decision EB136(15) (2015). It will deliver the platform referred to in decision EB142(5). The draft global plan of action will also contribute to the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 3 (Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages) and Goal 13 (Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts).

6. In line with the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, the focus of this draft global plan of action is a targeted effort to rapidly scale up support for a group of countries with unique and severe challenges; it provides a response to the call for urgent action made by the health ministers of the small island developing States. It should not undermine ongoing work to protect the health of other vulnerable populations; rather, it should be used to strengthen experience and operational mechanisms that can also be applied to other countries.

## VISION

7. This draft global plan of action has a vision that by 2030, all health systems in small island developing States will be resilient to climate variability and change.

8. This vision must be realized in parallel with the steps taken by countries around the world to reduce carbon emissions, both to protect the most vulnerable from climate risks and to gain the health co-benefits of mitigation policies.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Regional Office for the Western Pacific has published the Pacific islands action plan on climate change and health (<http://iris.wpro.who.int/handle/10665.1/14236?show=full>); regional action plans have been completed and are in the process of being published for the small island developing States in (a) the African and South East Asian regions and (b) the Region of the Americas.

## SCOPE

9. The draft global plan of action aims to provide national health authorities in small island developing States with the political, technical and financial support and the evidence needed to:

- (a) better understand and address the effects of climate change on health, including those mediated via climate change impacts on the main determinants of health (e.g. food, air, water and sanitation);
- (b) improve the climate resilience and environmental sustainability of health services;
- (c) promote the implementation of climate change mitigation actions by the most polluting sectors (e.g. transport, energy, food and agriculture) that will maximize health co-benefits, both within and outside small island developing States.

10. The draft global plan of action also aims to lead the way in transforming health services in small island developing States away from a model of curative services with escalating costs and towards a model based on disease prevention, climate resilience and sustainability. In addition, it aims to promote working in a more integrated way across different health programmes (e.g., environmental health, worker's health, health systems strengthening, emergency preparedness and response, food security and nutrition), and with other partners.

11. The draft global plan of action is designed to support WHO's the special initiative on climate change and health in, which is a voluntary grouping that includes small islands irrespective of their constitutional status, i.e. it includes the participation of independent States, overseas departments, dependencies and territories.<sup>1</sup>

## STRATEGIC LINES OF ACTION

12. The draft global plan of action has four interlinked and mutually reinforcing strategic lines of action; each has two associated actions and two indicators for monitoring progress.

### **Strategic line of action 1 – Empowerment: Supporting health leadership in small island developing States to engage nationally and internationally**

13. Health is increasingly recognized in climate discussions; nevertheless, it is still not routinely and formally identified as a priority, resulting in missed opportunities both to protect health and to promote health as an argument and success measure for climate action. There is a need to ensure that connections between health and climate change are effectively incorporated into the official positions of relevant small island developing States groupings in global negotiations of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and other relevant sustainable development processes. Small island developing States constitute about one fifth of United Nations and WHO Member States and could leverage their strength in numbers to advocate more effectively for global action. The strategic line of action on empowerment aims to ensure that the voice of health leaders, on behalf of the most vulnerable

---

<sup>1</sup> Reference elsewhere in this report to national adaptation plans and national communications is intended to include submissions both by independent States, and by overseas departments, dependencies and territories, either in their own right, or within those of their respective governing nations.

populations, becomes a driving force for adaptation in small island developing States and for mitigation by countries around the world.

**Action 1.1 – Establish at WHO a small island developing States hub or alternative coordination mechanism on small island developing States to provide support to climate change, environment and other priority health issues**

14. This action will address the request from countries to identify and promote mechanisms that support an open process of engagement between small island developing States and WHO, and between small island developing States and other development partners. This action will support: building capacity among policy-makers on climate change; and health diplomacy and negotiations. The hub will also work with other partners to connect the issue of climate change to other health and development priorities, including tourism, environment, waste management, agriculture, fisheries and industry. Progress will be monitored against the following indicator:

**Indicator 1.1 – Small island developing States coordination mechanism established in WHO for climate change, environment and other priority health issues**

**Action 1.2 – Provide health sector inputs to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and stakeholders leading relevant national climate change processes (e.g. national adaptation plans, national communications, nationally determined contributions)**

15. To implement this action, WHO will work to strengthen the monitoring of health issues within international conventions and agreements on the environment, and will put in place regional risk assessment and risk communication mechanisms. Through the platform to address the health effects of climate change in small island developing States, WHO will work to ensure that health leaders in small island developing States are well informed by the latest evidence regarding the relationship between climate change and health and are empowered to highlight the threats and opportunities for action in national contexts during high-level engagements and international negotiations. The Secretariat will also work to promote high-level engagement by working with Member States to include the small island developing States initiative in ongoing global and regional agendas and in small island developing States groupings within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, including the Alliance of Small Island States and the Group of 77 and China. Progress will be monitored against the following indicator:

**Indicator 1.2 – Number of small island developing States that include health as a priority in their most recent national communications, national adaptation plans or nationally determined contributions to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change**

**Strategic line of action 2 – Evidence: Building the business case for investment**

16. The global evidence base for the impacts of climate change on health is comparable to that for any other climate-sensitive outcome (e.g. agriculture and water resources). However, this information is often not presented in an easily accessible form at the national or subnational levels where most policy decisions are made. It also often lacks the systematic economic evidence base that is necessary to make the case to potential investors, such as international climate finance institutions, development banks and national finance ministries. Finally, there is a lack of operational research on the implementation of climate change and health programmes in small island developing States and elsewhere.

17. In addition, the relatively small human resources and research capacity in most individual small island developing States presents a challenge in generating new, locally relevant research. There is therefore a need to ensure that existing evidence is connected as directly as possible to policy and to build capacity and strengthen the connections of national research institutions in small island developing States with each other, with research institutions outside such States and with policy-makers. This strategic line of action therefore aims to ensure that health ministries have the necessary health, environment and economic evidence to support scaled up investment in climate change and health, identify priority investments and monitor their impact.

**Action 2.1 – In collaboration with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, develop or update national climate and health country profiles for every small island developing State**

18. In collaboration with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, WHO has already produced country profiles for 45 countries, including six small island developing States. The platform to address the health effects of climate change in small island developing States will work with partners to conduct new or updated climate change and health vulnerability and adaptation assessments, and will explore with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change the possibility of preparing a health and climate change report for small island developing States. Progress will be monitored against the following indicator:

**Indicator 2.1 – Number of small island developing States that have completed climate and health country profiles supported by WHO and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change**

**Action 2.2 – Identify, support and build on existing centres of excellence for increasing capacity, conducting assessments, data analysis, research and implementation of actions, including with organizations and universities that have regional mandates**

19. This action will include estimating the cost of climate change impacts on health in small island developing States; developing detailed investment plans, informed by sound economic analyses of costs and gaps, to increase the resilience of health-care systems, including health care facilities; conducting operational research in parallel with implementation and developing and implementing a research agenda, including by providing support to build research capacity in countries. It will also make better use of information on small island developing States to sensitize large emitting countries to take actions to reduce emissions. Progress will be monitored against the following indicator:

**Indicator 2.2 – Number of collaborating centres actively engaged in supporting the platform to address the health effects of climate change in small island developing States**

**Strategic line of action 3 – Implementation: Preparedness for climate risks, adaptation, and health-promoting mitigation policies**

20. The draft global plan of action will build on the experience gained in climate and health adaptation projects around the world, increasing coverage of evidence-based interventions within a comprehensive approach based on WHO's operational framework for building climate resilient health systems. It also aims to strengthen the role of the health sector in promoting health co-benefits of climate change mitigation actions implemented by those sectors more responsible for global warming, both within and outside small island developing States.

21. This strategic line of action aims to bring about transformational change in health systems by promoting and supporting a culture of disease prevention, building the climate resilience of health systems and maximizing the health co-benefits of climate change mitigation policies.

**Action 3.1 – Support small island developing States through regional frameworks to build climate resilient health systems**

22. This action includes preventive measures, such as integrating into the implementation of universal health coverage the protection of the environmental determinants of health (e.g. water and food security) and the strengthening of the surveillance and control of climate-sensitive diseases. It also includes a specific focused effort on climate resilient and environmentally sustainable health care facilities (i.e. building or retrofitting health infrastructure to become resilient to extreme weather events and ongoing climate change; ensuring reliable access to, and efficient use of, energy and water; and reducing emissions of greenhouse gases. It will also entail baseline assessments and the development and implementation of climate mitigation plans for the health sector to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from energy, food, transportation and procurement. Progress will be monitored against the following indicator:

**Indicator 3.1 – Number of small island developing States that have initiated actions for climate resilient, environmentally sustainable health care facilities**

**Action 3.2 – Develop and implement programmes to raise awareness and build capacity for adaptation and disease prevention both by people and by the health system**

23. To implement this action, WHO will support small island developing States to implement national and subnational health adaptation plans and facilitate information-sharing, stocktaking and research, and will conduct advocacy and awareness campaigns for health leaders, policy-makers, key stakeholders and the general public. This action will also require strengthening environmental health programmes to make a full contribution to preventive health services and primary health care (including disaster risk management) and the control of communicable and noncommunicable diseases (including mental health). Progress will be monitored against the following indicator:

**Indicator 3.2 – Number of small island developing States that have begun implementation of climate change and health national and subnational adaptation plans or actions to achieve health co-benefits described in their nationally determined contributions to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change**

**Strategic line of action 4 – Resources: Facilitating access to climate and health finance**

24. A significant change in the current health vulnerability of the populations of small island developing States will not be possible without access to sufficient financial resources. Health ministers have prioritized the need to expand and diversify the funding streams potentially available to build health resilience to climate change. They have identified specific challenges, including the complexity of accessing the main climate finance mechanisms; the fact that no health agencies are currently accredited to implement projects on behalf of such mechanisms; and that eligibility of countries for some funding streams is linked to overall measures of economic development without due account being taken of the particular challenges of small island developing States, such as high per capita costs of providing health care and high economic vulnerability to extreme weather events.

25. This strategic line of action aims to facilitate access to climate finance, development assistance and domestic resources so as to triple the current level of investment in climate change and health in small island developing States over the period 2019–2023.

**Action 4.1 – Lead a process to identify new and innovative forms of funding and resource mobilization mechanisms**

26. This action will entail advocacy to facilitate equity and transparency in accessing funds, including supporting simplified funding mechanisms. Countries have also requested WHO to support the establishment of a special fund for small island developing States on climate and health (Small Island Developing States Climate and Health Fund). Progress will be monitored against the following indicator:

**Indicator 4.1 – Special fund on climate and health for small island developing States established (Small Island Developing States Climate and Health Fund)**

**Action 4.2 – WHO will pursue the process to become an accredited agency for the Green Climate Fund and facilitate support to small island developing States**

27. Small island developing States have advocated for WHO to facilitate mechanisms and overcome current complexities in obtaining funding for adaptation and mitigation in the health sector. The Secretariat will also continue to support countries by strengthening national leadership, advocacy and instruments to establish a clear process to access climate change and health financing. Progress will be monitored against the following indicator:

**Indicator 4.2 – Total funds received for the health sector as a percentage of total climate funds**

## **MONITORING AND REPORTING OF PROGRESS**

28. Progress in implementation of the Global plan of action will be monitored against the indicators defined above, based primarily on survey information collected in consultation with countries, which also form the basis of the climate and health country profiles supported by WHO and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. It is proposed that progress be reported biennially to the Health Assembly, over the period 2019–2025.<sup>1</sup>

## **ACTION BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD**

29. The Executive Board is invited to consider the draft global plan of action on climate change and health set out above and to provide further guidance, focusing its discussions on the following:

- the possibility of recommending the draft global plan of Action to the World Health Assembly for approval;

---

<sup>1</sup> WHO regional committees may wish to consider separate monitoring arrangements for individual regional action plans.

- ensuring an effective operating model for the WHO Secretariat to support the implementation of the initiative, across the three levels of the Organization;
- actions that may be taken by Member States to mobilize political support for the initiative on climate change and health in small island developing States through international health, climate change and sustainable development processes; and to widen the scope of the proposed scale-up in work on climate change and health beyond the initial focus of this initiative.

= = =