

Sixty-seventh session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean, Cairo, Egypt, 12–13 October 2020

Summary report by the Chair, H.E. Dr Hala Zayed, Minister of Health and Population, Egypt

PART 1: TOPICS FOR GLOBAL DISCUSSION

In response to the risk posed and disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the 67th session of the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean was held virtually through a secure online platform, hosted from the WHO Regional Office in Cairo, Egypt. The agenda for the session was shorter than normal, and was further subdivided into an abridged agenda of items that were discussed during the online meeting and other agenda items that were communicated as documents, with any discussion of the latter taking place through informal consultation.¹ Decisions on proposals relating to agenda items were taken through a written silence procedure after the online session.²

Development of the Programme Budget 2022–2023

The Regional Committee received a document setting out the proposed approach to developing the Programme Budget 2022–2023. The document explained that the COVID-19 pandemic had disrupted the normal process for developing the programme budget, and proposed an alternative process and timelines. It also proposed extending the Thirteenth General Programme of Work (GPW 13) until 2025. The document was not tabled as an agenda item for discussion during the virtual session of the Regional Committee, but in discussions of other agenda items support was voiced for the proposal to extend GPW 13. Consultation with Member States in the Region on the programme budget process and priorities is planned to take place in November.

WHO Transformation

The Regional Committee received two documents reporting on efforts to transform WHO across the three levels of the Organization to enhance the impact of its activities at country level: a global report on transformation and a report focusing on transformation within the Region. It was noted that functional reviews had been undertaken for all country offices in the Region, and work was now underway to implement recommendations from those reviews. Furthermore, the Regional Office had also been restructured to better align with strategic priorities and enhance impact, notably with the creation of a department for Communications, Resource Mobilization and Partnerships. The documents were not tabled as an agenda item for discussion during the virtual session of the Regional Committee; the Secretariat is seeking input from Member States through ongoing contact and informal consultation.

Development of a draft global patient safety action plan

The Regional Committee received a document outlining progress in developing a draft global patient safety action plan, and which included a link to the draft action plan. The document was not tabled as an

¹ Document EM/RC67/2 is the decision setting out the special procedures for the session.

² Document EM/RC67/3-Rev.1 is the decision establishing the written silence procedure.

agenda item for discussion during the virtual session of the Regional Committee, and no feedback on the draft plan has been received from Member States.

PART 2: TOPICS OF REGIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

Regional strategy to improve access to medicines and vaccines in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, 2020–2030

The Committee endorsed a new strategy designed to ensure that everyone in the Region has access to the quality essential medicines and vaccines they need, without suffering financial hardship, by 2030.³ Equitable access to essential medicines and vaccines was a key part of universal health coverage, but was compromised by many challenges in the Region. The COVID-19 pandemic had both exacerbated those challenges and increased concerns about access to treatments and any eventual vaccine, making it an opportune time to address the issue. Member States welcomed the new strategy, which called for innovation to improve access including the establishment of a regional/subregional pooled procurement/joint purchasing arrangement.

The COVID-19 pandemic in the Eastern Mediterranean Region and the International Health Regulations (2005) in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

The Regional Committee received reports on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Region and on progress in building core capacities under the International Health Regulations (IHR) (2005). Member States noted with alarm the impacts of the pandemic, including both the direct impact of COVID-19 on mortality and morbidity and the very serious disruption to essential health services. The pandemic showed that there had been inadequate investment in IHR core capacities in many countries. On the other hand, it also demonstrated that developing resilient health systems was a cost-effective long-term investment. Member States adopted a resolution calling for effective response to the pandemic, including action to maintain essential health services.⁴ The Committee also endorsed a new regional strategic framework for the prevention and control of emerging and epidemic-prone infectious diseases.⁵

Establishment of a Subcommittee for Polio Eradication and Outbreaks

The Regional Committee discussed polio eradication in the Region and adopted a resolution on galvanizing efforts to eradicate polio in the Region.⁶ Member States expressed concern that the Eastern Mediterranean is now the only WHO Region where wild poliovirus remains endemic. Furthermore, both wild poliovirus cases and vaccine-derived poliovirus cases have been increasing in recent years. The resolution includes provision to establish a new Subcommittee on Polio Eradication and Outbreaks for the Eastern Mediterranean Region to ensure high-level support for and oversight of this work. Several Member States expressed strong interest in joining the Subcommittee.

³ EM/RC67/R.2.

⁴ EM/RC67/R.3.

⁵ EM/RC67/R.1.

⁶ EM/RC67/R.4.

Procedure for accreditation of regional non-State actors not in official relations with WHO to attend meetings of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean

The Regional Committee adopted a new process for accrediting non-State actors to attend meetings of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean.⁷ The procedure is intended to reinforce engagement and build on constructive dialogue with non-State actors in the Region within the terms of the Framework of Engagement with Non-State Actors. Accreditation is a privilege that the Regional Committee may now grant to regional nongovernmental organizations, regional business associations and philanthropic foundations. It will include an invitation to participate, without the right to vote, in meetings of the Regional Committee and the possibility of submitting written and/or oral statements through the WHO Regional Office.

Strategic action framework to improve access to assistive technology in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

The Regional Committee endorsed a new strategic action framework to improve access to assistive technology in the Region.⁸

⁷ EM/RC67/R.5.

⁸ EM/RC67/R.1.