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## **Progress report on the regional strategy on health and the environment 2014–2019**

### **Introduction**

1. In 2013 the 60th Session of the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean endorsed the regional strategy on health and the environment and framework for action 2014–2019 (resolution EM/RC60/R.5). The Committee requested WHO to: provide technical support to Member States to adapt and implement this regional strategy ; build partnerships with United Nations organizations and other relevant stakeholders to facilitate its implementation; and monitor and report to the Regional Committee the progress achieved in its implementation on biennial bases.
2. WHO is providing technical support to countries in developing their national environmental strategies and plans of action based on the regional strategy. In a regional meeting organized in December 2014, WHO and countries adopted a framework for developing national plans of action based on the regional strategy. Several countries in the Region have finalized their national framework of action for the implementation of the strategy; however most are still in the initial stages of identifying country teams for the development of national strategies and plans of action.
3. This report describes activities undertaken by WHO and Member States to implement the regional strategy.

### **Progress achieved since 2013**

#### *Water, sanitation and hygiene*

4. A methodology for developing national policies on water requirements for health and the response to water scarcity was developed and refined. Fifteen countries updated their national standards for drinking-water quality based on WHO guidelines on drinking-water quality. Preventive water safety plans have been adopted in eight countries. Eleven countries have strengthened their national monitoring of the water and sanitation sector under the framework of the UN-Water Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking-Water (GLAAS).

#### *Air quality and health*

5. Guidance on air quality and health and new burden of disease estimates was shared with 17 countries of the Region through a consultation held in Amman in December 2014. The public health response to air pollution was discussed during the 61st Session of the Regional Committee in October 2014, as well as during the consultation in December 2014. Member States are committed to tackling these environmental health risks issues within the public health system in partnership with other stakeholders. The health impacts of airborne sand and dust will be discussed by experts from the health, environment and meteorological sectors in a regional meeting later this year

#### *Chemical safety*

6. National capacities for preparedness and response to chemical events were strengthened in several countries as required under the International Health Regulations 2005 (IHR). Technical support was also provided to Member States for promotion and implementation of multilateral environmental agreements and those of other international forums with a focus on chemicals.

*Waste management and environmental health services in health care facilities*

7. Member States strengthened capacities to address health aspects of solid waste management including municipal and hazardous waste. Focus was put on health care waste management, with special attention to countries that face major constraints in improving population health outcomes as a result of lack of resources, political instability or other complex development challenges. A training course on health care waste management was held in July 2015. Environmental health standards for accreditation of health care facilities were developed and adopted by countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council. A protocol for auditing environmental health in health care facilities was also developed for piloting.

*Environmental health management in emergencies*

8. A regional revolving stock was established for environmental health in emergencies. Health service providers in several Member States were trained on response to chemical exposure accidents, and scientific resources and training materials were made available in several languages. One major objective of the strategy was to develop profiles in countries on preparedness and response in relation to environmental health services in emergencies.

*Climate change and health*

9. The global WHO plan on climate change and health was reviewed by several Member States during the WHO Conference on Health and Climate in August 2014, and the framework for the public health response to climate change was further discussed during the 61st session of the Regional Committee in October 2014. This framework is being promoted and adapted in the Region in collaboration with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (UNESCWA), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and League of Arab States.

10. WHO conducted a desk review of knowledge on health and climate change within the Region, and is developing a training manual for health professionals on health vulnerability assessment and adaptation planning.

*Sustainable development and health*

11. In partnership with relevant regional organizations (League of Arab States, UNESCWA and UNEP), WHO is involved in several forums preparing for the post 2015 sustainable development goals with the aim of ensuring that health (and the environment) is central to the goals as a precursor, an outcome and an indicator of sustainable development. The health sector greening initiative will be promoted more actively beginning in 2016.

**The way forward**

12. The major challenges in the Region are shortages in technical capacity in environmental health and the fragmentation and multisectorality of this issue. WHO support to countries of the Region will continue to building institutional capabilities and enhancing monitoring and evaluation programmes for indicators and progress achieved in the areas of identified environmental health priorities. With the stewardship of ministries of health, national health and environment plans of action will be developed and implemented in partnership with all stakeholders within the agreed time-frame of 2014–2019.