

WHO publications

Report by the Secretariat

1. At its 121st session, the Executive Board accepted the Director-General's proposal to the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee at its sixth meeting to submit a new WHO publication policy to the Board in 2008, once that policy had undergone a further, fuller review.¹ Members of the Committee had stressed the need for WHO to have a robust publishing policy and emphasized that WHO's publications² should be firmly grounded in evidence. Further, they had emphasized the importance of WHO's publications being in line not only with the Organization's corporate policies but also with its international commitments.
2. The Committee had also noted that the Director-General, in her role as editor-in-chief of the Organization, needed editorial independence. On the issue of dissemination, members of the Committee had considered that WHO was distributing too much in print and, while the needs of readerships with no access to electronic communication should be taken into account, the Organization should make greater use of distribution through the Internet and other new technologies.
3. One of WHO's constitutional responsibilities is to provide objective and reliable information and advice in the field of human health. It fulfils this responsibility in part by producing and disseminating information in the form of publications, technical documents, newsletters, press releases, fact sheets, articles in external publications and journals, CD-ROMs, computer diskettes and through its web sites.
4. WHO issues some 350–400 publications a year. Of these titles, around 75% are published by headquarters and the rest by regional offices. Currently, between 1.2 million and 1.6 million copies of WHO publications are distributed annually, 90% of which are distributed free of charge. In the biennium 1998–1999, the total cost of publications to the Organization was estimated at US\$ 117 million (14.4% of the total budget). In the biennium 2004–2005, the total cost of publications was estimated to be US\$ 347.6 million (12.7% of the total budget), 71.7% of which was attributed to the cost of writing and preparing the initial text. Editing, printing, translation and electronic products each accounted for 22.7%; the remaining 5.6% was accounted for by illustration, design, layout, clearance, storage, distribution, mailing, and marketing and sales activities.

¹ Document EB121/2007/REC/1, summary record of the first meeting, section 4.

² The term "publication" refers to "information products", i.e. materials that are issued by WHO to the public in whatever format and through whatever channel. It excludes materials internal to WHO.

5. New WHO publishing policy guidelines have been drafted, which take into account the comments of the Committee. They combine elements of existing policies with innovative approaches aimed at strengthening quality control and reducing WHO's spending on publishing. The objectives are:

- to ensure the relevance of the Organization's publications and to maintain its reputation for excellence
- to ensure that WHO publications are based on sound evidence and that all material that is made available to external audiences is authoritative, credible, reliable and impartial
- to ensure that WHO publications are in line with the Organization's corporate policies and its international commitments
- to increase the cost-efficiency of production and distribution of WHO publications
- to ensure that WHO publications are accessible and available
- to enhance the multilingualism of its publications
- to protect the intellectual property, image and reputation of the Organization, and enhance the branding of its publications.

6. As far as possible, the policy follows a "life-cycle" approach to publishing. The cycle includes planning, content development, executive clearance, production processes, dissemination, archiving and evaluation.

Planning

7. With the introduction of the global management system, scheduled for early 2008, publications will be planned within the results-based performance management framework of the Organization in the same way as other programmatic activities.

8. A master list of planned publications will be prepared for executive approval at the beginning of each biennium.

9. Any article, book chapter or invited commentary relating to WHO's work that is to be submitted by a staff member for external publication will be subject to the same clearance procedures as articles, books and commentaries published by WHO.

Content development

10. The steps taken in developing content will be clearly documented for each publication by the technical unit concerned.

11. Specific procedures will be followed for different categories of publications, including peer review for scientific publications and clearance by the WHO Guidelines Review Committee of any publications proposing recommendations for guidelines or best practice and of similar normative documents.

12. The responsibility for the technical quality of all publications prepared by a particular department will rest with the director concerned.

Executive clearance

13. The final text of all publications will be cleared by the relevant Assistant Director-General or Regional Director before publication. Publications that describe the workings of a particular government or national health service or that have policy implications for the Organization or address controversial health-related issues will require additional clearance by the Director-General's Office.

Production processes

14. Industry standards will be adopted for file formats and standardized designs and templates will be used for certain publication categories (which have yet to be defined).

15. Use of digital printing and print-on-demand technology will be increased both to print WHO publications at or closer to the location of their intended target audiences, and to maintain a greater number of titles in print.

16. Training in publishing will be strengthened, to ensure that those responsible for managing the publishing process acquire the necessary skills, knowledge, and competencies. The training will be complemented by the development of a publishing policy e-guide that includes all publishing-related procedures and policies. This guide will be made available on WHO's Intranet.

Dissemination

17. Electronic distribution will be the preferred means for disseminating WHO publications. Where the intended target readership of a product does not have access to the Internet, or if a product has sales potential, such products will also be made available in print.

18. An integrated collection of WHO publications in electronic format (an e-library) will be developed and made accessible to Member States to reduce the need for dissemination of printed products.

19. Publications developed specifically for the World Wide Web or posted there will be subject to the same quality-control procedures and clearances as printed publications.

Archiving

20. Electronic files of the final versions of WHO publications will be deposited in the WHO institutional repository, as envisaged in the WHO plan of action on multilingualism.¹

Evaluation

21. An evaluation of WHO's publishing activities will be carried out at the end of each biennium, both to monitor the policy's effects on the technical quality and quantity of WHO publications

¹ Document EB121/6.

(including the number of copies disseminated) and to make recommendations for further improvements.

WHO identity and copyright

22. WHO publications are a part of the Organization's corporate identity and must reflect the values that it promotes.

23. WHO publications must be produced to a high editorial standard and must be easily recognizable as originating in the Organization. Branding of WHO publications will be strengthened by the use of standardized templates for some categories of publications.

24. All WHO information materials will bear the WHO logo and an appropriate disclaimer, indicating whether the views presented are those of the Organization, a group of individuals or an expert group.

25. WHO copyright will, as a matter of principle, remain with the Organization and will not be assigned to an outside institution.

Multilingualism

26. The languages in which an information product will be published will be reviewed at the planning clearance stage. If translation is deemed necessary at this stage, the product will be approved only if translation can be assured.

27. The volume of multilingual content on WHO web sites will be increased, style guides and glossaries will be produced in all official languages, technical guidelines for multilingual publications will be established or reinforced, publication workflows will be rationalized to minimize the cost of producing different language versions of the same document, and a multilingual institutional repository will be established, as envisaged in the WHO plan of action on multilingualism.¹

ACTION BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

28. The Board is invited to note the report.

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¹ Document EB121/6.