

Multilingualism: implementation of action plan

Report by the Secretariat

1. In May 2007 the Executive Board at its 121st session noted the report on the plan of action on multilingualism.¹ A progress report on implementation of the action plan was discussed by the Board at its 122nd session,² and resolution EB122.R9, entitled “Multilingualism: implementation of action plan”, was adopted, containing a resolution for consideration by the Health Assembly. In May 2008 the Health Assembly adopted resolution WHA61.12, which requested the Director-General to prepare, before the 124th session of the Executive Board, a timetable for implementation of the plan of action and a table showing the financial implications globally, within the framework of the Medium-term strategic plan 2008–2013.

PROGRESS MADE AND TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF PROPOSED AREAS OF ACTION

2. **Translation priorities.** A publishing policy coordination group has been established in order to advise the Director-General on, inter alia, the setting of translation priorities.

3. A list of WHO’s documents and information products translated into the official languages has been produced in order to show the current availability of these outputs in each of the languages concerned. In addition, a master list has been prepared for the entire Organization of all planned information products that have been approved for development with a view to publication. The list covers the biennium 2008–2009 and includes the planned translations of these products.

4. As requested in resolution WHA61.12, a process of informal consultations with Member States has begun in order to establish a strategy for setting translation priorities; and initial meetings to discuss priorities for the Russian and Chinese languages have been held. The master list of planned publications will also be made available so that WHO country offices can obtain Member States’ suggestions for translation priorities. The publishing policy coordination group is expected to harmonize the setting of such priorities throughout the Organization, and to submit its recommendations by 2010. The number of multilingual titles published during the final years of the Medium-term strategic plan 2008–2013 will be monitored in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy.

¹ Document EB121/2007/REC/1, summary record of the second meeting.

² Document EB122/29, section H.

5. The number of translations of WHO's information products will be increased by finding additional external publishers and partners to translate and publish WHO's publications to the required WHO standard. From 2010 to 2013, more documents will be outsourced to these external publishers for translation and publication. WHO's strict quality control standards will be maintained, and a survey will be conducted to monitor translation quality.

6. **Multilingual team of web editors.** Progress has been made in the provision of multilingual content on the main WHO web site and on the web sites of many regional and country offices. In the first eight months of 2008, the numbers of web pages published on the WHO web site in the official languages were as follows: Arabic, 345; Chinese, 291; French, 761; Russian, 271; and Spanish, 370. The proposed targets for 2009, in pages published, are as follows: Arabic, 600; Chinese, 600; French, 900; Russian, 600; and Spanish, 650.

7. During the biennium 2010–2011, a team of six full-time web editors will be appointed in order to further increase multilingual content on the WHO web site, providing scope for a greater diversity of topics and depth of coverage. The target numbers of web pages to be published in the official languages are as follows: Arabic, 1500; Chinese, 1500; French, 2200; Russian, 1500; and Spanish, 1800. The web sites of the regional offices will also increase the number of web pages published in their respective official languages. Mechanisms to outsource the editing and production of multilingual content will be explored.

8. By 2013, the quantity of high-quality multilingual content on the web will have increased considerably. For the biennium 2012–2013, the target numbers of web pages to be published on the WHO web site in the official languages are as follows: Arabic, 1750; Chinese, 1750; French, 2800; Russian, 1750; and Spanish, 2300.

9. **Institutional repository.** A global working group – composed of librarians, web officers and other experts from WHO headquarters and the regional offices – has been established in order to develop an institutional repository of information products in official and non-official languages. In early 2008, the working group agreed on common standards for metadata, systems requirements and contents. A proposal for a repository system has been finalized and a software tool is being tested. Once the tool has been selected, configuration and implementation of the system will continue, as will the migration of WHO's information products from existing library databases.

10. In the WHO library system, there are currently several thousand publications and documents available in each of the official languages, together with publications in over 50 additional languages. Much of this material is available in print only. It is estimated that six million pages of publications and documents need to be scanned, and the relevant metadata added, in order to allow multilingual searching of the entire collection. By the end of 2013, the scanning and uploading of multilingual information products will have been completed, along with the configuration and implementation of the repository system and of a web browser with a multilingual interface. In addition, activities to promote the self-archiving of information products by WHO staff will have been implemented.

11. **Style and terms.** Effective communication in all languages requires consistent use of key terms and phrases. Although regional variations exist in some languages, they remain the exception where public health is concerned. In each language, usage needs to be consistent across the Organization. This is particularly true where specific technical and public-health terms and phrases are concerned. In 2008 efforts continued on the consolidation of style guides and glossaries of terms. The work was coordinated through the annual meetings of the heads of WHO's translation services, with additional input from the annual interagency meetings of translation services. Much of this work has been made available to WHO staff and external translators on a password-protected site.

12. It is intended to frame a clear policy so that style and terms can be standardized across the Organization. Every two years, style guides will be published for two additional official languages. In order to ensure that all technical areas are covered in these glossaries, technical editors working in the relevant languages will be needed for the consolidation process.

13. **Publications.** There has been a marked increase in the number of multilingual WHO information products realized in collaboration with external partners, with nearly 200 multilingual documents published in the first nine months of 2008 – compared with 156 documents published in 2007. By the end of 2009, a pilot study will have been completed on the use of extensible mark-up language. If introduced widely across WHO, extensible mark-up language could streamline current publication processes and promote publishing in a more cost-efficient, standardized electronic format.

14. It is expected that it will become standard practice to use typesetting based on extensible mark-up language for selected multilingual publications. Categories will be defined for WHO publications, and during the next biennium publications falling into categories for which standardized templates and formats have been devised will be published using a workflow based on extensible mark-up language. Finally, an evaluation of WHO's publishing processes will assess the cost efficiencies arising from the adoption of typesetting based on extensible mark-up language. By the end of the plan, multilingual publishing is expected to have become sustainable through cost savings and income from sales and royalties.

15. **Staff development.** A report by the department responsible for staff development and learning in the Secretariat indicated that 1382 staff from headquarters and the regional offices enrolled for language training during the biennium 2006–2007. At headquarters, the number of language students increased by 18% between 2007 and 2008. Recently, an encouraging upsurge of interest in Arabic has also been noted. A global language policy aimed at encouraging and promoting access to language training for all staff in the Organization is being drafted. The policy will have a particular focus on access at country level. The various opportunities offered by distance learning are also being investigated with a view to establishing a global programme in 2010. Language training will remain free for staff and funding will be ensured through the staff development fund.

16. Resolution WHA61.12 also requested the Director-General to establish a database containing details of the official languages in which members of WHO staff in the professional category staff are fluent. Pilot studies will be needed in order to identify whether a mechanism for tracking this information can be created within the global management system, which was launched in July 2008, or whether a separate mechanism should be set up. This new database should be created in the biennium 2010–2011, and should be monitored annually thereafter. A review and evaluation of the database will be conducted towards the end of the period of the Medium-term strategic plan 2008–2013 and the necessary improvements made.

ACTION BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

17. The Executive Board is invited to note the report.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF RESOURCES REQUIRED FOR THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTION PLAN
(US dollars)**

Proposed area of action	Cost per biennium			Total cost
	2008–2009	2010–2011	2012–2013	
Translation priorities	350 000	1 200 000	2 000 000	3 550 000
Multilingual team of web editors	300 000	1 000 000	2 000 000	3 300 000
Institutional repository	5 611 325	1 082 800	1 082 800	7 776 925
Style and terms	200 000	300 000	300 000	800 000
Publications	100 000	2 700 000	1 100 000	3 900 000
Staff language database	100 000	250 000	250 000	600 000
Total	6 661 325	6 532 800	6 732 800	19 926 925

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