

Report of the regional committees to the Executive Board

Report by the Director-General

1. This report summarizes the proceedings of the WHO regional committees, based on the reports of the committee chairs.¹ It has been prepared pursuant to the proposals for enhancing alignment between the regional committees and the Executive Board, and the decision by the World Health Assembly that chairs of the regional committees should routinely submit a summary report of the committees' deliberations to the Board.² The report focuses on the key issues and outcomes, particularly those that are of global significance and those that respond to decisions of the Health Assembly and Executive Board.

2. The six regional committees met between 25 August and 24 November 2020 as follows:

- Seventieth session of the Regional Committee for Africa, 25 August and 24 November (resumed), Brazzaville, chaired by Ms Jacqueline Lydia Mikolo, Minister of Health and Population, Congo;
- Seventy-third session of the Regional Committee for South-East Asia, 9–10 September, New Delhi, chaired by Mr Anutin Charnvirakul, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Health, Thailand;
- Seventieth session of the Regional Committee for Europe, 14–15 September, Copenhagen, chaired by Dr Alexey Tsoy, Minister for Health, Kazakhstan;
- Fifty-eighth Directing Council of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)/ seventy-second session of the Regional Committee for the Americas, 28–29 September, Washington, DC, chaired by Dr Fernando Ruíz Gómez, Minister of Health, Colombia;
- Seventy-first session of the Regional Committee for the Western Pacific, 6–9 October, Manila, chaired by Dr Francisco Duque III, Secretary of Health, Philippines;
- Sixty-seventh session of the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean, 12–13 October, Cairo, chaired by Dr Hala Zayed, Minister of Health and Population, Egypt.

¹ Summary reports of the regional committees are posted on the WHO website (<http://apps.who.int/gb/statements/RC/2020/>).

² Decision WHA65(9) (2012) on WHO reform, paragraph (4)(d).

3. Owing to the pandemic of coronavirus disease (COVID-19), all the regional committees met in virtual sessions online with abridged agendas. Special procedures were adopted by each Committee as relevant to enable proceedings to take place and urgent business to be concluded. Written silence procedures were also used as relevant, before and after the sessions.

TOPICS FOR GLOBAL DISCUSSION

WHO transformation

4. The Executive Board at its 146th session requested the Secretariat to provide a full update on the WHO transformation agenda to the Seventy-fourth World Health Assembly, through the Executive Board at its 148th session, and to be preceded by updates presented to the regional committees in 2020.¹ The regional committees were invited to comment and provide input to a draft report on transforming for enhanced country impact.

5. The Regional Committee for Africa accepted the report.

6. The Regional Committee for Europe considered that the report would benefit from a more detailed account of the findings of country reviews, and requested additional information on concrete solutions to the mismatch of resources and staffing; greater transparency in the presentation of progress made in the delivery of the transformation agenda; and a more comprehensive portrayal of the situation on the ground. The COVID-19 pandemic would necessarily have an impact on the transformation process, but a cycle of constant reform should be avoided.

7. The Regional Committee for the Western Pacific requested that the report be updated on the transformation and address how recommendations from the evaluation of the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response would be integrated into the transformation. It also requested inclusion of information on the proposed evaluation of the transformation, and on how further transformation work will be prioritized, including processes and timelines. The Committee encouraged WHO to continue to address gaps in the implementation of its transformation efforts, which will further assist the Organization in fulfilling expectations to work in a faster, more innovative and coordinated manner.

Development of a draft global patient safety action plan

8. In resolution WHA72.6 (2019) on global action on patient safety, the Health Assembly requested the Director-General, *inter alia*, to formulate a global patient safety action plan in consultation with Member States and all relevant stakeholders, including those in the private sector, for submission to the Seventy-fourth World Health Assembly through the Executive Board at its 148th session. Regional committees were invited to comment and provide input to the document on the development of a draft global patient safety action plan.

9. The regional committees for Africa and South-East Asia supported the proposed consultation process for the draft action plan and its main elements.

¹ See document EB146/2020/REC/2, summary records of the second meeting, section 3.

Development of the Proposed programme budget 2022–2023

10. Under normal circumstances, a full first draft of the Proposed programme budget would have been submitted to the regional committees following a rigorous and inclusive bottom-up planning process. However, the opportunities for significant consultations at the country level having been limited in 2020, the normal process for developing the programme budget could not be followed. At the time the regional committees were held, a paper on the approach and process to development of the programme budget 2022–2023 was being developed; it was subsequently issued for information.

11. The Regional Committee for Africa reviewed the process and approach for the drafting of the programme budget for 2022–2023. It noted that the current pandemic of COVID-19 offered an opportunity for rethinking the role of WHO so as to be better equipped to help the world to prevent health pandemics and to build resilient health systems. It stressed the need to reflect important changes already taking place and to wait for the outcome of the evaluation of global response by the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response. To balance these objectives, it proposed maintaining a biennial cycle for the programme budget 2022–2023 with the clear understanding that a revised budget would be submitted to the Health Assembly in May 2022. The Committee took note of the limits on the consultations and requested the Secretariat to use all means and avenues for more consultations. It called for an increase in resources for malaria, tuberculosis and noncommunicable diseases as well as greater investment in research and development. It expressed support for the extension of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2023 to 2025.

12. The Regional Committee for Europe expressed disappointment that it had not received a full draft of the Proposed programme budget. Ample time and detailed information should be provided for consultations with Member States before submission to the current session of the Board. Member States should be fully informed about costed activities, including those that had not been included in the Programme budget 2020–2021. The lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic should inform the Proposed programme budget and planning for the long-term implementation of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, taking into account the recommendations due to come from the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response.

13. The Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean expressed support for the proposal to extend the duration of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work. Consultation with Member States in the Region on the programme budget process and priorities was planned to take place in November.

14. The Regional Committee for the Western Pacific acknowledged the inevitable impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the development of the programme budget and supported the approach proposed. The Committee's recommendations included: ensuring that the budget development process continued to be transparent and driven by consideration of Member States' needs and priorities, including during the mid-term revision process; maintaining critical programmes related to universal health coverage, including noncommunicable diseases and immunization against vaccine-preventable diseases, despite the COVID-19 crisis; establishing priorities among programme areas when allocating additional budget space; and ensuring accountability and transparency in implementation, particularly in relation to COVID-19. It requested the Secretariat to provide: further analysis of emerging needs, including the additional global public health goods introduced in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic; more information on how potential additional budget elements (emerging and existing changes triggered by the emergence of COVID-19, the WHO transformation and polio transition) could be accommodated within the projected budget increase; and updates on the implementation of the Results Framework of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, including information on how the Framework might be revised by incorporation of the lessons learned from the pandemic.

TOPICS OF REGIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

15. The Regional Committee for Africa adopted a strategy for scaling up health innovations in the African Region and a framework for the implementation of the global action plan on physical activity 2018–2030 in the Region.

16. The Regional Committee for the Americas adopted resolutions on the COVID-19 pandemic in the Region of the Americas and reform of PAHO's governance. It also considered a report on the financial situation and adjustments to PAHO's strategic priorities, accepting the recommendations therein, as well as a report on the implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005) in the Region of the Americas. Member States were encouraged to engage actively in the various review processes under way in regard to the pandemic response and implementation of the Regulations.

17. The Regional Committee for South-East Asia endorsed the WHO South-East Asia Region Member States' Declaration on the collective response to COVID-19 and requested the Regional Director to report on progress on the implementation of the Declaration every three years until 2026.

18. The Regional Committee for Europe adopted the European Programme of Work, 2020–2025, entitled "United action for better health in Europe", including three core priorities (moving towards universal health coverage; protecting against health emergencies; and promoting health and well-being) and four flagship initiatives (The Mental Health Coalition; empowerment through digital health; the European Immunization Agenda 2030; and healthier behaviour, through incorporating behavioural and cultural insights).

19. The Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean adopted a resolution calling for effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including action to maintain essential health services, and a resolution on galvanizing efforts to eradicate polio in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. It endorsed a regional strategy to improve access to medicines and vaccines 2020–2030, a strategic framework for the prevention and control of emerging and epidemic-prone infectious diseases, and a strategic framework to improve access to assistive technology.

20. The Regional Committee for the Western Pacific endorsed a regional strategic framework for vaccine-preventable diseases and immunization 2021–2030, an action framework for safe and affordable surgery and an action plan on healthy ageing.

ACTION BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

21. The Board is invited to note the report.

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