

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 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 of the regional committees, 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 28 August and 2 November 2023 as follows:

- Seventy-third session of the Regional Committee for Africa, 28 August–1 September, Gaborone, chaired by Dr Edwin Dikoloti, Minister of Health and Wellness, Botswana;
- Sixtieth Pan American Sanitary Conference of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)/Seventy-fifth session of the Regional Committee for the Americas, 25–29 September, Washington, DC, chaired by Dr Ivette Berrío Aquí, Deputy Minister of Health, Panama;
- Seventieth session of the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean, 9–12 October, Cairo, chaired by H.E. Dr Ali Haji Adam Abubakar, Minister of Health of Somalia;
- Seventy-fourth session of the Regional Committee for the Western Pacific, 16–20 October, Manila, chaired by Dr Mohammad Isham Jaafar, Minister of Health, Brunei Darussalam;
- Seventy-third session of the Regional Committee for Europe, 24–26 September, Astana, chaired by Dr Azhar Giniyat, Minister of Healthcare of Kazakhstan; and
- Seventy-sixth session of the Regional Committee for South-East Asia, 30 October–2 November, New Delhi, chaired by Dr Mansukh Mandaviya, Minister of Health and Family Welfare, India.

¹ The reports of the regional committee chairs are posted in full on the WHO website (<http://apps.who.int/gb/statements/RC/2023/>, accessed 4 January 2024).

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

REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR AFRICA

3. The Regional Committee for Africa was held in hybrid format. During the session, 11 documents on public health matters of regional and global concern were reviewed. The agenda had 20 items, 11 of which were on substantive matters and included key documents such as the report of the Regional Director on the work of WHO in the Region, an update on the WHO transformation agenda, the Programme budget 2024–2025, the draft fourteenth general programme of work, and an update on the investment round for improving the predictability and flexibility of resources and sustainable financing. The Committee adopted the framework for implementing the global strategic directions for nursing and midwifery 2021–2025; the framework for sustaining resilient health systems to achieve universal health coverage and promote health security, 2023–2030; and the framework for implementing the action plan (2022–2030) to effectively implement the global strategy to reduce the harmful use of alcohol as a public health priority. It also adopted resolutions on regional strategies: for expediting the implementation and monitoring of national action plans on antimicrobial resistance 2023–2030; on diagnostic and laboratory services and systems 2023–2032; and to promote health and well-being 2023–2030.

4. The frameworks and strategies adopted during the session were designed to accelerate progress towards universal health coverage, health security and attainment of the health-related sustainable development goals in the African Region. The WHO Secretariat reported on progress made in implementing the ongoing strategies and frameworks endorsed at the previous session and the Committee agreed on future actions to be taken. The Committee noted the progress made and the challenges encountered. Member States and participants made recommendations to address these challenges and accelerate progress in the implementation of the strategies and frameworks.

5. Three special events were held during the session: an event to strengthen multisectoral actions to address the nutrition and food insecurity crisis in the African Region; an event to mark WHO's 75th anniversary; and an event on interrupting the transmission of all polioviruses in the African Region. The Committee adopted 12 decisions, notably the sunseting of reporting resolutions and decisions relating to strategies, frameworks and technical documents adopted between its sixty-second and seventy-second sessions and the accreditation of eight regional non-State actors as recommended by the Programme Subcommittee.

REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE AMERICAS

6. The Regional Committee for the Americas discussed the consultation document on the draft fourteenth general programme of work prepared by the WHO Secretariat. The Committee welcomed the focus on determinants of health and on the unfinished work of achieving Sustainable Development Goal 3 and universal health coverage. The Committee stressed the importance of focusing on the most marginalized populations and addressing discrimination, gender inequality and other drivers of health inequity. The shift to a stronger WHO in-country presence was also welcomed. While support was expressed for the vision of a shared draft fourteenth general programme of work for all health stakeholders, the Committee emphasized that the draft fourteenth general programme of work should, first and foremost, be a plan for WHO. The Committee urged the WHO Secretariat to identify concrete outcomes and outputs and to show how WHO would demonstrate its added value in achieving those results.

7. The Committee also commented on the work of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Body to draft and negotiate a WHO convention, agreement or other international instrument on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response and the Working Group on Amendments to the International Health Regulations (2005). The Committee emphasized that Member States of the Region should continue to

participate in both negotiation processes to ensure that regional perspectives were reflected in the final texts. The Committee also stressed that the new pandemic instrument and the amended Regulations must be complementary and not duplicative or contradictory. The need to continue strengthening core capacities required by the International Health Regulations (2005) and ensure compliance with the Regulations was noted.

8. The Committee adopted the PAHO/AMRO Programme budget 2024–2025 and a new scale of assessed contributions for PAHO Member States. The Committee also adopted resolutions setting out a regional policy on strengthening human resources for health to achieve resilient health systems; a policy on the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases in children, adolescents and young adults; a strategy for improving mental health and suicide prevention in the Region of the Americas; and a concept paper on strategic communications in public health for behaviour change.

REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR SOUTH-EAST ASIA

9. The Regional Committee for South-East Asia adopted six resolutions and three decisions, each pertaining to critical aspects of the regional and global health agenda, including the Delhi Declaration on strengthening primary health care as a key element towards achieving universal health coverage. The Committee discussed important issues including sustainable financing, the Programme budget 2024–2025, and the draft fourteenth general programme of work. The Committee endorsed a regional strategic framework for sustaining, accelerating and innovating to end neglected tropical diseases, 2023–2030.

10. The Committee expressed appreciation for the WHO report Monitoring progress on universal health coverage and the health-related Sustainable Development Goals in the South-East Asia Region, 2023 update, which contained a comprehensive overview of the status and trends of 46 health-related Sustainable Development Goal indicators and an additional five indicators relevant to the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2025, for all Member States of the Region. The Committee took note of the Dhaka Call to Action and the new initiative on accelerating prevention and control of cardiovascular diseases in the South-East Asia Region (SEAHEARTS), the latter representing an adaptation of the WHO HEARTS technical package. The Committee further adopted a resolution on that topic. The Committee also reviewed seven progress reports on selected Regional Committee resolutions, including on coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and “building back better” and measures to promote essential health services to achieve universal health coverage and the health-related Sustainable Development Goals.

11. In accordance with Article 52 of WHO Constitution and Rule 49 of its Rules of Procedure, the Committee nominated Ms Saima Wazed (Bangladesh) as the next Regional Director. The Committee requested the WHO Director-General to propose to the Executive Board the appointment of Ms Wazed as Regional Director from 1 February 2024.

REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR EUROPE

12. Following addresses by the WHO Director-General and the Regional Director for Europe on the state of health globally and across the Region, the Regional Committee for Europe adopted a resolution and decisions on priority technical topics, including a regional framework for action for the health and care workforce to 2030, a road map on antimicrobial resistance, an action plan for refugee and migrant health, and environment and health.

13. The Committee also discussed the health preparedness, response and resilience agenda in the Region, including alignment between global and regional processes. That agenda would be developed

in close collaboration with Member States, with the Emergency Medical Teams initiative serving as a key pillar of such work.

14. Matters arising from the Seventy-sixth World Health Assembly were considered during the session, notably the draft fourteenth general programme of work and the associated investment round, with the Committee noting with appreciation the importance of the consultative development process for the draft fourteenth general programme of work.

15. With the objectives of enhancing transparency and accountability and supporting participatory governance, a new accountability report was presented that provided the Committee with a picture of how WHO/the European Region was managed, led and governed, including efforts to: increase focus on countries and country outcomes; improve financial sustainability and management; support staff health and well-being; prevent sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment; bolster partnerships; enhance engagement with non-State actors; and ensure effective and efficient governing bodies meetings. The Committee welcomed the report, which would be presented annually along with updates on progress in implementing the recommendations of the comprehensive governance review that had been endorsed during the session.

16. Finally, the Committee considered budget matters including the mid-term report on implementation of the Programme budget 2022–2023 and the regional plan for implementation of the Programme budget 2024–2025.

REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

17. The Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean expressed its appreciation of WHO's vision for health in the Region, Vision 2023, and the implementation of its accompanying strategy during the period 2018–2023. The Committee received updates on and discussed the proposed approach to drafting a plan for the WHO investment round and for developing the draft fourteenth general programme of work. The Committee discussed and adopted resolutions on: addressing noncommunicable diseases in emergencies: a regional framework for action; strengthening public health readiness for mass gatherings in the Eastern Mediterranean Region; climate change, health and environment: a regional framework for action, 2023–2029; and the health workforce in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: COVID-19 lessons to action. The Committee also endorsed a regional strategic action framework to strengthen road safety systems and an extension to 2030 of the implementation period of the regional strategy and action plan for tobacco control, 2019–2023.

18. The Committee nominated a new Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, Dr Hanan Hassan Balkhy (Saudi Arabia), from 1 February 2024. The Committee expressed its appreciation to the outgoing Regional Director, Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, for his commitment to international public health and his contributions and achievements during his tenure, and decided to make him Regional Director Emeritus.

REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE WESTERN PACIFIC

19. The Regional Committee for the Western Pacific in resolution WPR/RC74.R1 requested the WHO Director-General to propose to the Executive Board the appointment of the Minister of Health of Tonga, Dr Saia Ma'u Piukala as the Regional Director for the Western Pacific for a period of five years, commencing on 1 February 2024, and in resolution WPR/RC74.R2 expressed appreciation to the Acting Regional Director, Dr Zsuzsanna Jakab, for her service to the Region.

20. The Committee in decision WPR/RC74(1) adopted amendments to its Rules of Procedure to improve clarity and better align with the rules of other WHO governing bodies; in decision WPR/RC74(2) selected China to nominate a representative to serve a three-year term on the Policy and Coordination Committee of the UNDP/UNFPA/UNICEF/WHO/World Bank Special Programme of Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction; and in decision WPR/RC74(3) requested the incoming Regional Director to prepare options for the equitable distribution of Executive Board seats allocated to the Region.

21. In respect of furthering technical work, the Committee adopted resolution WPR/RC74.R3 endorsing the Asia Pacific health security action framework to enable the Western Pacific Region to address public health threats through a comprehensive, multisectoral approach to strengthening health security systems; resolution WPR/RC74.R4 endorsing the regional action framework on communication for health: a vision for using communication to improve public health in the Western Pacific Region, as a guide to employing a communication for health approach to improve health literacy and promote behaviour change towards improving health outcomes across the Region; resolution WPR/RC74.R5 endorsing the regional health innovation strategy for the Western Pacific to provide guidance to Member States in developing health innovations that prioritize well-being and equity; and resolution WPR/RC74.R6 endorsing the regional framework to shape a health workforce for the future of the Western Pacific to promote a more motivated and competent regional health workforce to strengthen primary health care towards achieving universal health coverage.

ACTION BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

22. The Board is invited to note the report.

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