

## **Engagement with non-State actors**

### **Report on the implementation of the Framework of Engagement with Non-State Actors**

**Report by the Director-General**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

1. In May 2016, the Sixty-ninth World Health Assembly adopted resolution WHA69.10 on the Framework of Engagement with Non-State Actors,<sup>1</sup> in which the Director-General was requested, inter alia, to take all necessary measures, working with Regional Directors, to fully implement the Framework of Engagement with Non-State Actors (FENSA) in a coherent and consistent manner across all three levels of the Organization, with a view to achieving full operationalization within a two-year time frame, and to report on the implementation of the Framework to the Executive Board at each of its January sessions under a standing agenda item, through the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee. This document contains the eighth annual report.

2. A report on non-State actors in official relations with WHO, including proposals for admitting new entities, and on reviews of the status of existing official relations, is provided in a separate document.<sup>2</sup>

#### **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FRAMEWORK OF ENGAGEMENT WITH NON-STATE ACTORS TO ADVANCE PUBLIC HEALTH OUTCOMES**

3. In line with its Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2025 and the related programme budget, and building on its continued engagement with non-State actors, WHO is actively expanding collaboration and pursuing partnerships to advance the public health agenda and support Member States' efforts to achieve public health outcomes and respond to health challenges at national and regional levels. These engagements have been reviewed and implemented in accordance with WHO's policies and rules, including the Framework of Engagement with Non-State Actors, and key achievements during the year 2023 are described below.

4. To ensure an effective implementation of the Framework, the Regional Office for Africa has conducted a series of activities to further promote the Framework as an enabling policy, and has built capacities among WHO's workforce to foster engagements with non-State actors at regional and country level, including by facilitating resource mobilization. Building on its continued collaboration with non-State actors, the Regional Office for Africa has continued its efforts to streamline the review and

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<sup>1</sup> See document WHA69/2016/REC/1, resolution WHA69.10 and Annex 5.

<sup>2</sup> See document EB154/37.

clearance of proposals for engagement with non-State actors, and to develop more tools and materials to facilitate learning and sharing of best practices at regional and country levels. The Regional Office for Africa reported that 43 projects involving engagement with non-State actors had been presented for clearance and review in 2023, including 14 within the emergency context.

5. In the report to its Executive Committee on engagement with non-State actors,<sup>1</sup> the Regional Office for the Americas/PAHO provided information on its implementation of the Framework, including efforts to raise awareness about the Framework among staff through trainings and presentations. The Regional Office also reported that it had conducted over 200 due diligence and risk assessments for proposed engagements, as well as hundreds of simplified reviews for low-risk collaborations. It had robust engagements with non-State actors throughout the year, including interactions, among others, to improve cardiovascular disease management across the Region, to improve nutrition and curb obesity, and to eliminate hepatitis and lymphatic filariasis. The Regional Office had also raised awareness and advocated for its priorities in a range of public health areas through participation in meetings with non-State actors. With respect to engagement with non-State actors in response to emergencies, the Regional Office had reported to its Executive Committee that it continued to collaborate with social media platforms to broadly disseminate public health messages about COVID-19 and monkeypox/mpox, and had worked with other non-State actors to increase access to COVID-19 vaccines, testing and clinical care for marginalized individuals in situations of vulnerability.

6. To further strengthen implementation of the Framework, the Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, in close collaboration with the specialized unit responsible for conducting due diligence and risk assessment in headquarters, conducted a series of awareness raising and capacity building activities, including, most recently, its regional “FENSA in motion” workshop. With the support of the Regional Director, the workshop brought together an esteemed gathering of participants, as well as global and regional experts, to identify and discuss common challenges in the application of the Framework and to exchange ideas on innovative approaches and best practices to advance the implementation of the policy in a consistent and positive manner. Building on the continued positive outcomes of its engagements with non-State actors, the Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean has actively promoted collaboration and encouraged efforts among different health actors in response to public health challenges. The Regional Office has been proactively supporting and encouraging technical units at regional and country level to engage with non-State actors by promoting better coordination across the three levels of the Organization, while ensuring compliance with WHO’s rules and policies, including the Framework. The Regional Office reported that 115 proposals for engagements with non-State actors had been submitted for clearance and approval.

7. The Regional Office for Europe is engaging with various stakeholders, including non-State actors, to advance the implementation of WHO’s priorities contained in the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2025 and the European Programme of Work: “United Action for Better Health in Europe”. To further promote and advance implementation of the Framework, the Regional Office led a series of initiatives to foster dialogue and interaction with all categories of non-State actors, in line with the provisions set out in the Framework. This approach is reflected in multiple engagements, such as the series of dialogues and exchanges to provide inputs that might inform WHO in its preparation of technical documents for the conference on Primary health care policy and practice: implementing for better results, and to support the development of the European Roadmap on antimicrobial resistance (AMR). Additionally, the Regional Committee has conducted trainings and briefings for WHO’s workforce to

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<sup>1</sup> See document CRE 172/6 (<https://www.paho.org/en/file/128118/download?token=x70jky4g>, accessed 14 November 2023).

promote a better understanding of the provisions of the Framework and their use. The Regional Committee reported about 300 engagements per year.

8. Building on the positive outcomes of its engagement with non-State actors, the Regional Office for South-East Asia is continuing its constructive dialogue and engagement with non-State actors in line with the Framework. The Regional Office has pursued multiple engagements to advance WHO's priorities and public health agenda at regional and country levels. To promote and facilitate the implementation of the Framework, and in close collaboration with the specialized unit responsible for conducting due diligence and risk assessment in headquarters, the Regional Office conducted intensive training courses to advocate for the Framework as an enabling policy, to encourage more engagements with non-State actors in line with the Framework, and to support country offices in applying the provisions of the Framework when engaging with non-State actors. The Regional Office noted a marked increase in its engagements with non-State actors and reported the clearance of 45 projects.

9. To promote and facilitate implementation of the Framework, the Regional Office for the Western Pacific has provided guidance to technical units and country offices through divisional meetings, one-on-one consultations, onboarding of new staff, and briefings of functional networks, such as the Executive Associates Network and the Regional Communications Network. While encouraging collaboration and dialogue with non-State actors, the Regional Office has been actively fostering the participation of non-State actors in WHO's regional technical meetings and in meetings of the Regional Committee as appropriate. In 2023, the Regional Office reported that 150 engagements with non-State actors had been reviewed.

10. The Secretariat continues to implement the Framework and the criteria and principles for secondments from nongovernmental organizations, philanthropic foundations and academic institutions approved by the Health Assembly in 2017.<sup>1</sup> As in previous years, proposals submitted in 2023 have been reviewed for compliance through well-defined processes to ensure consistent and coherent implementation of WHO's policies. A new secondment from a non-State actor was approved in 2023 and relevant information has been reported in the WHO Register of non-State actors under Secondments from non-State actors.

11. To advance and strengthen implementation of the Framework, the specialized unit has conducted a series of activities in 2023 in line with both the provisions of the Framework and a comprehensive management response to the initial evaluation of the implementation of the Framework.

12. To that end and building on the "Demystifying FENSA" initiative launched in 2021, the specialized unit conducted a number of actions to support strengthening the common understanding of the Framework as an enabling policy and shared best practices and practical information across the Organization. More communication products and checklists have been developed, disseminated, and targeted and tailored capacity-building activities (such as training and briefing sessions) have been conducted at the three levels of the Organization, including for newly hired WHO staff and appointed WHO Representatives. In addition, the second edition of the *Handbook for non-State actors on engagement with the World Health Organization* is in the process of being published and an eLearning course "introducing FENSA" is under development and will be rolled out in the first quarter of 2024.

13. While the mandate of the specialized unit has been shifted to focus on engagement proposals that are complex or associated with higher risks, it continues to provide guidance and recommendations across the three levels of the Organization. This is to ensure the steady application of the Framework, as well as

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<sup>1</sup> See document A70/53; see also document WHA70/2017/REC/3, summary records of the fourth meeting, section 2.

the deepening and strengthening of engagements with a positive impact on public health, while balancing risks against expected benefits. In 2023, the specialized unit conducted over 720 standard reviews in response to requests from technical departments and units across the three levels of the Organization.

14. In its report to the Executive Board in January 2023, the unit has ensured follow-up of the update of non-State actors in official relations entries in the WHO Register of non-State actors, and, in close cooperation with technical departments, has reviewed joint collaboration plans and annual reports of the activities jointly implemented with non-State actors in official relations, outlining the progress of implementation and the deliverables achieved.

15. To support the Executive Board in fulfilling its mandate on official relations, the specialized unit reviewed applications from non-State actors for admission into official relations, and non-State actors set to undergo their triennial review for consideration by the Executive Board at its 154th session. In line with the Framework, due diligence and risk assessments were performed for each non-State actor set for review, and entries in the WHO Register were verified and the relevant supporting documentation provided. In total, 220 entities have been reviewed, of which 82 presented for Member States' consideration as per their triennial reviews.

16. In 2023, the specialized unit conducted over 730 reviews in response to requests from technical departments and units across the three levels of the Organization. Additional reviews, as well as risk assessments and due diligence were also performed for 250 proposals for designation and redesignation of institutions as WHO collaborating centres. It is important to note that the volume of requests for WHO collaborating centre designation has been growing steadily during the last four years leading to an increased workload from effectively reviewing and managing proposals. To meet demand, in compliance with WHO's policies and procedures, it may become necessary to allocate resources to support and maximize the benefits of these productive engagements as the number of proposals is expected to continue to rise.

17. Despite the global challenges of the last few years, significant collaborative progress has been achieved across the three levels of WHO since the last FENSA Focal Point Network meeting. The specialized unit, in its coordinating role, organized in-person sessions of the Network to take stock of the array of helpful tools and initiatives available to strengthen implementation of the Framework, and to exchange views and share knowledge and best practices across all levels. Participants have also provided an update on communication tools, procedures and system developments. Sessions served to highlight the achievements and lessons learned by regional offices and divisions in headquarters, and provided an opportunity for each region and division to share its unique experience, challenges and successes.

18. Recognizing the importance of strategic engagement with non-State actors across the Organization, the Secretariat continues to make progress in reinforcing a constructive, flexible and positive approach in line with the Framework, as well as relevant policies and rules, while ensuring equity when engaging with non-State actors.

19. Building on its continued collaboration with non-State actors, the Secretariat has expanded the scope of its collaboration and engagement in a range of public health areas, including occupational safety and health, antimicrobial resistance, digital health, road safety, healthier populations and the social determinants of health, communicable diseases, noncommunicable diseases, and quality assurance of norms and standards. To ensure constant communication, the Secretariat has updated tools and guidance documents to strengthen awareness and better embed the provisions of the Framework, and to support heads of WHO country offices in their consideration of engagement with non-State actors.

20. The Secretariat is continuing to engage in constructive dialogues with non-State actors, including civil society groups and private sector entities on, for example, access to medicines and technologies for diabetes care, the prevention and control of obesity and pandemic preparedness, in order to strengthen engagement and advance a public health agenda.
21. The Secretariat has participated in and facilitated a number of technical meetings and events with non-State actors to raise awareness and advocate for its priorities, including on traditional medicines, health of migrants and refugees, health security and emergencies, health emergency prevention, preparedness, response and resilience, health through the life-course, and health sector development.
22. In order to foster collaboration among diverse stakeholders to collectively tackle public health challenges, the Secretariat has launched a series of new multistakeholder initiatives, including the Acute Care Action Network for emergency, critical and operative care, the Global Initiative on Digital Health, the Alliance for Transformative Action on Climate and Health, the Alliance for Anaemia Actions, and the WHO Civil Society Commission. These WHO initiatives enable the pooling of technical resources, expertise and perspectives from various sectors to address public health priorities. They support WHO's role as a catalyst for global cooperation, providing guidance and technical support. They also serve as a platform for dialogue among stakeholders to ensure that efforts in public health are not only efficient but also equitable, leaving no one behind in the pursuit of better global health outcomes.
23. IARC, WHO's specialized cancer research agency, has streamlined the implementation of the simplified review procedure as the default procedure for examining engagements with non-State actors and has reported that more than 190 engagements, in the form of grant applications, accepted contributions or collaborative agreements that took place in 2023. The Agency continues its efforts to build capacity and develop more tools to facilitate learning and sharing of best practices. It has indicated that implementing the Framework has raised challenges in terms of workload, timelines and strategic positioning.
24. Highlighting the importance of Article 5.3 of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control and preventing tobacco industry interference, which could undermine the efforts of both the WHO Secretariat and the Convention Secretariat on tobacco control and public health, the WHO Secretariat is conducting a systematic analysis of tobacco industry investment in the pharmaceutical and health sectors. This will support identifying tobacco industry related bodies that are leveraged to acquire stakes in the pharmaceutical and well-being sectors, and map out investments of tobacco corporations in the pharmaceutical industry, as well as inhaler and other nicotine replacement health therapy related businesses.
25. The Secretariat of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control and the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products continues to raise awareness about the risks of engaging with the tobacco industry and those working to further its interests vis-à-vis stakeholders beyond the health sector, in particular in the context of supporting ratification and implementation of the Protocol. Another challenge relates to the increase in the number of commercial entities and nongovernmental organizations promoting novel and emerging nicotine products. Many of these are linked to the traditional tobacco industry, but there are others whose links and motivations may not be clear.
26. It is important to note that as in previous years, the volume of engagement with non-State actors has exponentially increased in 2023 and has generated an increased workload for the Secretariat across the three levels of the Organization in conducting and managing effective reviews of proposals. To meet demand, in compliance with WHO's policies and procedures, it may become necessary to allocate additional resources to support and maximize the benefits of these productive engagements, as the number of proposals is expected to continue to grow.

## **EMERGENCIES AND THE FRAMEWORK OF ENGAGEMENT WITH NON-STATE ACTORS**

27. To advance strategic engagement with non-State actors during emergencies, the Secretariat has further simplified internal and external coordination mechanisms to facilitate the participation of non-State actors in WHO's global collaborative networks, such as the Global Strategic Preparedness Network and the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network. As a result, the Secretariat has engaged with hundreds of entities to work collectively with a shared purpose, renewed determination and the resources to sustain positive change in the area of prevention, risk mitigation and preparedness.

28. In May 2023, WHO established the International Pathogen Surveillance Network (IPSN) to accelerate progress in pathogen genomics and improve public health decision making. The Network brings together entities from across sectors, income levels and geographies with a commitment to international cooperation and equity, and expertise in genomics data and technologies or scale-up of surveillance systems. It sets out to create a mutually supportive global network of genomic surveillance actors that amplifies and accelerates the work of its members to improve access and equity.

29. The Secretariat updated its Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan for 2023–2025. The updated two-year strategy builds on the objectives of the 2022 Plan and places strong emphasis on supporting countries as they transition from an emergency response to longer-term, sustained COVID-19 disease prevention, control and management. Engagement with non-State actors remains an essential point for maximizing the impact of efforts within and between components of the response and of longer-term planning, minimizing gaps in preparedness and response efforts, maximizing the availability of and efficient allocation of resources, including new COVID-19 tools such as vaccines, and supporting the strengthening of health systems.

30. In August 2023, in its convening role, WHO launched its Partners Platform 2.0, a country-centred platform for agile and dynamic planning to detect and respond to health emergencies. The platform has been redesigned to make it more user friendly for all partners and features tools and resources for specific hazards and operational readiness. Since 2020, the WHO Partners Platform has been the first interactive digital space to coordinate health emergencies. To date, 160 countries and 600 non-State actors have had access to the Platform.

31. To enhance and streamline engagement with non-State actors during emergency responses, the Secretariat has updated the modalities to facilitate the implementation of the Framework in emergency settings; as well as the related standard operating procedures in order to strengthen and promote collaboration among entities and other stakeholders and build stronger and more resilient networks of global health partners. The revised modalities also feature additional simplification in order to: fast track engagement with non-State actors delivering a life-saving response; put emphasis on a risk-informed and risk-educated approach; and promote alignment with Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) common humanitarian principles.

## **ACTION BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD**

32. The Board is invited to note the report.

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