

Report of the Executive Board on its 147th and 148th sessions, and on its special session on the COVID-19 response

1. The Executive Board held its 147th session on 22 May 2020 (*de minimis*) and 16 November 2020 (resumed) and its 148th session from 18 to 26 January 2021. In all three cases, the meetings took place virtually, using video conference technology and were coordinated from WHO headquarters, Geneva. The Executive Board held its special session on the COVID-19 response on 5 and 6 October 2020, using a hybrid format and coordinated from WHO headquarters, Geneva. This report summarizes the main outcomes of the three sessions.

SPECIAL SESSION ON THE COVID-19 RESPONSE (5 AND 6 OCTOBER 2020)

2. The Board adopted its **agenda** containing 5 items, with 5 accompanying documents. It adopted one decision.

3. In the context of the pandemic of coronavirus disease (COVID-19), the Board decided to adopt **special procedures** for the hybrid meetings of its special session.

4. After extensive and in-depth discussions on the **implementation of resolution WHA73.1 (2020) on the COVID-19 response**, the Board expressed its support for WHO's efforts to address the pandemic while working to maintain essential health services. It called for further efforts to ensure fair and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines through the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility and encouraged WHO to work closely with OIE and FAO to identify the zoonotic source of the virus. It supported the proposal to hold an Executive Board retreat relating to the COVID-19 response, in order to look at ways to strengthen the Board's core governance role.

5. Following the **update from the Co-Chairs of the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response, the Chair of the Review Committee on the Functioning of the International Health Regulations (2005) during the COVID-19 Response and the Chair of the Independent Oversight and Advisory Committee for the WHO Health Emergencies Programme**, the Board stressed that the findings of the three review mechanisms should inform future decision-making and that Member States needed to play a pivotal role in guiding the Secretariat's translation of those findings into policy action. It noted that further efforts would be required to strengthen the International Health Regulations (2005) in order to prevent, mitigate and respond to future pandemics, including for issuing travel advisories during a pandemic. It also considered a proposal to introduce an intermediate level of alert for public health emergencies.

147TH SESSION (22 MAY 2020 (*DE MINIMIS*) AND 16 NOVEMBER 2020 (RESUMED))

6. The Board's adopted its **agenda** containing 13 items and subitems, with 21 accompanying documents. It adopted 12 decisions.

7. In the context of the pandemic of COVID-19, the Board decided to adopt **special procedures** for the virtual *de minimis* and resumed meetings of its 147th session.

8. In response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the possibility of limitations to physical meetings of the governing bodies precluding the holding of governing bodies in 2021 as envisaged, the Board decided to adopt **contingency arrangements** for the Seventy-fourth World Health Assembly, the 148th session of the Executive Board and the thirty-third and thirty-fourth meetings of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee of the Executive Board.

PILLAR 4: MORE EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT WHO PROVIDING BETTER SUPPORT TO COUNTRIES

9. The Board noted the **report of the thirty-second meeting of Programme, Budget and Administration Committee** and the report on the **review of entitlements of members of the Executive Board**. Following discussions, the Board decided to recommend to the Seventy-fourth World Health Assembly, that with effect from 1 July 2021, the maximum reimbursement of travel expenses of members of the Executive Board should be based on the travel entitlements of WHO staff members.

10. Having considered and noted the reports on the **evaluation of the election of the Director-General of the World Health Organization**, the Board decided to adopt the amendments to Rule 62 of its Rules of Procedure.

11. After discussions, the Board noted the **annual report on evaluation**. It also considered two reports on **hosted partnerships**.

12. The Board appointed members to fill the six vacant positions on the **Programme, Budget and Administration Committee** and two on the **Foundation Committees**.

13. The Board noted the statement by the representative of the WHO staff associations and the report on the meetings of four expert committees and study groups.

148TH SESSION (18–26 JANUARY 2021)

14. The Board's adopted its **agenda** containing 48 items and subitems, with 64 accompanying documents. It adopted six resolutions and 19 decisions.

15. In the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the Board decided to adopt **special procedures** for its virtual meetings.

16. In the extensive discussion of the **report by the Director-General**, numerous constructive and positive comments were made.

17. The Board noted the report of the **regional committees**.

18. The Board noted the recommendations contained in the **report of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee** and decided to request the Director-General to enhance and implement a values-based, ethical and gender-mainstreamed organizational culture and environment, founded on the basis of accountability, transparency, fairness, inclusion and risk management in the context of the fight against sexual exploitation and abuse, sexual harassment and other misconduct at all levels of the Organization.

PILLAR 1: ONE BILLION MORE PEOPLE BENEFITING FROM UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE

19. Having considered and noted the report on **global action on patient safety**, the Board decided to recommend to the Seventy-fourth World Health Assembly the adoption of a global patient safety action plan 2021–2030.

20. Noting the report on the **political declaration of the third high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases**, the Board decided to encourage Member States to take further action to address diabetes as a public health problem, and to recommend to the Seventy-fourth World Health Assembly the adoption of a decision to present an implementation road map 2023–2030 for the global action plan for the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases 2013–2030, through the Executive Board at its 150th session, for consideration by the Seventy-fifth World Health Assembly.

21. In its consideration of **oral health**, the Board noted the relevant report and recommended to the Seventy-fourth World Health Assembly the adoption of a resolution to develop, by 2022, a draft global strategy tackling oral diseases, for consideration by the WHO governing bodies in 2022; and to translate that global strategy, by 2023, into an action plan for public oral health, including a framework for tracking progress with clear measurable targets to be achieved by 2030.

22. Noting the report on **expanding access to effective treatments for cancer and rare and orphan diseases, including medicines, vaccines, medical devices, diagnostics, assistive products, cell- and gene-based therapies and other health technologies; and improving the transparency of markets for medicines, vaccines, and other health products**, the Board called for further action, ideally through the WHO Price Information Exchange for Medicines, to tackle the high prices of and fragmented procurement processes for medicines, particularly new medicines.

23. In discussing the **global strategy and plan of action on public health, innovation and intellectual property**, the Board considered a draft resolution to strengthen local production of medicines and other health technologies to improve access, on which it decided to hold further consultations in the intersessional period with a view to submitting a final version for the consideration of the Seventy-fourth World Health Assembly. It noted the report.

24. Having considered the report on **antimicrobial resistance**, the Board emphasized the importance of adopting a One Health approach and welcomed Member State participation in the revision of the Codex Code of Practice to Minimize and Contain Foodborne Antimicrobial Resistance. It requested additional technical assistance to accelerate Member State implementation of national action plans for combatting antimicrobial resistance, including to address health security challenges such as those posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

25. The Board noted the reports on **substandard and falsified medical products** and the **standardization of medical devices nomenclature** and expressed its support for the progress made in that regard by the Member State mechanism on substandard and falsified medical products. Given the complexity and urgency of the task, it requested that the Secretariat hold a Member State briefing for national regulatory authorities responsible for medical devices in order to present an assessment of the available systems and consult on a preferred system. It also commented on the importance of continuing to work closely with the International Medical Devices Regulators Forum and other regulatory bodies in order to devise harmonized international nomenclature of medical devices.

26. In its consideration of the report on the **Immunization Agenda 2030**, the Board noted that the COVID-19 pandemic had highlighted the importance of extensive immunization to prepare for pandemic threats and called for any adjustments to the Agenda to be considered in that light. It fully supported efforts to finalize a framework for monitoring and evaluation, which should lead to the strengthening of health systems and the implementation of universal health coverage. It noted the report.

27. The Board noted the report on **integrated people-centred eye care, including preventable vision impairment and blindness** and requested the Secretariat to provide more technical tools and guidance on the range of instruments available, including evidence-based eye care interventions, as well as guidance on practical data collection to help Member States to build national capacities and strengthen eye care services within their respective health systems.

PILLAR 2: ONE BILLION MORE PEOPLE BETTER PROTECTED FROM HEALTH EMERGENCIES

28. After extensive and in-depth discussions on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on global health, the Board noted the report on the **COVID-19 response** and underscored the importance of guaranteeing equitable access to COVID-19 medicines and vaccines, and ensuring that COVID-19 vaccines were considered as global public goods. In the light of the emergence of new variants of the virus, it requested that WHO continue to advocate the sharing of genetic sequence data, samples and other pertinent information related to SARS-CoV-2 in an open, timely and detailed manner.

29. Having considered and noted the reports on **strengthening WHO's global emergency preparedness and response** and **strengthening preparedness for health emergencies: implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005)**, the Board decided to call for the development of a resolution, with full participation of Member States for consideration by the Seventy-fourth World Health Assembly, on strengthening WHO's health emergency preparedness and response capacities.

30. Following its consideration of the report on **mental health preparedness and response for the COVID-19 pandemic**, the Board decided to: (i) recommend that the Seventy-fourth World Health Assembly endorse the updated comprehensive mental health action plan 2013–2030; (ii) urge Member States to develop and strengthen, as appropriate, as part of a broader whole-of-society approach, the timely and quality provision of the whole range of comprehensive and integrated mental health services and psychosocial supports; and (iii) request the Director-General to provide technical support to Member States, to strengthen WHO's capacity in respect of work on mental health at global, regional and country levels, and to systematically integrate mental health into all aspects of the work of the Secretariat on universal health coverage.

31. The Board noted the report on the **public health implications of implementation of the Nagoya Protocol** and acknowledged the need for timely pathogen-sharing to fulfil public health needs, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. In respect of the establishment of a proposed WHO BioHub, it called for Member States to be consulted prior to the Seventy-fourth World Health Assembly on the BioHub's proposed scope, material transfer agreements, and access and benefit-sharing plans, including safety and security considerations.

32. After considering the reports on **poliomyelitis eradication** and **polio transition planning and polio post-certification**, the Board expressed concern about the surge in cases of wild poliovirus in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the increasing outbreaks of vaccine-derived poliovirus in several countries, and falling immunization rates as a result of the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. It emphasized the importance of addressing those challenges in the revised Global Polio Eradication Initiative strategy, to be submitted to the Seventy-fourth World Health Assembly. It also commented on the need to support the implementation of polio transition plans and ensure the availability of long-term financing to sustain polio resources.

PILLAR 3: ONE BILLION MORE PEOPLE ENJOYING BETTER HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

33. After noting the report on **social determinants of health**, the Board recommended to the Seventy-fourth World Health Assembly the adoption of a resolution on strengthening efforts to address the social, economic and environmental determinants of health with the aim of reducing health inequities, and to accelerate progress in addressing the unequal distribution of health resources within and among countries, as well as conditions detrimental to health at all levels and in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

PILLAR 4: MORE EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT WHO PROVIDING BETTER SUPPORT TO COUNTRIES

Budget and financing matters

34. The Board noted the reports on the **financing and implementation of the Programme budget 2020–2021**, the **Proposed programme budget 2022–2023** and the **sustainable financing** of the latter. It concurred with the guidance of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee in respect of the Proposed programme budget 2022–2023 and its financing and implementation as well as that regarding the WHO resource mobilization strategy and the need for more sustainable financing of the Organization. The Board decided to establish a time-bound and results-oriented Working Group on Sustainable Financing, open to all Member States, in order to enable WHO to have the robust structures and capacities needed to fulfil its core functions as defined in the Constitution.

35. The Board noted the reports of the **scale of assessments** for the biennium 2022–2023 and the **status of collection of assessed contributions**, including Member States in arrears in the payment of their contributions to an extent that would justify invoking Article 7 of the Constitution, and concurred with the guidance of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee in that respect.

Update on the Infrastructure Fund

36. The reports regarding the **update on information management and technology** and the **Geneva buildings renovation strategy** were noted.

Governance matters

37. The Board noted the report on the **WHO transformation** and concurred with the guidance of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee in that respect.

38. Following extensive discussion, the Board noted the reports on **WHO reform: governance, World Health Days** and the **involvement of non-State actors in WHO's governing bodies** and decided to recommend to the Seventy-fourth World Health Assembly the adoption of a decision to: (i) sunset reporting on resolutions whose mandates had been completed or superseded by a new mandate on the same subject matter or whose subject matter would be systematically incorporated into future reports on a related subject matter; and (ii) to specify end dates for reporting on 10 resolutions with unspecified reporting requirements. It also recommended that the Seventy-fourth World Health Assembly adopt a decision to welcome the Secretariat's support of initiatives that celebrate the date of 30 January as a day dedicated to neglected tropical diseases.

Global strategies and plans of action that are scheduled to expire within one year

39. Having considered and noted the report on the **WHO global disability action plan 2014–2021: better health for all people with disability**, the Board recommended to the Seventy-fourth World Health Assembly the adoption of a resolution to ensure comprehensive, accessible and affordable access to health systems and care for all persons with disabilities. It also requested the Director-General to develop, in close consultation with Member States and relevant international organizations and other stakeholders, by the end of 2022, a global report on the highest attainable standard of health for persons with disabilities, to be submitted for consideration by the Seventy-sixth World Health Assembly, through the Executive Board at its 152nd session.

40. The Board noted the report on the **global health sector strategies on, respectively, HIV, viral hepatitis and sexually transmitted infections, for the period 2016–2021** and decided to recommend to the Seventy-fourth World Health Assembly the adoption of a resolution to confirm the objective of the global health sector strategies on, respectively, HIV, viral hepatitis and sexually transmitted infections to contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal target 3.3 (By 2030, end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical diseases and combat hepatitis, waterborne diseases and other communicable diseases) and other communicable disease-related goals and targets. It also requested the Director-General, building on the work already under way, to undertake a broad consultative process to develop global health sector strategies on, respectively, HIV, viral hepatitis and sexually transmitted infections, for the period 2022–2030.

41. In its discussion of the **process for the election of the Director-General of the World Health Organization**, the Board noted the relevant report and decided to request the Secretariat to conduct a study on voting machines able to read and immediately tabulate votes cast on ballot papers and to report on its findings to the Seventy-fourth World Health Assembly. It also decided to recommend to the Seventy-fourth World Health Assembly the adoption of a decision, which, in respect of the present and subsequent elections, set forth that in the case that more than one candidate is nominated by the Executive Board for the post of Director-General of the World Health Organization, candidates so nominated shall address the Health Assembly before the vote for the appointment of the Director-General. In addition, it also decided that financial travel support shall be provided to all candidates participating in the candidates' forums.

42. The report on the implementation of the **Framework of Engagement with Non-State Actors** was noted. After considering the report on the review of one third of the **non-State actors in official relations with WHO**, the Board adopted a decision on the outcome of that review, including the admission into official relations of two bodies and the discontinuance of official relations with one other.

Committees of the Executive Board

43. Three **prizes** and one **award** were awarded by the Board.

Staffing matters

44. The Board noted the following documents: the **statement by the representative of the WHO staff associations**; the **report of the Ombudsman**; the **update on human resources**; and the **report of the International Civil Service Commission**, concurring with the respective guidance of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee.

45. The Board confirmed **amendments to the Staff Rules** concerning both the remuneration of staff in the professional and higher categories and payments and deductions, recruitment policies and abolition of post, and in another resolution it recommended to the Seventy-fourth World Health Assembly the adoption of a resolution on the salaries of staff in ungraded positions and of the Director-General.

Report on meetings of expert committees and study groups

46. The Board noted the reports on meetings of three **expert committees** and on **expert advisory panels and committees and their membership**.

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