

**67th session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe
(Budapest, Hungary, 11–14 September 2017)**

Summary report by the President, Ms Katalin Novák, Minister of State for Youth and Family Affairs and Minister of State for International Affairs, Hungary¹

PART 1: TOPICS FOR GLOBAL DISCUSSION

Development of a draft five year global strategic plan to improve public health preparedness and response

Representatives expressed support for the guiding principles and pillars related to the development of a draft five-year global strategic plan to improve public health preparedness and response, which would support implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005) (IHR). The plan is intended to strengthen the capacity of national IHR focal points; monitoring, evaluation and reporting on IHR core capacities; event management; laboratory capacity; and WHO capacity to support implementation of the IHR. They emphasized that the IHR self-assessment tool must be complemented with additional instruments such as a voluntary external evaluation, carried out in a way that accommodates Member States' potential sensitivities, including the need for a resource-efficient preparatory process. Prior to the formal consultation with Member States scheduled to be held in November 2018, Member States requested the Secretariat to explore and find possible areas of common ground, especially in the area of monitoring and evaluation, and emphasized that it was important to agree on the way forward at the Seventy-first World Health Assembly.

Global vector control response

Representatives expressed their support for the strategic approach for integrated global vector control and response in the light of the increasing burden of vector-borne diseases also in the European Region. It was suggested that an in-depth discussion of the added value to be gained from the development of a regional plan on vector control response should be held at the 68th session of the Regional Committee, alongside the discussion of the first report on implementation of the regional framework for surveillance and control of invasive mosquito vectors and re-emerging vector-borne diseases, 2014–2020.

Draft concept note towards WHO's 13th General Programme of Work 2019–2023

Representatives discussed the draft concept note, expressing strong support for the vision and focus on strategic priorities in the guiding principles, while calling for the identification of activities and initiatives facing deprioritization. Representatives requested additional information on the methodology for assessment of the WHO contribution to health outcomes and on options for resource mobilization. Despite some concern over the proposal to make WHO more operational, given the Organization's core function as a normative and technical agency, there was support for operationalizing WHO in certain circumstances, including during the early stages of an emergency. Concerns were raised over accountability. Representatives noted that operations at the country level should be set in a context of close cooperation with other United Nations entities, and emphasized the value of expanding partnerships including with a broad range of non-State actors.

¹ The full report of the session (document EURO/RC67/REP) and all working documents and resolutions mentioned in the report are available from: <http://www.euro.who.int/en/about-us/governance/regional-committee-for-europe/67th-session/documentation> (accessed 24 October 2017).

PART 2: TOPICS OF REGIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

Roadmap to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, building on the Health 2020 policy framework

The Secretariat introduced the proposed roadmap for implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (document EUR/RC67/9), intended to advance governance and leadership for health and well-being, reduce inequity, promote multisectoral and intersectoral policies, create healthy places and settings and resilient communities and strengthen health systems for universal health coverage. Representatives expressed broad support for the proposed joint monitoring framework and emphasized key issues, including the mainstreaming of health across all policies; the adaptation of the Sustainable Development Goals to the national context; the need to address all determinants of health throughout the life-course; and the maintenance of policy coherence across sectors through a whole-of-government approach. Participants also agreed on the importance of local action and the engagement of communities through a whole-of-society approach, preparedness for emerging public health threats, and evaluation and monitoring of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The Regional Committee adopted resolution EUR/RC67/R3, in which it adopted the roadmap and the joint monitoring framework.

Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health

Representatives discussed the outcomes of the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, held in Ostrava, Czech Republic, on 13–15 June 2017. The main political outcomes of the Conference were the adoption of the Ostrava Declaration on Environment and Health, with its associated compendium of possible national actions, and revised institutional arrangements for the European Environment and Health Process. The commitments undertaken in the Declaration involve four main areas: leveraging the European Environment and Health Process to achieve selected Sustainable Development Goals; addressing the “unfinished business” in environment and health in Europe; promoting coherence across all political levels and establishing inclusive platforms for dialogue; and developing national portfolios of action and promoting strong intersectoral coordination. The European Environment and Health Process will in future be governed by a single body, the European Environment and Health Task Force.

Participants welcomed the new commitments set out in the wide-reaching Ostrava Declaration. All speakers underlined the need for a multisectoral approach, involving the environment, economy, transport and agriculture sectors as well as regional, city and local authorities. The Regional Director was urged to coordinate the Regional Office’s activities with relevant United Nations entities and multilateral processes, such as the Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management policy framework. WHO should continue to develop expertise in the area of environment and health, as well as promoting and disseminating research and encouraging investment. A number of representatives welcomed the revised institutional arrangements for the European Environment and Health Process. The Regional Director was requested to continue exploring, with UNECE and UN Environment, the possibility of establishing a unified process and to report on that matter to the Regional Committee at its 68th session. The Regional Committee adopted resolution EUR/RC67/R4 endorsing the Ostrava Declaration.

Towards a sustainable health workforce in the WHO European Region: framework for action

Representatives discussed the draft framework for action towards a sustainable health workforce in the Region (document EUR/RC67/10). The framework is supported by a toolkit focusing on specific regional evidence and providing Member States and other stakeholders with structured access to effective strategies, planning tools and case studies that can be adapted to national priorities. Representatives agreed that an integrated, intersectoral approach is needed, and that health, social welfare, finance and labour sectors and civil society must coordinate their actions. In order to stem the tide of health worker emigration, representatives noted the importance of adherence to the WHO Global Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel and other ethical recruitment practices and called for the development of a shared database on mobility indicators and exchanges of information on health worker mobility. The Regional Committee adopted resolution EUR/RC67/R5.

Strengthening Member State collaboration on improving access to medicines in the European Region

The Secretariat introduced the report on access to medicines (document EUR/RC67/11), emphasizing the need for Member States to provide access to medicines in a financially sustainable manner, which was a particular challenge for new, high-priced medicines to treat conditions such as cancer and hepatitis . Representatives called for more widespread exchanges of information and experiences between Member States and greater transparency about the true costs of research and development (R&D), potentially extending to full public disclosure of all R&D costs. They expressed concern about the high cost of innovative medicines, and noted that some medicines were in short supply in certain countries because of parallel exports, or were not marketed at all because of the manufacturer's business strategy in the country concerned. Representatives stressed the importance of quality assurance of medicines through schemes such as the WHO prequalification of medicines programme, and stressed the dangers of counterfeit drugs. National essential medicines lists should be drawn up to reflect local patterns of resistance to antibiotic, antiretroviral and antituberculosis medicines. WHO should facilitate discussion about and analysis of possible alternative business and price models, while at the same time promoting the use of biosimilars and generic medicines. Cooperation between and joint action by Member States, while essential when dealing with the pharmaceutical industry, must nevertheless remain entirely voluntary. The Committee adopted decision EUR/RC67(1).

Accelerating implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005) and strengthening laboratory capacities for better health in the WHO European Region

The Secretariat introduced a technical document (EUR/RC67/13) identifying priority areas for application and implementation of the IHR, IHR compliance and strengthening of laboratory capacity in the Region. They recalled the legitimacy and binding nature of the IHR and the importance of the role of national focal points, country ownership, an intersectoral, whole-of-government approach and partnerships.

Representatives welcomed the proposal for accelerated actions in the European Region, particularly using IHR as a tool for strengthening health security, strengthening the capacity of national IHR focal points and creating platforms for information exchange and monitoring and evaluation of IHR core capacities, also using voluntary tools, like external assessments, after action reviews and simulation exercises,

Representatives also discussed the strengthening of laboratory capacity for the implementation of IHR. They emphasized the value of bilateral agreements for improving rapid detection of and response to cross-border health threats and the importance of close cooperation with regional partners such as the European Union.

Partnerships

The Regional Office has signed a memorandum of understanding with the European Union Committee of the Regions, which operates at the regional and city levels. It also collaborates with the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Eurasian Economic Union. It hosts the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, which brings together Member States, academia and civil society. Representatives noted that the maintenance and expansion of transformative partnerships at all levels and with all sectors will require capacity-building for WHO staff. The Regional Committee adopted resolution EUR/RC67/R7, in which it decided to establish a procedure to grant accreditation to international, regional and national non-State actors not in official relations with WHO, so that they may participate in its meetings.

Governance

Under current procedures, the written report on the work of the regional committees, submitted to the Executive Board, receives limited attention. The Committee agreed that key messages should instead be the subject of a brief oral presentation to the Executive Board, although that will entail changes to the Board's programme of work. Representatives supported the proposal to decide on a case-by-case basis whether a particular global policy should be implemented in the Region, or whether it was already covered by the Regional Office's programme of work. The Committee agreed on new procedures for its endorsement of the outcome documents or declarations of high-level regional meetings and for web-based consultations on the documents for its regular sessions. The report on WHO performance in countries will become a standing item on the Committee's agenda. The Regional Committee adopted resolution EUR/RC67/R6.

Budget

Funding for noncommunicable disease programmes in the Region has increased, despite the overall scaling-down of that category across the Organization. Operational planning for 2018-2019 includes mapping deliverables and results to Sustainable Development Goal targets; the resulting maps will be linked to the biennial collaborative agreements between Member States and WHO. Concerns were raised with regard to the financing of the Programme budget 2018-2019, particularly the mobilization of flexible funding, since the proportion of highly earmarked resources is increasing.