

Summary report on the

**WHO/UNAIDS/UNFPA/  
UNICEF joint regional  
meeting on Global  
Accelerated Action for the  
Health of Adolescents:  
Guidance to Support  
Country Implementation**

WHO-EM/CAH/202/E

Cairo, Egypt  
20–21 March 2017



**World Health  
Organization**

Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean

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## 1. Introduction

A WHO/UNFPA/UNICEF/UNAIDS joint intercountry meeting on the *Global Accelerated Action for the Health of Adolescents (AA-HA!): Guidance to Support Country Implementation* to operationalize the adolescent health component of the *Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescent Health, 2016–2030* was held in Cairo, Egypt, from 20 to 21 March 2017. The meeting was jointly organized by the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa, United Nations Joint Programme on AIDS (UNAIDS) Regional Support Team for the Middle East and North Africa and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Regional Office for the Arab States.

The objectives of the meeting were to:

- share key adolescent health elements of the *Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescent Health* and the *Global Accelerated Action for the Health of Adolescents (AA-HA!): guidance to support country implementation*;
- introduce and use the implementation guidance in developing/ updating national adolescent strategies and plans;
- determine areas for action in adolescent health programming in Member States and for United Nations agencies and other relevant stakeholders based on the implementation guidance and discuss its implications on existing adolescent and school health programmes in the Region.

The meeting was inaugurated by Dr Mahmoud Fikri, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean. Dr Fikri reiterated WHO's commitment towards advancing the health of adolescents in the Region. He said that the implementation guidance would boost national efforts to

fulfil commitments made in 2015 through endorsement of Regional Committee resolution (EM/RC62/R.1), which urged Member States to “develop or update national reproductive, maternal, neonatal, child health strategic plans in accordance with the United Nations *Global Strategy for Women’s, Children’s and Adolescent Health*”.

Dr Yamina Chakkar, Director of the Regional Support Team for UNAIDS, emphasized the importance of an inclusive HIV response and health services for all, including adolescents and young people.

Dr Luay Shabaneh, Regional Director, UNFPA, highlighted the importance of working with youth and adolescents in the Region, particularly in light of current challenges.

Dr Ndeye Fatou Ndiaye, Regional Child Survival and Development Specialist, UNICEF, delivered the speech of Mr Geert Cappelaere, UNICEF’s Regional Director, in which he urged all partners and stakeholders to address adolescent health in an integrated manner through a life-cycle approach in order to achieve sustainable gains and fight inequities in all settings.

The meeting was attended by a total of 50 participants, including participants from 10 countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region, together with experts from regional and international organizations, academic institutions, nongovernmental organizations, youth organizations and WHO, UNAIDS, UNICEF and UNFPA staff members from headquarters, regional and country offices.

## **2. Summary of discussions**

Participants discussed the *Global Strategy for Women’s, Children’s and Adolescents’ Health*, and the implementation guidance for *Accelerated*

*Action for the Health of Adolescents (AA-HA!)* and the adolescent health global agenda and its implications for adolescent health in the Region. Selected countries presented their experiences and lessons learned from their own national adolescent health programmes.

A panel discussion, including experts from WHO, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNAIDS, UNDP, the Arab League, Arab Coalition for Adolescent Medicine, Population Council and Assiut University, discussed the global and regional adolescent agenda and its implications for adolescent health.

Representatives of United Nations agencies said that the UN contribution to the adolescent health component of the Global Strategy covered five key areas: providing technical support to countries to develop and update national plans; conducting resource mobilization; defining norms, regulations and guidelines; supporting the voice of women, children and adolescents to be heard; and tracking progress and strengthening accountability functions. These five functions were addressed by all UN agencies to some degree with variation according to the mandate of the different agencies.

WHO adopts a comprehensive approach in addressing adolescent health issues, fostering policy dialogue, setting priorities and generating evidence. It advocates for implementation of evidence-based interventions, and standardized regulations and guidelines, and investment in capacity-building at all levels.

UNAIDS works within the five functions with greatest focus on supporting adolescent voices to be heard and tracking progress and accountability through rapid needs assessments and screening programmes.

UNICEF highlights the importance of working with adolescents in humanitarian settings and adopts a multisectoral approach across all of its programme areas.

The core focus of UNFPA is youth development and empowerment across four areas: sexual and reproductive health; gender; development of youth policies; and development of national plans.

UNDP uses its convening power to prioritize universality and inclusiveness and works to identify the social determinants of health affecting adolescents. It fosters a multisectoral HIV response and promotes noncommunicable disease interventions, including tobacco control.

The Population Council generates evidence to support policy and programming in the Region with adolescent health at the core of its agenda. It supports research implementation and advocates to conduct priority research in the area of adolescent health.

The Arab Coalition for Adolescent Medicine aims to raise awareness of adolescent health and advocates for parliamentary changes to increase the visibility of adolescent health to extend the reach of school health programmes. The Coalition also works to build the capacity of adolescent health care providers. The Arab League addresses adolescent health within the *Arab Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescent Health*.

The University of Assiut highlights challenges to research in the Region and the issues surrounding these. It proposes the establishment of a research alliance among universities to improve pre-service adolescent health education and capacity and to widen the scope of research.

Participants discussed key experiences in the areas of partnership, multisectoral planning, innovative approaches in communicating with adolescents, e-learning and adolescent participation.

Participants discussed the steps for using the implementation guidance in a hypothetical country. They covered priority-setting, identification of priority adolescent health interventions, and adolescent health programming (including monitoring and evaluation).

### *Status of adolescent health programming*

Key findings of the questionnaire on “Assessing adolescent health programmes and the implementation of adolescent health services by Member States in the Region” were presented and are summarized below.

- In a significant number of countries, adolescent health programmes are not highly functional and have not been institutionalized.
- Governance of adolescent health is a major issue that needs to be addressed in the Region in terms of policies, leadership and financing.
- School health programmes are functional in all countries in the Region.
- Adolescent health standards of services are not identified in a systematic way.
- Culturally sensitive indicators are often overlooked.
- Platforms for adolescent participation are often lacking in responding countries.
- Pre-service education is far from addressing adolescent health in a substantial proportion of countries.

Data obtained from the survey will form the base for further analysis and follow up.

Each country identified key next steps and activities to be implemented, including:

- advocating for use of the *Global Accelerated Action for Health of Adolescent (AA-HA!) Implementation Guidance* with decision-makers, donor agencies and technical partners;
- reactivating/developing a national taskforce for adolescent health in line with the implementation guidance;
- conducting national orientation meetings for consensus on, and communication of, the implementation guidance;
- holding national workshops for adolescent health implementation planning and measurement;
- strengthening the skills of health providers to address adolescent health and well-being and identifying champions at country and district levels.

*Regional interagency roadmap to support countries*

Representatives of United Nations agencies presented a draft roadmap of support to countries to strengthen adolescent health and well-being. The following key strategic areas were proposed for prioritization:

- Identification of technical gaps and provision of technical support to countries;
- Strengthening of advocacy and communication platforms and implementation of interventions at country level; and
- Reinforcement of monitoring, evaluation and accountability measures for adolescent health programming.

### **3. Recommendations**

#### *To Member States*

1. Debrief high-level decision-makers, staff of technical programmes and stakeholders on the meeting and its outcomes.
2. Ensure commitment at all levels towards implementation of the identified next steps.
3. Institutionalize adolescent health programming in terms of leadership, financing and accountability.
4. Support platforms to ensure adolescent participation in planning and implementation of adolescent health activities.
5. Review health information systems to ensure integration of key adolescent health indicators.

#### *To United Nations agencies and partners*

6. Ensure implementation and follow up of activities of the regional interagency roadmap.
7. Harmonize interagency support to Member States taking into consideration the work across the continuum of care.
8. Provide support to academic and research institutions to prioritize adolescent health research and commit to strengthening pre-service education.
9. Ensure active participation of youth organizations and civil society organizations at country level in the development and implementation of the implementation guidance.



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