Regional Committee for Europe
70th session
Virtual session, 14–15 September 2020
28 August 2020
Provisional agenda item 3(a)

Transformation in the WHO European Region

This document describes the current and planned activities in the WHO Regional Office for Europe, as part of the WHO transformation at global and regional levels. It is submitted to the WHO Regional Committee for Europe at its 70th session in September 2020.
Introduction

1. The WHO transformation process is intended to be results-driven and to have a measurable impact at country level and on the lives of individuals. This will be achieved by fully aligning the Organization and its ways of working across its three levels (headquarters, regional offices and country offices) with WHO’s Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2023 (GPW 13) and its triple billion targets, with the aim of leaving no one behind.

2. The transformation process is aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the decisions on United Nations development system reform, which has implications and provides opportunities for WHO, as for all United Nations agencies. WHO transformation signifies a commitment to coherence and unity of action across the entire United Nations system, as noted by Member States during the Seventy-second World Health Assembly in May 2019.

3. The need for strong leadership from WHO in order to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3 and other health-related SDGs has been, and will continue to be, recognized and emphasized in the WHO transformation.

4. The WHO transformation process is characterized by five workstreams: a new strategy; fit-for-purpose processes and tools; a new operating model; new external engagement and partnerships; and organizational culture and staff engagement. The achievements of this process, which is aligned with the objectives set out in GPW 13 and with the global conceptual model for transformation launched by the Director-General, provide a firm foundation from which the WHO European Region can continue to contribute to the global transformation agenda.

5. The present update on WHO transformation focuses on the main developments that have occurred since the 69th session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe in September 2019. It outlines both the WHO Regional Office for Europe’s contribution to this global transformation plan for the three levels of the Organization, as well as how the Regional Office is transforming through action taken following the appointment of a new WHO Regional Director for Europe in February 2020.

The WHO transformation process in the WHO Regional Office for Europe

6. Throughout the process to date, the Regional Office has been both engaged and supportive, working towards making WHO transformation a reality in the Regional Office.

7. A range of initiatives and activities have been undertaken or developed to move this forward: culture change plans; values months; a “pulse-check” survey; a reinvigorated change supporters’ network; mechanisms for engagement with the Staff Association of the WHO European Region and the Ombudsman; the establishment of a General Service Staff Task Force; full engagement with the development of the WHO Academy including actively supporting the work of the Academy to provide COVID-19 training support for health workers in the European Region and around the world though the WHO Academy app; and active participation in the Global Transformation Team.
8. With respect to the Organization’s aim of harmonizing the operating model across its three levels and putting countries at the centre of its work, the Regional Office has been fully engaged in the process through its membership of and active participation in the various multilevel task forces and working groups.

9. In addition, the Regional Office has focused on transformation through planned country support programmes and biennial collaborative agreements, and regional workplans developed in the process of preparing the Programme budget 2020–2021, including by putting in place outcome teams and output focal points to support both the planning and reporting process.

**The European Programme of Work (2020–2025) – “United Action for Better Health in Europe”**

10. A central pillar of the Regional Office’s contribution to the transformation of WHO is the development of the European Programme of Work (2020–2025) – “United Action for Better Health in Europe” (EPW), which places enhanced country impact at the heart of the Regional Office’s future work.

11. Since every WHO region has its particular challenges, opportunities, priorities and specificities, the EPW is intended to demonstrate the ways in which the work of the WHO Regional Office for Europe can best contribute to the global vision set out in GPW 13. It seeks to align the work of the Regional Office with the triple billion targets, while also taking into account the roadmap to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well-Being for All.

12. Aligning the Regional Office and its work with GPW 13, the EPW presents three interconnected strategic priorities to ensure healthy lives and well-being for all at all ages: moving towards universal health coverage; promoting health and well-being; and protecting against health emergencies. The EPW sets out a vision of how the Regional Office can help health authorities in Member States to rise to the challenge of what citizens in the Region expect them to do, in each country and collectively in the European Region, and takes into account the COVID-19 pandemic that has hit the Region so fiercely during 2020. It reflects the determination of the Regional Office to leave no one behind, and to strengthen the leadership of health authorities in the Region.

13. A two-pronged approach will be applied, with a better balance between support at the regional and subregional levels and direct country support. While the Regional Office and the EPW will orient the focus and delivery towards country-based operations, the latter will fully acknowledge that delivery at one level – regional, subregional or country – has an impact on delivery across all levels.

14. With an emphasis on fostering a work environment conducive to delivering results, the Regional Office is carrying out the following.

   • Aligning its organizational structures to deliver the EPW and GPW 13 informed by consultation with staff, and seeking to align resource allocation and programming with the needs of delivering impact at country level;
• Supporting a values-based culture of collaboration, including agile and multidisciplinary team-based models of working, with appropriate levels of delegated authority and accountability, including for intensified joint technical assistance and policy support. This agile transformation will achieve maximum impact at country level and ensure an innovative results-oriented approach to country work.

• Creating a culture of innovation underpinned by effective culture change and supports that ensure that innovation from all levels of the Organization reaches the senior leadership.

• Introducing leaner administrative procedures and practices, and pursuing digital transformation.

• Working to ensure a healthy, respectful and motivational workplace for all staff, with zero tolerance of harassment.

15. The WHO Values Charter underpins the delivery of the EPW and lies at the core of the vision of the new Regional Director for agile transformation in the Regional Office to build a fit-for-purpose Regional Office for the future.

Transformation in action: restructuring the Regional Office to deliver strategic priorities

16. Under the new Regional Director, structural alignment of the activities of the Regional Office with the strategic priorities of the EPW and GPW 13 is currently under way, in full consultation with, and with the engagement of, the staff of the Regional Office and the Staff Association.

17. A new draft high-level organigram for the Regional Office was presented in February 2020 to align the Regional Office’s organizational structure with the strategic priorities of the EPW and GPW 13.

18. Almost 300 staff from the Regional Office, the geographically dispersed offices (GDOs) and the country offices participated in a virtual consultation process on the draft high-level organigram, launched in May 2020. The consultation process was facilitated by staff members, with reports being provided to the Regional Director and the Executive Council. Throughout the process, there have been regular town hall meetings with the staff of the Regional Office.

19. In addition, a Management Project Plan Steering Committee and working groups were established to lead work in a number of key transformative areas including: documenting innovative ways of working and proposing options and approaches for agile and innovative ways of working for the future; looking at the formal team-based structures and proposing possible options for the future to support the restructuring process; and simplifying an initial number of business processes that were prioritized following a survey to all staff. In parallel, the digitalization of certain processes and the automation of administrative forms have been initiated.

20. Following a full selection process, new directors were appointed in May 2020 to lead new divisions and to form a new Executive Council to support the Regional Director.
A special adviser to the Regional Director on transformation and organization development has also been appointed with responsibility for areas including staff development and learning, and internal communications strategy.

21. As part of the restructuring process for the Regional Office, an in-depth functional review process is currently under way and is being advanced at pace during May–August 2020, with progress being reported to the Regional Committee at its 70th session. As part of an overall emphasis on organizational development, the new structure of the Regional Office will translate the Regional Director’s vision into reality, focusing on collaborative ways of working through agile, cross-divisional teams ensuring country focus and ensuring that innovation from all levels of the Organization reaches the Executive Council.

**Transformation in action: establishing a new organizational culture of open communication and engagement**

22. In February 2020, the newly appointed Regional Director hosted two inaugural townhall meetings at which he signed the WHO Values Charter and invited the entire staff of the WHO Regional Office for Europe including country offices and GDOs to “walk the talk” and join him in doing so.

23. During these townhall meetings, the Regional Director presented his vision for health in the European Region for the future and discussed its operationalization through the EPW.

24. Consultation and engagement with staff, including on staff health and wellbeing, have been paramount and from the outset the Regional Director has held regular monthly meetings with the Staff Association to take staff interests and concerns into account.

25. Reflecting the commitment to enabling a safe and respectful workplace, with zero tolerance of workplace harassment, the recruitment of a full-time Ombudsman has been prioritized and the selection process is nearing completion.

26. To support a culture of open communication, the Regional Director and his team have hosted regular interactive virtual townhall meetings with staff working across the Region to keep staff updated on business continuity status, the COVID-19 response and the transition process. Regular email messages for the Regional Director, as well as vlogs and other channels such as an “Ask Hans” mailbox, have been set up to ensure free, frank and, where necessary, confidential communication.

27. As the restructuring process reaches its conclusion, these initiatives will continue to be built upon and expanded to ensure that a culture of open communication and engagement is embedded across the Regional Office in the future.