



REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE
EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

October 2017

Sixty-fourth Session
Islamabad, Pakistan, 9–12 October 2017

SIDE EVENT
IMPROVING ACCESS TO ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Objectives of the event

The objectives of the event are to:

- raise awareness of Member States of good practices within the Region to improve access to assistive technology;
- provide an overview on the need for, and benefit of, including access to assistive technology within universal health coverage;
- promote regional or subregional alliances to improve access to high-quality affordable assistive products;
- highlight WHO efforts to improve access to assistive technology and introduce WHO's Priority Assistive Products List.

Background: the need for change

Today only 5–15% (approximately 1 in 10 persons) of the population, globally, in need has access to assistive products¹ such as wheelchairs, canes, prosthetic and orthotic devices, spectacles, low vision aids, hearing aids, and augmentative and alternative devices to cope with functional decline. There is thus an urgent need to change the way we have traditionally perceived, designed, produced, manufactured, distributed, serviced and financed assistive products or devices – collectively called assistive technology. Without assistive technology, people are often confined to their homes, excluded from participating in society and locked into poverty and isolation.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities identified access to mobility aids, assistive devices and technologies as a human right that every Member State should provide. Providing access to assistive technology is a component of universal health coverage and needs to be integrated into efforts to attain target 3.8 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The current gap in access to assistive products will be magnified in the future by the immense projected population growth, especially as the number of older people worldwide increases from

¹ Global survey on government action on the implementation of the standard rules on the Equalization of opportunities for person with disabilities. Amman: South-North Center for Dialogue and Development for the Office of the UN Special Rapporteur on Disabilities; October 2006 (www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/documents/GlobalSurvey07.doc, accessed 6 September 2017).

841 million in 2013 (11.7% of the world's population) to more than 2 billion (21.1%) by 2050.² Recent years have also witnessed a dramatic rise in injuries, noncommunicable diseases and musculoskeletal conditions. Medicines alone cannot solve these new emerging challenges and there will most certainly be a greater need for assistive products; assistive technology needs have to be assessed on a broader basis.

Regional situation and challenges

According to a recent survey conducted by the WHO Regional Office, approximately 3.2% of the population in the Region has been reported to be living with disabilities. This figure is an underestimation, particularly when compared to the global percentage of 15% of the total population.³ Available data on current and projected ageing populations (60 years and above) in countries of the Region show that their numbers compared to the overall regional population will progressively increase from about 6.6% in 2015 to almost 15% in 2050.⁴ Noncommunicable diseases are also on the rise in the Region and the prevalence of the main behavioural risk factors is among the highest in the world. Given that the Region has the second highest road traffic death rates worldwide, the number of disabilities due to road traffic injuries can be expected to be high. It is estimated that 26 000 to 52 000 persons experience spinal cord injury in the Region every year, resulting in the need for wheelchairs, pressure relief cushions and other assistive products. In general, data are scarce on assistive technology needs in the Region. Nevertheless, available data on disability and related health conditions can be a proxy for estimating the market size of assistive products required to satisfy the needs of populations.

Global and regional response

At the global level, with the efforts of the Government of Pakistan, assistive technology has been included in the agenda of WHO's upcoming 142nd Executive Board in order that a roadmap for collective action by countries can be developed. At the 70th World Health Assembly, resolution WHA70.13 on prevention of deafness and hearing loss was adopted. At the 69th World Health Assembly, at which the first WHO Priority Assistive Products List was presented by the Federal Minister, Ministry of National Health Regulation Services and Coordination, the Government of Pakistan hosted a side event on "Assistive technology for all". In the Region in 2016, resolution EM/RC63/R.3 on improving access to assistive technology was adopted at the 63rd Regional Committee. In 2014, in partnership with a range of stakeholders, WHO established the Global Cooperation on Assistive Technology (GATE) initiative to improve global access to availability and affordability of the quality assistive products.

² United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. 2013. World Population Ageing 2013 (<http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/ageing/WorldPopulationAgeing2013.pdf>, accessed 6 September 2017).

³ World Health Organization, World Bank. World report on disability. Geneva: WHO; 2011 (http://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/report.pdf , accessed 6 September 2017).

⁴ EM/RC63/R.3 Improving access to assistive technology. October 2016 (http://applications.emro.who.int/docs/RC63_Resolutions_2016_R3_19120_EN.pdf?ua=1, accessed 6 September 2017).

Expected outcomes

- Greater awareness of WHO's normative work on assistive technology, including WHO's Priority Assistive Products List.
- A broader understanding among Member States of the importance of improving access to assistive technology in the Region.
- Increased awareness of the need for political and financial commitment to improve access to assistive technology in the Region.
- Impetus for a WHO resolution on improving access to assistive technology in the 142nd Executive Board discussions and subsequently, at the 71st World Health Assembly.

Proposed programme

The meeting is to be chaired by the Federal Minister of Health, Pakistan, in collaboration with the Ministers of Health of Iraq, Morocco, Syrian Arab Republic and United Arab Emirates.

Wednesday 11 October 2017, 17:00–18:00

Agenda item	Responsible entity	Allotted time (minutes)
Overall status of assistive technology in the Region	Dr Zafar Mirza, Director Division of Health System Development	05
Proposed declaration by Pakistan	Dr Assad Hafeez, Director General Health, Ministry of Ministry of National Health Regulation Services and Coordination	05
Remarks by ministers of health	Pakistan, Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq, Morocco, United Arab Emirates	25 (5 mins each)
Remarks by proposed global ambassador on assistive technology	Dr Sana Hafeez	05
Remarks by Regional Director	Dr Mahmoud M Fikri	05
Panel discussion	Dr Assad Hafeez, Director General Health, Ministry of National Health Regulation Services and Coordination and experts	15
Total duration		60 mins