



Report of the sixteenth meeting of the Programme Subcommittee of the Regional Committee

Opening of the session

1. The Programme Subcommittee of the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean held its sixteenth meeting on 22–23 February 2023 at the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean in Cairo, Egypt. The Programme Subcommittee was established in response to resolution EM/RC63/R.6 (2016).
2. The meeting was attended by experts nominated by Member States to serve as members of the Programme Subcommittee for a duration of two years, and by WHO staff. The agenda and list of participants are included as Annexes 1 and 2, respectively.
3. The Programme Subcommittee elected the following officers for a duration of one year.¹

Chair: Dr Riyadh Abdul Amer Al-Hilfi (Iraq)
Vice-Chair: Dr Ejlal Alalawi (Bahrain)
Rapporteur: Dr Kamal Shakhra (Palestine)

4. An overview of the Programme Subcommittee was presented. It was noted that the Programme Subcommittee played a crucial role in enabling the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean and other WHO governing bodies to focus effectively on priority issues for countries of the Region.
5. The objectives of the sixteenth meeting were introduced. An important preliminary objective was to present and discuss amended and restated terms of reference for the Subcommittee. This would be followed by the main item of business: to discuss the technical agenda for the 70th session of the Regional Committee. Subcommittee members would be invited to consider the overall theme for the 70th session and to discuss proposed agenda items in detail. Preparations were being made to hold for the Regional Committee to meet in a full-length face-to-face session at the WHO Regional Office in Cairo, but this would be confirmed at two further meetings of the Subcommittee later in the year.

Amended and restated terms of reference of the Programme Subcommittee

6. Members considered the terms of reference of the Programme Subcommittee. It was explained that as well as providing critical guidance to the WHO Secretariat in preparing for sessions of the Regional Committee, the Subcommittee had several other important functions which had grown in recent years, for example monitoring the implementation of Regional Committee recommendations and decisions and advising the Regional Director on regional Member State representation on global governing body committees. It was felt that the Subcommittee's existing terms of reference, as set out in Regional Committee document EM/RC63/8 Rev.2, were insufficiently detailed, and so an amended and restated version had been prepared.²

Decision by the Programme Subcommittee

7. Members of the Subcommittee welcomed the amended and restated terms of reference and approved in principle a draft decision adopting them, to be put to Member States.

¹ See EM/RC63/8 Rev.2.

² See EM/RC70/19.

Preliminary outline of the 70th session of the Regional Committee

8. An outline of the proposed provisional agenda for the 70th session of the Regional Committee was presented to the Programme Subcommittee. An overarching theme was proposed: “For a healthier future in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: promoting, protecting and delivering health for all by all”. A list of proposed topics for different agenda items was shared with participants, as well as brief proposals for each topic. Subcommittee members listened to concise presentations of the proposals. This was followed by a detailed discussion with the Secretariat and the responsible officers as necessary.

9. The proposals fell under three broad areas: a) technical papers for the Regional Committee; b) panel discussions to be held during the Committee session; and c) pre-Regional Committee technical sessions. It was explained that Regional Committee technical papers were intended to present important public health issues in the Region where it was felt that the time was ripe for a Regional Committee resolution to help achieve genuine positive impact on health in countries of the Region. For each of the proposed technical papers, the Programme Subcommittee was also presented with a provisional outline of the action points for, respectively, Member States and the Secretariat that might be requested via a related draft resolution. By contrast, side events allowed a range of leading voices to be heard on major issues of concern, while pre-Regional Committee technical sessions typically addressed important topics, but ones which either (i) had not yet been developed to the point where they might form the basis of a Regional Committee resolution or (ii) concerned a new globally agreed resolution or strategy which needed to be implemented in the Region.

10. It was further explained that the 70th Regional Committee session would be relatively unusual in that the Regional Director’s current term in office was ending and so there would be an election to determine who would serve for the next five-year term. The process for the election of the Regional Director was outlined, noting that the appointment would be made by the WHO Executive Board in agreement with the Regional Committee. It was explained that election arrangements were likely to require significant time during the Regional Committee session. For this reason, the proposed provisional agenda was shorter than usual, with a relatively small number of technical papers, panel discussions and pre-Regional Committee technical sessions, and no side events. In addition, while the communications plan for the Regional Committee was still being developed, it was proposed to reduce the number of communications activities and products so as to allow participants to better focus on priority items of business.

11. The provisional agenda topics agreed by the Programme Subcommittee are listed in Annex 3 along with the lead department of the WHO Regional Office responsible for delivering each item.

12. It was noted that, in addition to these topics, the Regional Committee agenda would also include several items of statutory business, including progress reports on implementing certain resolutions, an update on WHO transformation in the Region, items of business from WHO’s global governing bodies referred for action or information, and several other standing items. In place of the normal standing item on the annual report of the Regional Director, it was intended to present a final report on implementation of WHO’s vision for the Region, *Vision 2023*, since its inception in October 2018.

Regional Committee technical papers

13. Four potential topics for technical papers were proposed to the Subcommittee by the Secretariat. It was noted that the topics were intended to align with the proposed theme of the Regional Committee session, and most topics would require close collaboration across technical departments and programmes. Work on developing papers would need to begin soon to ensure their timely circulation to Member States in advance of the Regional Committee session. The process of developing papers was likely to involve consultation with Member States and key stakeholders, and the Programme Subcommittee was encouraged to promote engagement from all Member States.

Panel discussions

14. It was proposed by the Secretariat that the Regional Committee agenda should also include two panel discussions. Both proposed discussion topics required wide-ranging and long-term, multisectoral action by a range of stakeholders, and the panel discussion format would facilitate input from several key stakeholders.

Pre-Regional Committee technical sessions

15. Four topics were proposed for pre-RC technical sessions.

Decisions by, and feedback from, the Programme Subcommittee

16. The Programme Subcommittee formally endorsed the list of proposed Regional Committee items presented by the Secretariat, including all proposed technical papers, panel discussions and pre-RC technical sessions. The Subcommittee provided extensive feedback and suggestions on proposals, to be taken into account by technical teams in drafting papers.

17. In addition, the Subcommittee requested that one item be added: a side event focusing on the potential health impacts of economic sanctions as this was an issue of strong concern in the Region. The Subcommittee also requested that some further issues be emphasized where possible within the provisional agenda for the Regional Committee session. It was noted that health economics and financing were critically important: it was usually difficult to secure adequate financial resources to ensure the effective implementation of health policies, and yet such policies could often be shown to have potential economic benefits that would outweigh their implementation cost. While it was recognized that there was limited scope to add new technical agenda topics, given the limited time available, the Secretariat was requested to ensure that the treatment of the agreed provisional agenda topics included due attention to economic and financial aspects. Furthermore, it was suggested that health economics might well be a suitable topic for a technical paper for the 71st session of the Regional Committee in October 2024.

Closing of the session

18. After thanking members of the Programme Subcommittee for their attention and valuable feedback and the Regional Office for its support, the Chair closed the session.

Annex 1. Agenda

1. Opening session
2. Adoption of the provisional programme
3. Overview of the Programme Subcommittee of the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean
4. Election of office bearers of the Programme Subcommittee of the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean (February 2022 – February 2023)
5. Amended and restated terms of reference of the Programme Subcommittee
6. Preliminary outline of the 70th session of the Regional Committee, including proposals for pre-RC sessions, technical papers and panel discussions
7. Closing session

Annex 2. List of participants*Members of the Programme Subcommittee*

Bahrain	Dr Ejlal Alalawi
Djibouti	Ms Noura Abdi
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	Dr Nicknam Mohammad Hossein
Iraq	Dr Riyadh Abdul Amer Al-Hilfi
Libya	Dr Azzam ElHadi Omar Hussein*
Morocco	Mr Abdelouahab Belmadani
Palestine	Dr Kamal Shakhra

Apologies received from:

Syrian Arab Republic	Dr Ahmad Dmeirieh
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WHO Secretariat

Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari	Regional Director
Dr Sussan Bassiri	Director of Business Operations*
Dr Rana Hajjeh	Director of Programme Management
Dr Christoph Hamelmann	Chef de Cabinet (CdC)
Dr Maha El-Adawy	Director, Healthier Populations (DHP)
Dr Asmus Hammerich	Director, UHC/Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health (NMH)
Dr Yvan J.-f. Hutin	Director, UHC/Communicable Disease Control (DCD)
Dr Hamid Syed Jafari	Director, Polio Eradication (POL)
Dr Awad Mataria	Director, UHC/Health System Development (UHS)
Dr Arash Rashidian	Director, Science, Information and Dissemination (SID)
Dr Dalia Samhouri and IHR*	Programme Area Manager, Country Health Emergency Preparedness
Mr Amr El Tarek	Regional Adviser, Planning, Budget, Monitoring and Evaluation
Ms Tarja Turtia	Acting Country Focus Support and Transformation Lead
Mr Tobias Boyd	Manager (Publishing, Editorial and Graphic Design)

Mr Amarnath Das	Regional Compliance and Risk Manager
Dr Nasim Pourghazian	Technical Officer
Ms Hala El Shazly	Administrative Officer
Ms Ranan Elnory	IT Service Desk Assistant
Ms Samah Abdel Aziz	Governing Bodies Officer
Ms Jessica Kanawaty	Administrative Assistant

*via VC

Annex 3. List of topics agreed for the 70th session of the Regional Committee

Lead department(s)	Proposed item
Technical papers	
NMH	Addressing noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) in fragile, conflict-affected and vulnerable (FCV) settings
WHE	Strengthening public health readiness for mass gathering events in the Eastern Mediterranean Region
UHS	Health workforce in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: from COVID-19 learnings to action
HPD (CEHA)	Climate change, health and environment: a regional framework for action 2024–2029
Panel discussions	
CdC	Regional Health Alliance: accelerating joint UN implementation of health-related SDGs in support of Member States of the Eastern Mediterranean Region
HPD	Youth health and well-being in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: a better future for all, by all
Pre-RC technical sessions	
WHE	Minimizing morbidity and mortality due to trauma in humanitarian settings in the Eastern Mediterranean Region
UHS	Designing and implementing primary health care-oriented models of care in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: what do we know so far?
SID	Developing and implementing national plans for the development and adaptation of clinical practice and public health guidelines
DCD	A sustainable, integrated approach to the prevention, control and elimination of vector-borne diseases
Side event	
CdC	The impact of economic sanctions on health