



Report of the twenty-third 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 twenty-third meeting on 26 June 2025 as a virtual meeting through videoconferencing technology. The meeting was attended by experts nominated by Member States to serve as members of the Programme Subcommittee, and by WHO staff. The agenda and list of participants are included as Annexes 1 and 2, respectively.
2. The objectives of the meeting were introduced. The main objective was to review arrangements for the 72nd session of the Regional Committee including the draft provisional agenda and programme for the session. Subcommittee members were also invited: to approve the addition to the draft provisional agenda of a technical paper and draft resolution on climate change and health; to review revised arrangements for determining membership of WHO bodies and committees; and to review progress in developing a tool to collect data on the health impacts of economic sanctions.

Provisional agenda and programme for the 72nd session of the Regional Committee

3. An updated outline of the proposed provisional agenda and programme for the 72nd session of the Regional Committee was presented to the Programme Subcommittee. It was noted that, as agreed with the Subcommittee at its previous meeting in February, the timeframe for development of Regional Committee documentation had been brought forward. Four technical papers and the related draft resolutions had already been developed, as had 16 progress reports and most other Regional Committee documents. Recent interim versions of the technical papers, draft resolutions and progress reports had been shared with the Subcommittee, and Member State consultation sessions on each technical paper and draft resolution had been scheduled for the first half of July with a deadline of 31 July for the submission of feedback. Interim versions of documents, including advance translations, would then be revised in time for publication at the end of August.
4. Updating the Subcommittee, Dr Adham Ismail, Director of Programme Management and Chef de Cabinet ad interim, noted that the progress in developing documents was unprecedented. Early and extensive consultation on papers should help ensure that Member State concerns were well reflected and that discussions during the Regional Committee could focus on the draft resolutions. He thanked the Subcommittee for its invaluable role in guiding work to make the Regional Committee session more innovative and impactful, and urged Subcommittee members to share any feedback on documents and to encourage their ministries to engage actively in all consultations.
5. Several other innovations in relation to the upcoming Regional Committee session were presented. It was noted that, as agreed by the Subcommittee at its previous meeting, a “pre-RC” programme of virtual events would be held during the week from 29 September to 2 October. The provisional programme of pre-RC events was presented, noting that it would include a mixture of side events, technical sessions and social media campaigns. Further innovations would include the addition to the Regional Committee session programme of a special update on the health impact of economic sanctions, as requested by Member States.
6. In addition, a short but important addition to the Regional Committee programme was proposed: in response to a request from the Government of Egypt, it was proposed that ministers be invited to sign the Cairo Call to Action on Breast Cancer. This could provisionally be scheduled at the end of the discussion of

the technical paper and draft resolution on improving palliative care in the Region. It would only require a few minutes, but would be a valuable opportunity for ministers to build on recent progress in enhancing women's health.

Developing a regional operational framework on climate change and health

7. The Subcommittee's approval was also requested for a bigger addition to the draft provisional agenda and programme for the upcoming Regional Committee session: a new technical paper and draft resolution on climate change and health. It was noted that the Eastern Mediterranean Region was severely impacted by climate change. Temperatures were rising faster than in any other WHO region, and there were more extreme weather events, with potentially drastic implications for population health. The Region had also been a leader in work to tackle the health impacts of climate change: it was the first among all WHO's regions to develop a dedicated regional framework in 2008, and this had been followed by extensive further action including the endorsement of a new, more comprehensive regional framework in 2023. However, Member States from the Region had not felt able to support decision WHA78(27) of the Seventy-eighth World Health Assembly in May 2025 adopting a new global action plan on climate change and health (2025–2028). While Member States of the Region remained firmly committed to action on climate change and health, there were concerns that consultation around the global action plan had been insufficient and that it did not adequately take account of unique circumstances and challenges in the Region.

8. In response to these concerns, the Secretariat proposed to develop a new regional operational framework for climate change and health. The proposed new technical paper and related resolution would set up an extensive, inclusive consultation process with Member States, and would also establish a new regional observatory on climate and health to collate and analyse information. The resulting draft framework would then be presented to the Regional Committee for further consideration and possible endorsement at its 74th session in October 2027.

Proposed nominations for membership of WHO bodies and committees

9. The Subcommittee received an update on the issue of arrangements for nominating Member States to various positions in WHO governing bodies. It was recalled that representation of Member States in various governing bodies and offices – including, among others, Chair of the Regional Committee, membership of the Programme Subcommittee, membership of the Executive Board and President or Vice-President of the Health Assembly – was now generally based on a principle of rotation. At its previous meeting in February, the Subcommittee had agreed to change the rules slightly so that previous occupancy of posts would only be taken into account for the period since 2018 (the year in which regional governance reform took effect) and to distribute positions among three groups of Member States, in alphabetical order within each group. Following that decision in February, the Secretariat had applied the new rules to produce a list of suggested nominations for upcoming posts and bodies, and the resulting list was now presented for the Subcommittee's endorsement.

The impact of sanctions on health and health systems in the Region: methodology and tool development

10. The Subcommittee received an update on efforts to assess the impact of economic sanctions on health and health systems in the Region. Previous work on this issue had been discussed at successive closed side meetings in the margins of the 70th and 71st sessions of the Regional Committee, but at the more recent of those meetings Member States had requested that the issue become an item in the agenda for future Regional Committee sessions. Member States had further requested that the Secretariat develop a data collection methodology and tool, noting that while the use of sanctions globally and in the Region had increased over the decades, measurement of their health impacts had been inadequate. The Secretariat had therefore analysed potential approaches, drawing on related work to measure health system performance and the social determinants of health. Based on that analysis, a proposed data collection template would be presented to Member States during the Regional Committee session. The template would include standardized indicators with the aim of enabling systematic reporting of comparative data going forward.

Decisions by, and feedback from, the Programme Subcommittee

11. **The Subcommittee accepted the proposed changes to the draft provisional agenda and programme for the upcoming Regional Committee session, including adding a new technical paper and draft resolution on climate change and health and scheduling time for Member States to sign the Cairo Call to Action on Breast Cancer.** The importance of involving all relevant stakeholders, including other intergovernmental organizations, in the development of a new regional operational framework on climate change and health was emphasized. With regard to the provisional agenda and programme more generally, it was requested that any opportunities to review progress towards One Health in the Region be identified and exploited, noting that the pre-RC week might offer opportunities in this regard. **The Subcommittee agreed that both the proposed nominations for membership of WHO bodies and committees and the proposed template for collecting data on the health impact of economic sanctions should be presented to Member States.**

Closing of the session

12. 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. Overview of the provisional agenda and programme for the 72nd session of the Regional Committee and the pre-RC virtual events
3. Proposal for possible development of a regional operational framework on climate change and health
4. Proposed nominations for membership of WHO bodies and committees
5. Development of template for collecting data on the health impacts of economic sanctions
6. Closing session

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

Egypt	Dr Radi Hammad
Jordan	Ms Huda Abd ElKarim Taha Ababneh
Kuwait	Dr Al-Munther Al-Hasawi
Lebanon	Ms Hilda Harb
Oman	Dr Abdullah Hamood Al Harthy
Pakistan	Dr Shabana Saleem
Qatar	Dr Salih Ali Almarri
Tunisia	Dr Sina Haj Amor

WHO Secretariat

Dr Sussan Bassiri	Director of Business Operations
Dr Adham Ismail	Director of Programme Management
Dr Mohamed Abdi Jama	Senior Adviser (Strategy)
Ms Mira Kristina Ihalainen	Director, Communication, Resource Mobilization and Partnership (CRP)
Dr Ahmed Zouiten	Director ad interim, Department of Health Emergencies (WHE)
Dr Asmus Hammerich	Director, UHC/Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health (NMH)
Dr Benedetta Allegranzi	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)
Ms Samah Abdel Aziz	Technical Officer, Governing Bodies
Mr Amr El Tarek	Regional Adviser, Planning, Budget, Monitoring and Evaluation
Dr Valeria De Oliveira Cruz	Coordinator, Country Cooperation
Dr Osama Ali Maher	Health Operations Response Officer
Mr Omid Mohit	Senior Technical Manager, Strategic Communications for Health
Mr Maroun Karam	Administrative Services Officer
Mr Tobias Boyd	Manager (Publishing, Editorial and Graphic Design)

Mr Amarnath Das	Regional Compliance and Risk Manager
Dr Nasim Pourghazian	Technical Officer
Ms Micaela Pereira	Technical Officer
Ms Miriam Holm	Technical Officer
Ms Rita Meimari	Senior Administrative Assistant
Ms Jessica Kanawaty	Administrative Assistant
Mr Ahmed Shokry	IT Service Desk Assistant
Ms Ines Imbert	Technical Officer