World Health
Organization

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE **Eastern Mediterranean**

Brief guide to developing
national action plans to improve access to
assistive technology
using the regional strategic action framework

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CONTENTS

1. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

This document provides step-by-step guidance to developing national action plans to improve access to assistive technology through implementation of the *Regional strategic action framework to improve access to assistive technology in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean (1)*. The regional strategic action framework provides guidance to countries of the Region in designing and implementing action plans to improve access to assistive technology and it is recommended that implementation teams adapt the steps presented in this guide according to national context, situation and stage of development. The process can take place at national or subnational level *(2)*.

To increase access to assistive technology in the Region, the 63rd session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean adopted resolution EM/RC63/R.3 on Improving access to assistive technology, *(3)* which was reinforced by World Health Assembly resolution WHA71.8 on the same subject in 2018 *(4)*. To operationalize resolution EM/RC63/R.3, a rapid assessment of assistive technology needs and provision was conducted in 17[1] of the 22 countries in the Region in 2017 *(5)*. The regional strategic action framework was informed by an analysis of this assessment and the analysis is presented in a report entitled *Assistive technology in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: results of a rapid assessment.*

> **Assistive technology is a subset of health technology that refers to assistive products and related systems and services developed for people to maintain or improve functioning and thereby promote well-being. It enables people with difficulties in functioning to live healthy, productive, independent and dignified lives, participating in education, the labour market and social and political life.**

Without assistive technology, people in need are often excluded, isolated and locked into poverty, increasing the burden of morbidity and disability. In addition to its positive impact on individual health and well-being, assistive technology is a cost-effective strategy which leads to reduced health and social welfare costs and enables people with functional limitations to work and contribute to national economies and development.

Improving access to assistive technology aims to ensure the provision of sustainable sufficient quantities of safe, effective [2] and affordable assistive products and services *(6)*. It is central to expanding universal assistive technology coverage, which means that everywhere everyone receives the assistive technology they need without incurring financial hardship. To achieve this, efforts are required in the four areas of policy, products, personnel and provision:

- leadership, governance, financing, information and research (policy)
- assistive products (products)
- workforce involved in all these areas (personnel)
- service delivery (provision) *(7)*.

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[1] Afghanistan, Bahrain, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia.

[2] For an assistive product to be effective, the assistive product needs to be barrier-free and to match the user, and the environments of use need to match the assistive product.

2. REGIONAL STRATEGIC ACTION FRAMEWORK TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

The regional framework presents actions, approaches and solutions that can be used to improve access to assistive technology at the country level. It proposes actions that should be based on the most updated assessment of assistive technology in the country with the understanding that data and evidence, as well as proposed solutions to challenges, are available to inform country-level action *(8)*.

The regional framework comprises two main components: the action plan and the indicators for monitoring progress at the national level. Depending on the situation of assistive technology at country level, the framework introduces a set of actions and indicators that can be adjusted according to each country's situation.

Component A: Priority actions for improving access to assistive technology

To achieve the goal of the regional framework, actions have been proposed to achieve four strategic objectives addressing the four areas of policy, products, personnel and provision:

1. Advance the policy framework for the progressive realization of universal assistive technology coverage.
2. Increase the supply of high-quality, safe, effective and affordable assistive products.
3. Improve the availability of qualified personnel at all levels.
4. Expand the coverage of services for the provision of assistive products.

In addition, there are specific actions for policy, products, personnel and provision in emergency situations and humanitarian contexts. The current strategic framework emphasizes the need to include priority assistive products and inclusive barrier-free environments within emergency preparedness and response planning and all-hazards disaster risk management programmes *(4)*. This is relevant to all countries irrespective of their current situation as they need to be carried out before an emergency situation or humanitarian crisis arises.

Component B: Indicators for monitoring the action plan

Monitoring is a critical component to support Member States to systematically track their progress and performance in implementing their action plan to improve access to assistive technology. The monitoring component of the regional framework provides and describes a set of 18 indicators that are mapped to the strategic objectives. The indicators were developed to offer a simple (not simplistic), realistic and feasible means of collecting key data at country level. If necessary, new indicators can be developed, following the same criteria.

3. RECOMMENDED STEPS IN DEVELOPING AN ACTION PLAN

3.1 Overview of the steps

In order to improve access to assistive technology, each country needs to assess the existing situation and identify priority actions to inform the development of the action plan. This guide outlines a set of four phases with 11 steps and accompanying guidance as outlined below.

Phases	Steps
Phase 1: Initiating the action plan development process	Step 1: Prepare for the action plan development process
	Step 2: Identify stakeholders and conduct orientation for those who will be engaged in developing the action plan
	Step 3: Assess the situation of assistive technology
Phase 2: Formulating the first draft of the action plan and establishing a set of performance indicators	Step 4: Map the assessment findings to the regional framework
	Step 5: Set objectives and select priority actions and activities for interventions
	Step 6: Establish a set of monitoring indicators
Phase 3: Conducting a national consultation workshop around the draft action plan	Step 7: Prepare for a consultation workshop
	Step 8: Revise and update the first draft action plan and monitoring indicators
Phase 4: Finalizing the action plan	Step 9: Finalize the action plan and monitoring indicators
	Step 10: Obtain government approval and endorsement
	Step 11: Develop an annual operational roadmap

3.2   Phase 1: Initiating the action plan development process

Step 1: Prepare for the action plan development process

- **Identify the coordinating entity**

It is recommended that the development of a national action plan is under the responsibility of a governmental entity that coordinates the related process and steps for its development with the various stakeholders at national level. This will facilitate the development process and provide clear leadership for it. This entity would not only be responsible for coordinating the relevant activities and tasks, but also for eliciting government approval and official endorsement.

- **Identify the technical team**

The action plan development process needs a technical team to conduct the situation assessment, review its findings and develop the action plan. A national focal person/team should be officially nominated by the coordinating entity/ministry. The focal person/team should be familiarized with the regional framework and its main components. While establishing the team, clear responsibilities should be assigned to team members depending on their roles and involvement. The person/team assigned to formulate the action plan must have the skills and expertise that are necessary to develop such a document and be able to work closely with stakeholders and the coordinating entity. Details on the key responsibilities of the focal person/team are provided in Box 1.

Box 1. Key responsibilities of the focal person/team

The focal person/team will be responsible for:

- developing a methodology or work plan for the action plan development process with a specified timeframe;

- conducting mapping of stakeholders and identifying relevant key stakeholders;

- updating the list of stakeholders if new stakeholders are identified during the process;

- organizing stakeholder orientation workshop/meeting on assistive technology and the action plan development process;

- conducting an assessment of the situation of assistive technology in the country using appropriate tools, in close consultation with concerned stakeholders;

- collecting information for the assessment of the situation of assistive technology and coordinating communication and follow-up with national respondents from stakeholders using appropriate tools;

- identifying and analysing the key findings of the assistive technology assessment and developing a report based on findings to inform the development of the action plan;

- developing the first draft action plan;

- conducting a national workshop with stakeholders to review and discuss the draft action plan and validate the key findings of the assessment;

- revising and finalizing the action plan after incorporating feedback from the national workshop;

- supporting the steps related to seeking government endorsement or approval of the action plan through the appropriate channels and developing an operational roadmap for implementation.

- **Develop a methodology/work plan**

With a clear timeline for the activities, prepare a methodology for the overall process of developing a national action plan. The current document can be used as a guide to develop such methodology or work plan.

- **Identify the needed resources**

Once the team and the methodology have been established, the required resources, including the budget and human resources, need to be identified. These resources would cover activities such as conducting the situation assessment or ensuring logistical support for conducting workshops/training.

- **Conduct stakeholder mapping**

It is important to ensure that development of the action plan is an inclusive multisectoral collaborative effort among all concerned national stakeholders. The purpose of stakeholder mapping is to provide an analysis of the landscape of stakeholders involved in the provision of assistive technology in the country. Stakeholder buy-in can lead to improved policy implementation. It is also necessary to engage with them from the beginning of the process to develop an action plan. Stakeholders include concerned government sectors, nongovernmental organizations (for-profit and not-for-profit), user groups and beneficiaries. It is recommended to compile a list of essential stakeholders at the start of the process (see Box 2).

Box 2: Proposed priority key stakeholders

Government and government-affiliated entities
- Ministry of health
    - department responsible for disability, ageing, noncommunicable diseases and chronic conditions
    - departments/individuals responsible for the financing, procurement and provision of assistive technology
- Ministry of social welfare, labour, or equivalent
    - departments/individuals responsible for financing, procuring and providing assistive technology
- Ministry of finance
    - departments/individuals responsible for allocating government funds for health care and public health
- Ministry of education
- Ministry of higher education
- Other institutions and agencies linked to assistive technology based on the local context.

For-profit organizations: private companies who finance, manufacture, procure, and/or provide assistive products on a large scale
- Non-for-profit organizations: civil society organizations who procure and/or provide assistive products at a large scale (e.g. disabled persons organizations and organizations that work with people with disabilities), United Nations agencies, development partners, etc.

Other stakeholders
- Local opinion leaders or champions for assistive technology
- Charities who donate assistive products on a large scale

Stakeholders mapping should result in a list of stakeholders indicating their area of involvement within the assistive technology ecosystem and a plan to engage them during the process as illustrated below.

As the development of the action plan progresses, the list of stakeholders may need to be updated. Additional stakeholders may be identified while engaging with those who are already part of the process.

The following are the recommended steps in conducting stakeholder mapping.[3]

Identify key stakeholders

To identify key stakeholders in the process of improving access to assistive technology, prepare a list of every ministry, organization, group or individual who is concerned with assistive technology at national level. This list could be analysed based on the stakeholders' engagement, roles, perspectives and interests.

Analyse stakeholders

This includes analysing the mission of stakeholders' groups and associations and their types of engagement [4] in assistive technology, identifying what motivates their work, and assessing their capacity to engage in development and implementation of the action plan. It is helpful to speak to stakeholders to determine their potential roles and stimulate their interest when possible.

Map relationships

Map the relationships between the roles of each stakeholder and how they may contribute to the four strategic objectives of the action plan and its development and implementation.

Prioritize level of engagement

Analysing and mapping key stakeholders informs the prioritization of their involvement and influence in the assistive technology areas of policy and financing, provision, personnel and products. It is important to consider the stage and level of engagement of each stakeholder as those with high levels of influence must be prioritized for engagement at the beginning of the process.

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3   Stakeholder mapping guide: mapping potential key stakeholders in reproductive health and family planning service delivery, in preparation for implementing WHO MEC/SPR guidance. Geneva: World Health Organization (https://www.who.int/repro-ductivehealth/stakeholder-mapping-tool.pdf).

4   Type of engagement might be according to the stakeholders' area of focus within assistive technology (mobility, cognitive, hearing, communication and vision impairments, self-care, etc.) or the role of the organization (policy-making, regulatory, service provision, financing, procurement, distribution, advocacy, etc.).

- **Develop a stakeholder engagement plan**
  - With a clear list of stakeholders, develop a stakeholder engagement plan taking into consideration:
    - level of engagement [5] : from the outset (for key/essential stakeholders) or during the process of developing the action plan (for other stakeholders);
    - method of contact: in-person, phone calls, emails, etc.;
    - channels of communication: through official invitations or direct contact.
- **Conduct a stakeholders' orientation workshop/meeting on assistive technology and the action plan development process**

Engaging with relevant stakeholders from the beginning of the process is essential in developing the action plan. It is recommended that a national workshop/meeting is conducted with the participation of key stakeholders. This will help to raise their awareness of the situation of assistive technology and improve their understanding of the overall process. It also helps to create ownership.

Step 3: Assess the situation of assistive technology

- **Identify the assessment tool**

Use the WHO assistive technology capacity assessment (ATA-C) tool or any other situation analysis tool focusing on people-centred policy, products, personnel and provision to conduct an assistive technology assessment at national level. The findings will inform the development of the action plan. Use the results of the stakeholder mapping exercise to engage with the relevant stakeholders during this assessment.

The findings from this assessment will allow for a better understanding of the current landscape of assistive technology and identify challenges and opportunities to improve access.

- **Collect data and information**

Review existing national documents/reports/policies relevant to assistive technology and seek out other sources of information depending on the tool and method used for the assessment.

- **Build consensus on the findings of the situation analysis among stakeholders**

Organize a consensus-building workshop to present and discuss the assessment findings, to resolve any discrepancies in stakeholder responses and to identify elements that should be included in the action plan.

- **Develop a report on the key findings of the assessment**

A report on the key findings of the assistive technology system assessment will provide the baseline information, data and evidence for the development of the action plan.

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[5] There are three main functions taken on by stakeholders for a successful situation analysis: active and inclusive multi-stakeholder participation, decision-making, and organization and coordination. Rajan D. Situation analysis of the health sector. Chapter 3, p.12. In: Strategizing national health in the 21st century: a handbook. Geneva: World Health Oragnization; 2016 (https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/250221/9789241549745-chapter3-eng.pdf?sequence=19&isAllowed=y, accessed 19 October 2021).

3.3 Phase 2: Formulating the first draft of the action plan and the performance indicators

Based on the findings of the assistive technology assessment and drawing on the regional framework, the first draft action plan should be formulated by the focal person/team. This draft should then be further reviewed and updated by the stakeholders during a national workshop assigned at a later stage (see Phase 3). Review the proposed templates to set the structure of the action sheets and indicators (see Annex 1).

Step 4: Map the assessment findings to the regional framework

Before starting to actually develop the action plan, take some time to identify trends and the main areas for improvement, challenges and opportunities within the assistive technology system. The regional framework introduces four strategic objectives that the action plan should seek to achieve. The challenges identified during the situation analysis process, and the discussions around possible solutions to overcome those challenges, help to establish the best possible strategic objectives and recommended actions.[6]

Steps 5 and 6 provide guidance on how to start building the action plan based on the regional framework and drawing on the findings of the assessment.

Step 5: Set objectives and select priority actions and activities for interventions

- **Define the main strategic objectives**

Defining the strategic objectives is the foundation for creating the action plan to improve access to safe, effective and affordable priority assistive products in the country. Use the evidence-informed findings of the situation assessment to establish strategic objectives that correspond to each of the four domains of assistive technology: policy, products, personnel and provision.

- **With a clear rationale, define the main actions to achieve each strategic objective**

Each objective may have a set of actions that can be viewed as steps towards attainment of the defined objectives (9). An analysis of the assessment findings provides the foundation for identifying priority actions for intervention. The findings also serve to highlight any number of potential problems that require action. Setting the required actions should be done with a strong reasoning and rationale based on the findings of the assessment. The identified actions will be the basis for further discussion and prioritization by stakeholders during the national workshop (see Step 7).

Some actions in the regional framework may need to be divided into sub-actions. Consider breaking down the actions into more than one whenever this is recommended by the concerned technical team.

- **For each action, identify a set of implementation steps/activities**

In order to enable implementation of each action, a set of potential activities should be identified. The regional framework provides a series of implementation steps/activities to ensure

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6   Situation analysis of the health sector (https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/250221/9789241549745-chapter3-eng.pdf?sequence=19&isAllowed=y).

the cooperative multisectoral roles of the government, WHO and other partners. Choose and/or adapt the available implementation steps/activities to develop feasible ones according to national context and situation. The responsibility of the specific stakeholders to implement such activities must be assigned at a later stage during the national workshop (see Phase 3). This will strengthen commitment and promote performance monitoring when implementing the action plan at national level.

Step 6: Establish the monitoring indicators of the action plan

Monitoring is a critical component to support countries in systematically tracking their progress and performance in implementing their action plan. The regional framework provides and describes a set of 18 indicators that are mapped to the strategic objectives. Each indicator is developed with a description, numerator, denominator and response/unit.

- Use the proposed indicators in the regional framework and/or develop new ones.
  - Indicators developed could be drawn from the indicators of the regional framework.
  - When it is necessary to develop new indicators, meta-data will need to be provided as has been done in the regional framework with description, numerator, denominator and response unit.
  - When needed, develop a list of core indicators and an extended list of indicators as optional sources of evidence.

3.4 Phase 3: Conducting a national consultation workshop around the draft action plan

This phase involves consultation, coordination and cooperation with all potential stakeholders, including the beneficiaries. The objective of the workshop is to present and discuss the findings of the assistive technology assessment and to revise and update the first draft action plan. The aim is to generate consensus among stakeholders on the structure and content of the action plan and to discuss opportunities and constraints for its implementation. The focal person/team should update the draft action plan based on the feedback from this consultative meeting.

Step 7: Prepare for the consultation workshop

- **Identify the stakeholders who will be invited**

Based on the stakeholder mapping exercise undertaken at the beginning of the process, invite all relevant stakeholders. Ensure that the essential/key stakeholders are represented in this meeting (see Box 2). Ideally at least 50% of the stakeholders that will be invited to the consultation workshop should have participated in the assistive technology situation analysis process. Coordination between government ministries/departments and all relevant stakeholders is a key factor for the success of a multi-stakeholder action plan.

- **Develop a concept note**

A concept note for the workshop should be developed and sent to all stakeholders with an invitation letter. The concept note should include:

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7   Rajan D. Situation analysis of the health sector. Chapter 3, p.38. In: Strategizing national health in the 21st century: a hand-book. Geneva: World Health Oragnization; 2016 (https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/250221/9789241549745-chapter3-eng.pdf?sequence=19&isAllowed=y, accessed 19 October 2021).

- an introduction to assistive technology in general
- a resume of the assistive technology assessment findings
- objectives and expected outcomes of the workshop
- workshop agenda.

Step 8: Revise and update the first draft action plan and the monitoring indicators

In order to ensure that implementation of the action plan will be workable it is important to discuss and agree on any practical issues pertaining to its implementation during the consultation workshop. This includes identifying national priorities, agreeing on respective roles and responsibilities, establishing coordinating mechanisms and identifying human and financial resource needs and sources of funding. Any potential constraints and limitations, as well as factors that might work in favour of the action plan, should be considered at this stage *(1)*. Therefore, stakeholders should undertake the following steps to finalize the action plan during the workshop.

- **Discuss and agree on the strategic objectives**

Strategic objectives describe the outcomes that lead to the achievement of the goal of the action plan when it is implemented. In consultation with national stakeholders, revise the proposed strategic objectives to see if they best describe the national strategic objectives. The strategic objectives in the regional framework are descriptive (not quantified) objectives. The findings of the assessment must be reviewed by stakeholders to facilitate consensus on the action plan.

- **Prioritize the potential actions for intervention, based on a clear rationale**

The main purpose of this step is to revise and prioritize strategic actions. With the evidence-informed rationale for each action, encourage discussions around solutions to address any identified shortcomings in the assistive technology system in the country. It is recommended to prioritize the actions for intervention based on the following criteria:

- cost
- impact
- political will
- urgency
- time to execute.

Certain actions or particular policy options will be more important or feasible than others. Thus, it is preferable that decisions regarding priority areas of action are carefully analysed during the workshop.

- **Identify the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders**

During the workshop, the roles and responsibilities of each entity or stakeholder within the action plan must be identified, in line with the stakeholder mapping exercise undertaken at the beginning of the process. This could be addressed by identifying a responsible body for each action who can coordinate with other concerned stakeholders.

- **For each action, agree on a timeframe for implementation**

Identify the approximate timeframe for each action and the overall timeframe for the action plan, taking into consideration its endorsement and implementation.

- **Identify key enablers and challenges**

In consultation with stakeholders, identify the key enabling factors and challenges that may influence implementation of the action plan. These factors need to be taken into consideration while adopting and implementing the plan. This can be included in the narrative part of the action plan.

- **Define a clear coordination mechanism between stakeholders for implementation of the action plan**

The entity designated to lead implementation of the action plan tends to vary from country to country. Some countries have an assistive technology agency/department in place or have an assistive technology sector led by the ministry of health, labour, social welfare or equivalent. Until an assistive technology agency is established, the workshop represents an opportunity to agree on a lead agency to coordinate efforts for implementation of the action plan.

- **Discuss and agree on the monitoring indicators**

Stakeholders should revise the proposed indicators during the workshop and agree on the indicators that will be used to track the progress of the strategic objectives.

3.5   Phase 4: Finalizing the action plan

Step 9: Finalize the action plan and monitoring indicators

Based on the feedback received during the national workshop, update and finalize the action plan with clear strategic objectives, priority actions and their rationale, responsibilities and timeframe.

The monitoring indicators should also be updated and finalized based on the feedback from the national consultation workshop. This should include indicator description, measurement/calculation and the source of the information to enable such measurement.

Step 10: Obtain government approval and endorsement

The formal process for government approval of the action plan depends on the situation and context in each country. This step will have started by obtaining consensus among the stakeholders during the consultation workshop. Based on this consensus, the focal person/team should go through the official routes to seek approval.

Identify the formal approval process that the action plan needs to go through to be officially endorsed by the government based on the country regulations. When seeking government approval, the fact that the person/team nominated to develop the action plan is officially assigned by the government is an advantage *(1)*.

Step 11: Develop an annual operational roadmap

The implementation of the formally endorsed action plan entails the development of an annual operational roadmap, which includes the specific steps to implement the activities in the endorsed plan.

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ANNEX 1

PROPOSED STRUCTURE/TEMPLATE FOR THE ACTION PLAN

Strategic objective 1: Policy						
Actions	Rationale	Activities	Responsibility		Timetable	Monitoring indicators
			Main	Contributing		

Strategic objective 2: Products						
Actions	Rationale	Activities	Responsibility		Timetable	Monitoring indicators
			Main	Contributing		

Strategic objective 3: Personnel						
Actions	Rationale	Activities	Responsibility		Timetable	Monitoring indicators
			Main	Contributing		

Strategic objective 4: Provision						
Actions	Rationale	Activities	Responsibility		Timetable	Monitoring indicators
			Main	Contributing		

Specific actions for emergency situations and humanitarian contexts						
Actions	Rationale	Activities	Responsibility		Timetable	Monitoring indicators
			Main	Contributing		

ANNEX 2

PROPOSED STRUCTURE/TEMPLATE FOR THE MONITORING INDICATORS

Strategic objective 1: Policy				
Indicator name	Description	Numerator	Denominator	Response/Unit

Strategic objective 2: Products				
Indicator name	Description	Numerator	Denominator	Response/Unit

Strategic objective 3: Personnel				
Indicator name	Description	Numerator	Denominator	Response/Unit

Strategic objective 4: Provision				
Indicator name	Description	Numerator	Denominator	Response/Unit

Specific actions for emergency situations and humanitarian contexts				
Indicator name	Description	Numerator	Denominator	Response/Unit