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## **Report of the seventh 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 seventh meeting on 16–17 February 2020 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.<sup>1</sup>

Chair: Dr Malik Muhammad Safi (Pakistan)  
Vice-Chair: Dr Hilda Harb (Lebanon)  
Rapporteur: Dr Shaker Abdulaziz Alomary (Saudi Arabia)

4. An overview of the Programme Subcommittee was presented, including its establishment, terms of reference, and membership and meetings. This was followed by an introduction to the objectives of the seventh meeting. The main objective of the meeting was to discuss the technical agenda for the 67th session of the Regional Committee, to be held at the WHO Regional Office in Cairo. Members would also receive updates and be consulted on some other important issues.

5. It was noted that following the recommendations of the fifth meeting of the Subcommittee, a range of innovations had been introduced for the 66th session of the Regional Committee in 2019. An overall theme had been introduced to make the session more coherent; presentations of technical items had been improved through training of presenters, better graphics and extensive use of short videos; an exhibition of country success stories demonstrating innovative health initiatives in the Region had been created to accompany the session; and the printing of documentation had been minimized to produce a “paperless” meeting.

6. These new arrangements had been well received. An electronic poll of attendees in the closing session (itself an innovation) had revealed very high levels of satisfaction with the Regional Committee session, and the Secretariat staff involved had also been impressed by the level of Member State engagement and the efforts made by the host team from the Islamic Republic of Iran.

7. However, the Secretariat were keen to try to make the 67th session even better. Some further potential innovations were therefore being explored, in particular having a keynote address by a high-profile speaker (see paragraph 15 below), the addition of an update on WHO transformation as a new standing item on the Regional Committee agenda (paragraph 17), and more use of exhibitions and other innovative ways of presenting material in the margins of the Committee session (paragraph 20).

8. Furthermore, the Secretariat proposed to undertake an evaluation of the Programme Subcommittee by seeking the views of current and past members regarding their role and how the Secretariat might best support them.

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<sup>1</sup> See EM/RC63/8 Rev.1

## **Preliminary outline of the 67th session of the Regional Committee**

9. An outline of the proposed agenda for the 67th session of the Regional Committee was presented to the Programme Subcommittee. A list of the proposed topics for the different agenda items was shared with participants, as well as brief proposals for each topic. The 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. Further potential topics were discussed along with those that had been presented.

10. The proposals fell under four broad areas: a) technical papers for the Regional Committee; b) pre-Regional Committee technical sessions; c) panel discussions to be held either before or during the Committee session; and d) side events, exhibitions and other initiatives to be held in the margins of the Regional Committee session. It was explained that every potential Regional Committee technical paper: (1) should address an important public health need in the Region; (2) should not have been discussed recently in a Regional Committee session; (3) should be sufficiently ready, in terms of completeness of data and proposed actions, to be the subject of a Regional Committee resolution which (4) had the scope to lead to a genuine positive impact on health in countries of the Region. By contrast, pre-Regional Committee technical sessions typically addressed important topics, but ones where data was incomplete or proposed actions still required technical consultation; they were thus not ready to form the basis of a Regional Committee resolution, but might well in due course be developed into a technical paper and related draft resolution for consideration at a subsequent Committee session.

11. The topics agreed by the Programme Subcommittee are listed in Annex 3.

12. The Subcommittee also discussed a possible theme for the 67th session of the Committee and agreed in principle that preparedness would be a suitable theme.

### *Preliminary outline of the main Regional Committee session*

13. Five potential topics for technical papers were proposed to the Subcommittee by the Secretariat. Four of those papers were accepted onto the agenda and an additional topic, addressing the public health dimensions of mass gatherings, was added to address long-standing concerns among Member States. The Subcommittee provided detailed feedback and suggestions on each proposal, to be taken into account by technical teams in drafting papers.

14. One topic for a potential technical paper was proposed but not accepted to avoid overcrowding the Regional Committee agenda: the regional strategy for the improvement of health information systems including civil registration and vital statistics systems, 2020–24. While members agreed that this was a very important topic, it was felt that it might be reasonable to present the new strategy for endorsement by Regional Committee without a technical paper as there had been detailed liaison with technical staff within countries in developing the strategy. This approach had been followed for endorsement of some previous regional strategies, most recently the endorsement of a new regional nutrition strategy by the 66th session of the Regional Committee in October 2019.

15. It was agreed that several other items of new business should be included in the main Regional Committee agenda. There should be a panel discussion on nursing to highlight progress and challenges in developing the nursing workforce in the Region during the International Year of Nurses and Midwives. This would be in addition to a planned keynote address by a high-profile speaker on this subject.

16. A second panel discussion, on the social determinants of health, was also proposed, but it was felt that this was unnecessary. However, the main Committee session would see the launch of a major report by the regional Commission on Social Determinants of Health which was appointed in 2019 under the chairmanship of Professor Sir Michael Marmot.

17. There would also be some changes with regard to the updates that were presented to the Regional Committee. The Committee normally received two updates, on polio eradication and health emergencies. It was agreed that this year's emergencies update should include a strong focus on preparedness and an

assessment of the response to the global COVID 19 outbreak across the Region. Furthermore, a third update should be added as a standing item of business to keep Member States informed about, and engaged with, the ongoing WHO transformation process.

#### *Preliminary outline of pre-Regional Committee meetings*

18. The Subcommittee considered six potential topics for pre-RC technical sessions and accepted four of them. Of the two topics that were not accepted, it was felt that one, applying the humanitarian–development–peace nexus in health systems recovery, did not require a technical discussion as it was already subject to extensive consultation with country experts. The other topic, addressing the public health dimensions of mass gatherings, should be covered as a technical paper in the main Regional Committee session to maximize the opportunity for ministers of health to participate.

19. The Subcommittee also accepted a proposal to hold two panel discussions as part of the pre-RC session.

#### *Side events, exhibitions, etc.*

20. The Subcommittee considered 10 proposals for side events and other initiatives to be held in the margins of the Regional Committee session. It was noted that scheduling side events was challenging for every Regional Committee session. There was always strong demand to cover many different topics, but this could be counterproductive, eating into lunchtimes and evenings when delegates also needed to study documents, consult colleagues and network. The Secretariat therefore proposed to try to innovate in presenting issues in the margins of the Committee session. Some of the proposed topics were best covered in the traditional side event meeting format; some others might take the form of posters, videos, booths or mini-exhibitions within a “marketplace” that delegates could visit at any time during the session. Annex 3 lists provisional suggestions for the presentation of different topics.

### **Other issues for the Subcommittee’s consideration**

#### *Establishment of Polio Committee*

21. The Secretariat sought and received the Programme Subcommittee’s approval to propose the creation of a new committee to oversee the fight against poliomyelitis in the Region. The new committee would aim to galvanize action among Member States to go the final mile in eradicating polio and would also help to coordinate polio transition. It would include representatives from the two Member States where wild poliovirus cases were still being reported as well as several other Member States. The proposal to create the new committee would therefore be presented to the Regional Committee for approval.

#### *Granting accreditation to regional non-State actors not in official relations with WHO*

22. The Secretariat sought and received the Subcommittee’s approval to present a proposal to Regional Committee for a procedure for granting accreditation to non-State actors not in official relations with WHO which would grant those actors the right to attend and speak at Regional Committee sessions. The Secretariat explained that non-State actors had sometimes attended Committee sessions and contributed to discussions. In principle, engagement with a range of stakeholders could be welcome and useful, but in line with WHO’s Framework of Engagement with non-State Actors there should be a transparent process for considering and vetting applicant entities to ensure that access to sessions was open to interested and relevant parties on a fair basis while avoiding potential conflicts of interest.

23. The Regional Office should therefore develop a procedure with clear criteria. If that procedure were approved by Regional Committee, applications would be invited from relevant non-State actors with a presence in the Region. Colleagues from WHO headquarters would support the process by undertaking due diligence of applicant entities, and Member State feedback might be sought as part of that due diligence, but in any case the proposed list of accredited entities would in due course be presented to Regional Committee for approval. It was also emphasized that the procedure would only grant entities the right to attend and speak at Regional Committee sessions, not to vote; and accreditation would not involve or imply authorization to undertake any particular programmes of work.

### *Extension and redevelopment of the Regional Office*

24. The Secretariat sought and received the Subcommittee's approval to present a proposal to the Regional Committee to redevelop and extend the Regional Office in Cairo. It was explained that the current office building occupied only half the available site space, and foundations were already in place to extend it. The Secretariat would like to build a one-storey extension; this would provide sufficient room for the WHO Emergencies Programme staff on one floor, and there would also be space for a new, larger, Kuwait Conference Hall to accommodate expanded Member State delegations and attendance by a wide range of stakeholders. If the Regional Committee approved the Secretariat's proposal, it would then require approval by the World Health Assembly. At that stage, approval would also be sought to cover the cost from the real estate component of WHO's Infrastructure Fund.

### *Review of Regional Committee resolutions*

25. The Secretariat provided an update on the ongoing review of the implementation of Regional Committee resolutions. Work on this had begun in 2019 and been discussed at the fifth and sixth meetings of the Subcommittee. In line with a global approach endorsed in WHA decision 72(22) of 2019, the Subcommittee had decided that future Regional Committee resolutions should have clear reporting requirements and a clear end date; typically, resolutions should have a six-year lifespan and include a requirement to report on progress to the Committee every two years. Furthermore, wherever possible indicators should be specified, drawn from among WHO's existing frameworks of recommended indicators, to monitor progress in relation to specific Member State or Secretariat obligations; and progress reports should be made as clear as reasonably possible, for example through the use of traffic lights to show country progress.

26. Alongside this work to improve resolutions and progress reports going forward, the Secretariat had also undertaken a review of existing resolutions with the aim of retiring those that had become obsolete. In line with the WHA decision, resolutions older than six years had been reviewed in early 2019 to identify those with continuing reporting requirements. In principle, it should be possible and desirable to retire most resolutions at the six-year point. Where a resolution required indicators to be monitored, that monitoring process might continue as part of the relevant programme. However, as a general rule, substantive obligations on either the Secretariat and Member States should not continue indefinitely; retirement of each resolution after six years provided an opportunity to review the relevant area of work and provide a fresh resolution if necessary.

27. The Secretariat sought and received the Subcommittee's approval to continue the review of resolutions and report on progress at the Subcommittee's next meeting, scheduled to take place during the 67th session of the Regional Committee in October 2020.

### **Closing of the session**

28. 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 2020 – February 2021)
5. Preliminary outline of the 67th session of the Regional Committee, including proposals for pre-RC sessions, technical papers and side events
6. Other issues for the Subcommittee's consideration
7. Closing session

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

Lebanon	Dr Hilda Harb
Morocco	Dr Abdelmajid Sahnoun
Oman	Dr Fatma Al Hinai
Pakistan	Dr Malik Muhammad Safi
Saudi Arabia	Dr Shaker Abdulaziz Alomary
Somalia	Dr Abdirizak Yusuf Ahmed
Tunisia	Dr Mohamed Hedi Loueslati

*WHO Secretariat*

Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari	Regional Director
Dr Rana Hajjeh	Director, Programme Management
Dr Syed Jaffar Hussain	Chef de Cabinet
Mr Hatem Adel El Khodary	Director of Business Operations
Dr Asmus Hammerich	Director, UHC/Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health
Dr Yvan J.-f. Hutin	Director, UHC/Communicable Disease Control
Dr Ramez Mahaini	Coordinator, Reproductive and Maternal Health
Dr Awad Mataria	Director, UHC/Health System Development
Dr Arash Rashidian	Director, Science, Information and Dissemination
Dr Dalia Samhouri	Programme Area Manager, Country Health Emergency Preparedness and IHR
Dr Ahmad Basel Al-Yousfi*	Director, Centre for Environmental Health Action, CEHA, Amman
Dr Rayana Ahmed Bou Haka	Manager, Country Focus Support
Mr Jaafar Jaffal	Regional Adviser, Planning, Budget, Monitoring and Evaluation
Mr Amarnath Das	Regional Compliance and Risk Manager
Dr Hala Khudari	Technical Officer, Director of Programme Management's Office
Dr Ruth Mabry	Technical Officer, Regional Director's Office

Mr Toby Boyd	Manager, Publishing, Editorial and Graphic Design
Ms Hala El Shazly	Administration Officer
Ms Samah Abdel Aziz	Senior Administrative Assistant
Mr Kareem El Hadary	IT Service Desk Administrator

\*via VC

### Annex 3. List of topics agreed for the 67th session of the Regional Committee

Lead(s)	Proposed title	Comments
<b>RC technical papers</b>		
NMH	Action to control tobacco now (ACT NOW)	
HSD	Regional strategy to improve access to medicines and vaccines in the Eastern Mediterranean Region	
HSD	Framework for action to promote the health of migrants, refugees and displaced populations in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, 2020–23	
DCD	Eastern Mediterranean Region End TB Strategic Plan, 2021–25	
WHE	Addressing the public health dimensions of mass gatherings	Pending confirmation with WHE director
<b>RC panel event</b>		
HSD	The International Year of the Nurse and Midwife: progress and acceleration	
<b>RC launch event</b>		
DHP	Launch of the report of the Regional Commission on the Social Determinants of Health	
<b>Pre-RC technical sessions</b>		
SID	Digital health and innovation	
CEHA	Occupational safety and health for health care workers in the Eastern Mediterranean Region	
DCD	Regional strategy for malaria and other vector-borne diseases, 2021–25	
WHE	Managing conflict-related trauma in the Eastern Mediterranean Region	
<b>Pre-RC panel discussion</b>		
NMH	From evidence to policy: implementing the regional framework on cancer prevention and control	
HSD	The impact of economic sanctions on health systems and the health of populations in the Eastern Mediterranean Region	
<b>Side events, exhibitions, etc.</b>		
HSD	Implementing the UHC Political Declaration of the 74th session of the UN General Assembly	Side event
DCD	Gavi, the vaccine alliance, and the Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria	Side event
DCD	Regional progress in hepatitis elimination and opportunities for rapid scale-up	Side event
POL	Progress on polio transition	Side event
SID	ICD11 and ICHI orientation	Booth
SID	Implementation of WHO guidelines in the Eastern Mediterranean Region	Booth
NMH	Mental health in the Eastern Mediterranean Region	Exhibition/display
NMH	Be Healthy, Be Mobile – a digital initiative to accelerate progress in NCD prevention and control	Exhibition/display
NMH	The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control	Exhibition/display plus some mention of the 15 <sup>th</sup> anniversary during RC