

Progress report on implementation of the regional strategic framework for blood safety and availability 2016–2025

Introduction

1. In October 2016, the 63rd session of the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean adopted resolution EM/RC63/R.5 endorsing the regional strategic framework for blood safety and availability 2016–2025 and its framework for action.
2. In the resolution, the Committee urged Member States to: (a) take the necessary steps to establish effective and sustainable blood transfusion services, with appropriate legislation and regulatory mechanisms and dedicated budget lines, and to develop national strategic and operational plans based on the strategic framework; (b) establish effective coordination and collaboration mechanisms among all relevant stakeholders in the public and private sectors; (c) establish, implement and support a national quality management system throughout the blood transfusion chain; (d) take the necessary steps to ensure regular voluntary non-remunerated donation of blood and blood components, and improve public education, donor motivation, mobilization and retention and all other elements to ensure a safe and sustainable donor programme; (e) develop competent human resource capacity through the provision of initial and continuing education and training of all staff involved in the vein-to-vein chain; and (f) establish a mechanism for the integration of blood and plasma programmes, aimed at optimizing the use of recovered and source plasma for fractionation.
3. The Committee also requested WHO to: (a) provide support to Member States to develop national strategic and operational plans based on the strategic framework; (b) foster coordination and collaboration with all relevant stakeholders and partners; and (c) monitor the progress achieved in implementing the strategic framework and report on it to the Regional Committee on a biennial basis.
4. Cognizant of the role of access to safe and quality-assured blood and blood products in benefiting one billion more people with universal health coverage and in protecting one billion more people from health emergencies, implementation of the framework has focused on five priority interventions: leadership and governance; coordination and collaboration; provision of safe products; appropriate clinical use; and quality management systems.
5. This report provides a progress update on implementation by Member States and WHO during the second two years of the 10-year framework, as well as challenges and the way forward.

Progress update

Strengthening organization, leadership and governance of national blood systems

6. In line with the regional framework and WHO's guidance on the management of blood and blood components as essential medicines, WHO has been supporting countries to strengthen regulation of national blood systems: Afghanistan has developed a national blood policy; Morocco has initiated evaluation of the implementation of the national blood transfusion strategy 2012–2016; Sudan has developed national guidelines on appropriate clinical use of blood; Lebanon has initiated a review of the national blood system; and Pakistan has strengthened the blood system reform programme. WHO also supported Somalia in the establishment of a national blood centre and Egypt in initiating mechanisms for the use of plasma for fractionation. In addition, the Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, in collaboration with the WHO Collaborating Centre for Research and Training in Blood Safety in the Islamic Republic of Iran, organized a workshop on leadership and governance of national blood systems in 2018.

Supporting coordination and collaboration

7. In line with the Regional Director's *Vision 2023*, the Regional Office is working closely with WHO collaborating centres in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Tunisia and United Arab Emirates. This includes collaboration with the centre in the Islamic Republic of Iran to prepare the regional status report on blood safety and availability, develop a report on the analysis of 15-year data on blood safety and availability in the Region, organize capacity-building workshops, and facilitate study visits for key staff from the Safe Blood Transfusion Programme of Pakistan and the National Blood Transfusion Service of Libya.

8. Several collaborative activities were conducted in the areas of organization and governance of blood systems, blood donor management, quality management systems and rational use of blood. Activities were conducted with: the Arab Authority for Blood Transfusion Services, under the Arab League; regional professional societies including the Arab Transfusion Medicine Forum, the Africa Society for Blood Transfusion, the Asian Association of Transfusion Medicine, the International Society of Blood Transfusion and the AABB (formerly the American Association of Blood Banks); patient associations including the Hemophilia Eastern Mediterranean Network, the World Federation of Hemophilia and the Thalassaemia International Federation; and other international and regional partners including the WHO Blood Regulators Network, European Blood Alliance, Paul-Ehrlich-Institut, International Haemovigilance Network, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, International Plasma and Fractionation Association, and International Council for Commonality in Blood Banking Automation.

Strengthening the provision of safe blood and blood products to meet patients' needs

9. To improve access to adequate supply of safe blood and blood products through regular, voluntary and non-remunerated blood donations, WHO has initiated and promoted the establishment of blood donor management programmes in countries. Following a regional training workshop on blood donor management conducted in Amman, Jordan in 2016 and a national workshop conducted in Pakistan in 2017, a national training workshop was conducted in Egypt in March 2018 with 27 participants from all governorates to address gaps in knowledge and skills identified through a comprehensive assessment. The plan to conduct an additional three national training workshops in countries has not been implemented, due to lack of funds.

10. The availability and safety of blood transfusion during humanitarian emergencies remains a major concern in the Region. In this regard, WHO has provided technical assistance to affected countries (Afghanistan, Libya, Iraq, Somalia and Yemen) to implement the recommendations of the regional consultation on the availability and safety of blood transfusion during humanitarian emergencies held in 2016.¹ This includes development of a two- to three-year plan of action to address gaps identified in the national blood systems of affected countries and advocating for the inclusion of blood transfusion in national emergency preparedness and response plans. In addition, national workshops were organized in 2019 to support the blood systems of Iraq and Yemen.

11. In order to support countries to optimize the use of plasma for fractionation, reduce plasma wastage and facilitate integration of blood and plasma programmes, a workshop on plasma fractionation was organized in 2018 in collaboration with the WHO Collaborating Centre for Transfusion Management in Tunisia.²

12. The supply, safety, quality and rational use of blood and blood products remained a focus during the reporting period. With contributions from health ministries and other relevant stakeholders in the Region, WHO updated its recommendations on screening of donated blood for transfusion-transmissible infections, integrated the WHO assessment criteria for blood regulatory systems into the WHO Global Benchmarking Tool for assessment of national regulatory systems, and launched WHO's *Action framework to advance universal access to safe, effective and quality-assured blood products 2020–2023*. In addition, the WHO Task Force on Donation and Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues was established in 2018, which includes

¹ Summary report on the regional consultation on the availability and safety of blood transfusion during humanitarian emergencies. Cairo: WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean; 2016 (http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/249542/IC_Meet_Rep_2016_EN_18967.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y).

² Participants from Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia.

six Member States from the Eastern Mediterranean Region (Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and United Arab Emirates).

13. World Blood Donor Day was marked throughout the Region in 2018 and 2019. The Regional Office collaborated with WHO headquarters in the development of the theme, slogan and campaign materials for these global public health days. In collaboration with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, month-long blood donation campaigns were successfully conducted during Ramadan throughout the Region in 2018.

Promoting appropriate clinical use of blood and blood products

14. Inappropriate use of blood, unsafe transfusion practices and a lack of effective patient blood management programmes continue to be major concerns in the Region. WHO and the International Society of Blood Transfusion are updating the guidelines on the clinical use of blood to meet the need for appropriate guidance. Efforts are ongoing in countries to establish a mechanism for clinical governance of blood transfusion services at the hospital level through the establishment of hospital transfusion committees.

Strengthening quality system management throughout the blood transfusion chain

15. Quality system management remains suboptimal in most countries of the Region. WHO is encouraging countries to establish appropriate quality management systems and standardized procedures for blood supply and transfusion systems through participation in assessment programmes, including regional external quality assessments for testing of transfusion-transmissible infections and blood group serology, and accreditation.

Challenges

16. One major challenge in implementation of the strategic framework is the low priority given to establishing effective, adequately funded and sustainable blood supply and transfusion systems, with appropriate regulatory mechanisms and proper organization, at the national level.

17. Similarly, inadequate attention is given to the role of access to affordable and quality-assured blood and blood products, including during emergencies, for achieving universal health coverage and protecting people in emergencies.

18. Insufficient efforts are being made to ensure regular voluntary non-remunerated donation of blood and blood components, and to establish effective and sustainable blood donor management programmes.

19. There is continued wastage of recovered plasma due to a lack of integration of blood and plasma programmes and absence of national or regional mechanisms for plasma fractionation in most countries.

20. Overall, a lack of adequate resources at the three levels of WHO has affected the provision of sustained and coordinated technical support to Member States to implement the regional strategic framework for blood safety and availability.

The way forward

21. Member States are urged to continue taking action to accelerate implementation of the strategic framework with a focus on updating the organization of their national blood systems, ensuring adequate and sustainable financing and establishing appropriate regulatory systems for the management of blood and blood products. These are essential medicines and an integral part of efforts toward universal health coverage.

22. Member States should continue to promote and support the establishment of effective blood donor management programmes and to promote regular voluntary non-remunerated donations, including converting family replacement donors to regular voluntary non-remunerated donors.

23. Member States should facilitate the development of national and regional capacity for plasma fractionation to optimize the use of plasma and reduce its wastage.

24. WHO has reorganized the blood programme at the Regional Office under the unit for Access to Medicines and Health Technologies, in the department of Universal Health Coverage/Health Systems, to facilitate coordination with related programmes to advance the implementation of the regional and global action frameworks. Expanding the scope of the blood programme to include other products of human origin, including organs, tissues and cells, will further facilitate alignment of regional work with global efforts in the management of donation and use of these products.

25. WHO will continue to provide Member States with sustained and coordinated guidance as well as technical support to scale up implementation of the regional strategic framework, and will provide the next progress report at the 69th session of the Regional Committee in 2022.