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## **Report of the tenth 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 tenth meeting on 10–11 February 2021 as a virtual meeting through videoconferencing technology. 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 Mohamed Abdi Jama (Somalia)  
Vice-Chair: Dr Amel Alfatih (Sudan)  
Rapporteur: Dr Rana Muhammad Safdar (Pakistan)

4. An overview of the Programme Subcommittee was presented, including its establishment, terms of reference, and membership and meetings. It was noted that the Programme Subcommittee played a crucial role in ensuring that Regional Committee business focused on priority issues for countries. The active engagement of members had enabled many successful innovations in conducting Regional Committee sessions in recent years, including the conduct of a fully virtual 67th Regional Committee session in October 2020.
5. The objectives of the tenth meeting were introduced. The main objective of the meeting was to discuss the technical agenda for the 68th session of the Regional Committee. Provisionally, the session would be held as a full-length face-to-face session at the WHO Regional Office in Cairo, but it might prove necessary to adopt alternative arrangements if severe disruption from the pandemic continued. If need be, further meetings of the Subcommittee would be convened in the spring and/or summer to discuss arrangements for a fully virtual or hybrid session.

### **Preliminary outline of the 68th session of the Regional Committee**

6. An outline of the proposed agenda for the 68th session of the Regional Committee was presented to the Programme Subcommittee. An overarching theme was proposed: “Rebuilding better and fairer: stronger systems, resilient communities, 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.
7. 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

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

positive impact on health in countries of the Region. By contrast, 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.

8. The topics agreed by the Programme Subcommittee are listed in Annex 3. It was noted that, in addition to these topics, the Regional Committee agenda would also include several items of statutory business, including the annual report of the Regional Director, progress reports on implementing certain resolutions, reports on items of business from WHO's global governing bodies, and several other standing items. These statutory items would include the first meeting of the Regional Subcommittee for Polio Eradication and Outbreaks, established via resolution EM/RC67/R.4 at the 67th session of the Regional Committee.

#### *Regional Committee technical papers*

9. 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 they also reflected the increasing emphasis on collaboration across technical departments and programmes to facilitate lasting positive impact in countries. All four proposals were accepted onto the agenda. The Subcommittee provided detailed feedback and suggestions on each proposal, to be taken into account by technical teams in drafting papers. It was noted that risk communications would be highlighted as a key element of building resilient communities.

#### *Panel discussions*

10. It was agreed that the Regional Committee agenda should also include three panel discussions proposed by the Secretariat. Some panel discussions might be held during the main Regional Committee session, if time allowed, whereas others would need to be scheduled for before the main session. While each technical paper would generally be expected to support a draft resolution for the Regional Committee's consideration, panel discussions allowed multiple perspectives to be heard on key issues. All three agreed discussion topics – building resilient health systems, progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and operationalizing the recommendations of the regional Commission on Social Determinants of Health – were urgent matters which required wide-ranging and long-term action. It was felt that the panel discussion topics might well give rise to technical papers and draft resolutions for consideration at future sessions of the Regional Committee.

#### *Pre-Regional Committee meetings*

11. The Subcommittee accepted four proposed topics for pre-RC technical sessions.

#### *Side events*

12. The Subcommittee accepted five proposals for side events to be held in the margins of the Regional Committee session. These included the regular annual updates on Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, plus three other events highlighting topics that required concerted regional input to support global initiatives.

13. 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, disrupting lunchtimes and evenings when delegates also needed to study documents, consult colleagues and network. However, it was felt that additional side events on human resources for health and mental health should be considered if time could be found in the agenda. These were likely to be mentioned during the main Regional Committee session, for example in the discussion of the Regional Director's annual report, and also featured among the topics for marketplace exhibitions (with mental health services being a prominent area for digital innovation during the pandemic), but might also be well served by dedicated side events.

*“Marketplace” topics*

14. In addition to side events, it was proposed to showcase a wide range of other issues and developments through innovative means including exhibitions, videos, demonstrations and more. The 66th Regional Committee session in Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran, had featured a well-received exhibition of country success stories, and the Secretariat were keen to take advantage of the extra space available with the WHO Regional Office as the venue for the 68th session, as well as the availability of many technical staff, to present more topics of interest within a “marketplace” which Member State delegations could visit during breaks and in the evening. It was noted that the Secretariat would be responsible for developing and coordinating all such presentations, but there would be a strong focus on developments at country level, including many examples of success and innovation in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic from across the Region.

**Closing of the session**

15. 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 2021 – February 2022)
5. Preliminary outline of the 68th session of the Regional Committee, including proposals for pre-RC sessions, technical papers, side events and other events/exhibitions
6. Closing session

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

Egypt	Dr Ahmed ElSobky
Pakistan	Dr Rana Muhammad Safdar
Saudi Arabia	Dr Shaker Abdulaziz Alomary
Somalia	Dr Mohamed Abdi Jama
Sudan	Dr Amel Alfatih
Tunisia	Dr Fâÿçal Ben Salah
United Arab Emirates	Dr Hussain Alrand
Yemen	Dr Mohammed Mustafa Rajamanar

*WHO Secretariat*

Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari	Regional Director
Dr Rana Hajjeh	Director of Programme Management
Dr Syed Jaffar Hussain	Chef de Cabinet (CdC)
Mr Hatem Adel El Khodary	Director of Business Operations
Dr Rick Brennan	Director of Health Emergencies (WHE)
Dr Maha El-Adawy	Director, Healthier Populations (DHP)
Dr Amir Hassan	Director, Communication, Resource Mobilization and Partnership (CRP)
Dr Asmus Hammerich	Director, UHC/Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health (NMH)
Dr Yvan J.-f. Hutin	Director, UHC/Communicable Disease Control (DCD)
Dr Awad Mataria	Director, UHC/Health System Development (UHS)
Dr Arash Rashidian	Director, Science, Information and Dissemination (SID)
Dr Hamid Syed Jafari	Director, Polio Eradication
Dr Ahmad Basel Al-Yousfi	Director, Climate Change, Health and Environment
Dr Rayana Ahmed Bou Haka	Manager, Country Cooperation and Collaboration
Dr Dalia Samhouri	Programme Area Manager, Country Health Emergency Preparedness and IHR
Mr Jaafar Jaffal	Regional Adviser, Planning, Budget, Monitoring and Evaluation
Mr Amarnath Das	Regional Compliance and Risk Manager

Mr Toby Boyd	Manager, Publishing, Editorial and Graphic Design
Dr Jamal Nasher	Technical Officer, Chef de Cabinet's Office
Dr Thamer Al-Hilfi	Technical Officer, Chef de Cabinet's Office
Ms Hala Khudari	Technical Officer, Director of Programme Management's Office
Ms Hala El Shazly	Administration Officer, Regional Director's Office
Ms Samah Abdel Aziz	Senior Administrative Assistant, Governing Bodies

### Annex 3. List of topics agreed for the 68th session of the Regional Committee

Department	Proposed item
<b>Technical papers</b>	
WHE/UHS	Accelerating health emergency preparedness and response – a plan of action
DCD/WHE/SID	A regional strategy for integrated disease surveillance – overcoming data fragmentation in the Eastern Mediterranean Region
DHP/WHE	Building resilient communities for better health and well-being
NMH	Addressing diabetes as a public health challenge in the Eastern Mediterranean Region
<b>Panel discussions</b>	
UHS/WHE	Shaping the future of health systems in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: advancing the dual goals of universal health coverage and health security
CdC	A decade of action on the Sustainable Development Goals in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: progress, challenges and way forward
DHP	Build back fairer: achieving health equity in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (the report of the Commission on Social Determinants of Health in the Eastern Mediterranean Region)
<b>Pre-RC technical sessions</b>	
DCD	Integrated strategies for multi-disease elimination
SID	Global Strategy on Digital health (GSDH) 2020–2024: a framework for action in the Eastern Mediterranean Region
UHS	Strategy to promote the health of refugees and migrants in the Eastern Mediterranean Region
WHE	Strengthening trauma care in humanitarian settings in the Eastern Mediterranean Region
<b>Side events</b>	
DCD	The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria: special focus on strategic directions to accelerate ending tuberculosis in countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region
DCD	Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance and immunization
DHP	The Decade of Healthy Ageing (2020–2030) – an opportunity to improve the lives of older people, families and communities
SID	Measuring and verifying excess mortality during a pandemic
DPM	Polio transition: integrated public health teams
<b>Marketplace: exhibitions, booths, press releases and other innovative ways to showcase important issues and developments</b>	
DCD	Strengthening infection prevention and control (IPC) in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: an urgent need
SID/NMH	Digital innovations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, with special emphasis on ensuring the continuity of disease prevention and control in the Eastern Mediterranean Region
SID	Implementing the eleventh revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) in countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region
UHS	The role of the private health sector in maintaining essential health services during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: lessons learned
UHS	Strengthening hospital resilience: hospitals' experiences combating COVID-19 in the Eastern Mediterranean Region
NMH	Celebrating and recognizing the 16th anniversary of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control
UHS	2021 – International Year of Health and Care Workers: investing in health workforce
WHE	Deployment of Epidemic Intelligence from Open Sources (EIOS) in countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region
WHE	Complex trauma and mass casualty management in humanitarian settings
WHE	Early detection of, confirmation of and response to high-threat pathogens
WHE	Improved information management for health emergencies (EOC)
CRP	Communications showcase: highlighting its importance in the COVID-19 pandemic
CdC	The Regional Health Alliance
CRP	Country success stories in responding to COVID-19