



Progress report on the regional framework for action on climate change

Introduction

1. This report provides an update on progress made in implementing Regional Committee resolution EM/RC64/R.3 on climate change and health: a framework for action, adopted in 2017.
2. Climate change is impacting human lives and health in a variety of ways. It threatens the essential ingredients of good health – clean air, safe drinking water, nutritious food supply and safe shelter – and has the potential to undermine decades of progress in global health.
3. The WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region is the second worst-affected WHO region (after the African Region) in terms of the adverse health impacts of climate change, although its contribution to climate change is limited, given its historical emissions of greenhouse gases. In 2019, the Seventy-Second World Health Assembly, in WHA72(10), launched a new plan of action on climate change and health in small island developing States (SIDS). As no SIDS exist in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (Bahrain is not one of the least developed countries), no country in the Region has been eligible to benefit from this initiative. However, several countries in the Region are vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change on health, including those affected by coastal zone cyclones and seawater intrusion, water scarcity, food insecurity, dust and sand storms, heat waves and other severe weather episodes such as droughts and floods.
4. In 2017, the 64th session of the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean adopted resolution EM/RC64/R.3 on climate change and health: a framework for action, in which it endorsed the framework for action on climate change and health in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (2017–2021).
5. In the resolution, the Committee called on Member States to: 1) designate and empower a national health and climate change focal point to facilitate and coordinate the development of the public health response to climate change; 2) increase the climate resilience of health systems, including through the integration of surveillance, early warning systems and management of the impact of climate change on health outcomes; and 3) ensure support for health and climate action by engaging the health community, relevant sectors and other stakeholders in mitigation of and adaptation to climate change.
6. Resolution EM/RC64/R.3 also requested the Regional Director to report on progress in the implementation of the regional framework for action to the 66th and 68th sessions of the Regional Committee. This report describes the progress achieved in the past two years.

Progress achieved since 2019

7. National profiles on climate change and health have been developed or updated for 17 countries by WHO in coordination with national focal points. The country profiles provide a reference for national dialogue within the health community and with other climate change stakeholders on developing the health protection and system resilience agenda in the face of climate change. Fig. 1 summarizes the percentage of countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region that have completed the different components of their climate change and health profiles.

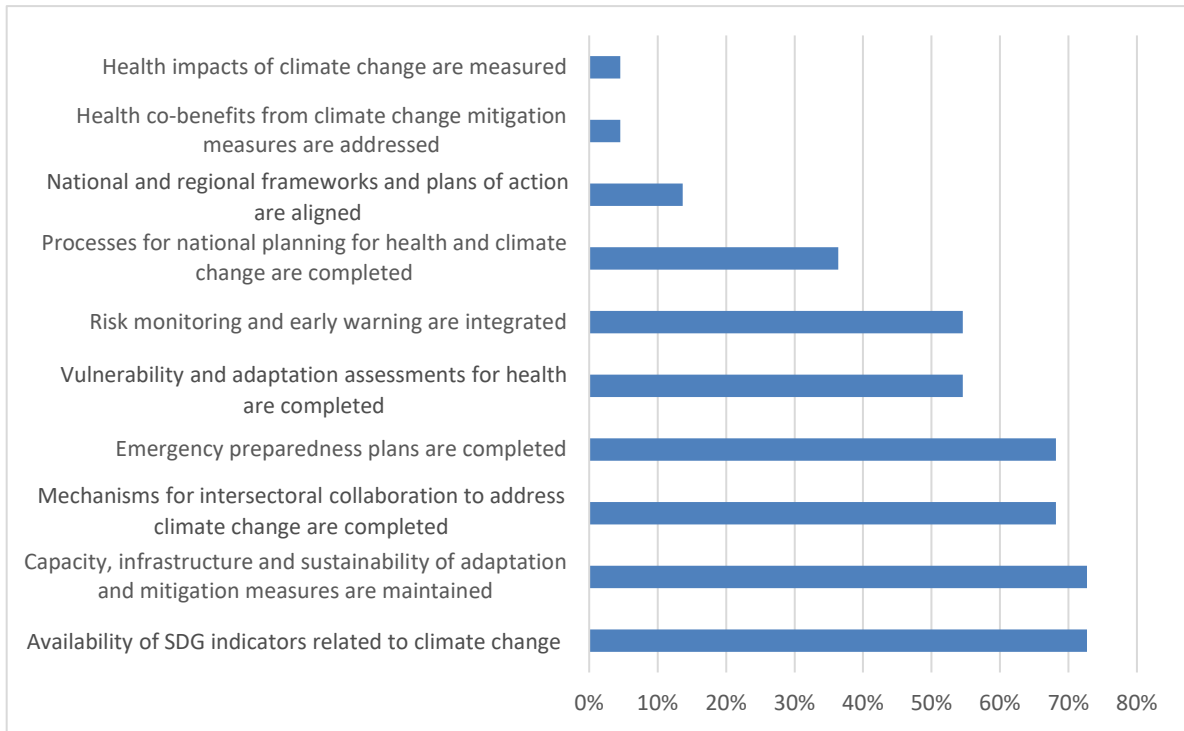


Fig. 1. Percentage of countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region that have completed the different components of their climate change and health profiles

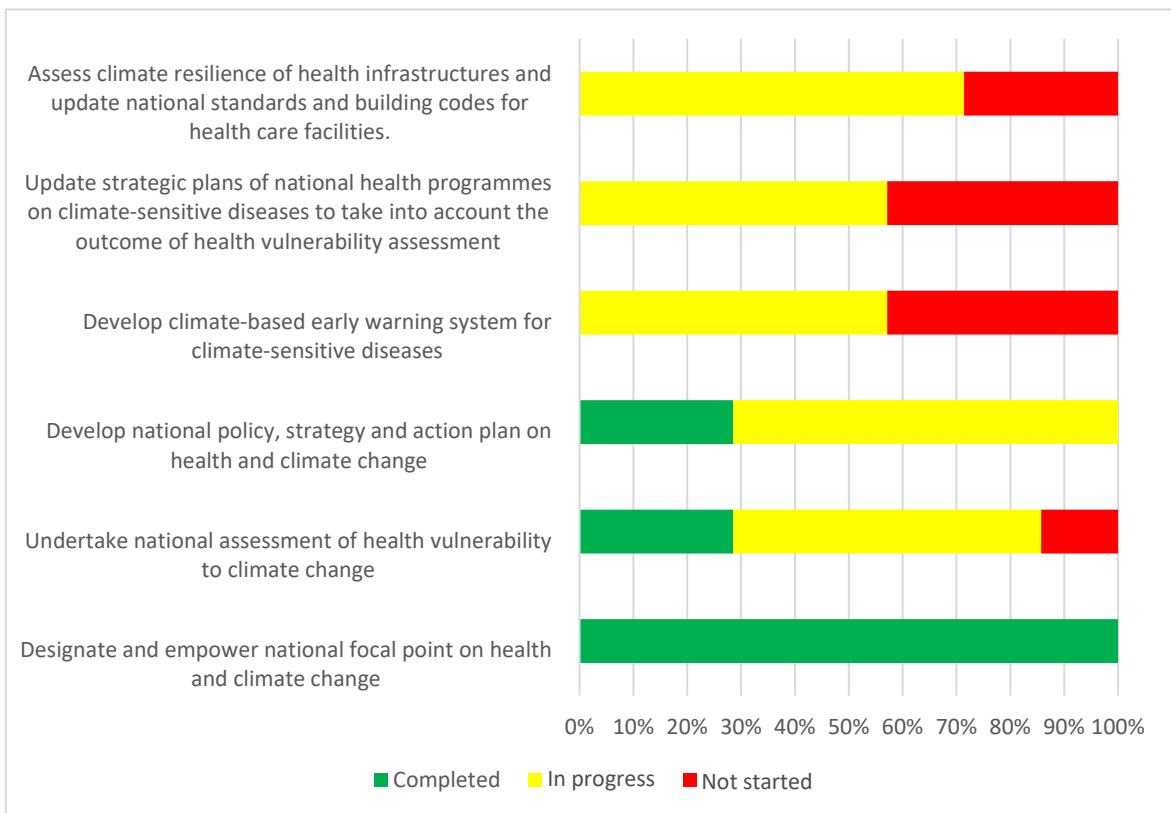


Fig 2. Status of implementation of priority actions of the regional framework for action on climate change and health (2017–2021) in seven countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region

8. Fig. 2 summarizes progress in implementing the main elements of the regional framework for action on climate change and health (2017–2021) based on the responses of nine countries to a WHO assessment. Most countries have yet to assess health vulnerability to climate change as part of developing a national strategy and action plan on the public health response to climate change, or the climate resilience of their health infrastructure to enable adaptation and mitigation measures to be taken to enhance the resilience of the health sector to extreme weather events.

9. Vector-, water-, air- and food-borne diseases are identified by most countries of the Region as the top climate-sensitive diseases of concern for health sector action on climate change. Climate change impacts on nutrition, mental health, respiratory diseases, occupational health and injuries due to extreme weather events are also reported.

10. Health sector action on climate change in the Region includes enhanced surveillance with expanded geographical coverage, early warning systems and the development of resilience-based health infrastructure. The Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan are piloting WHO guidance for climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable health care facilities, while Oman is piloting an early warning system for climate-sensitive diseases. Green Climate Fund funding proposals have been developed for Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, while Morocco and Oman have expressed interest and dialogue on this has started.

Challenges

11. A few countries in the Region (especially those experiencing protracted emergencies) have not yet designated a national health and climate change focal point, with clearly assigned responsibility, accountability and budgetary allocation, to facilitate and coordinate, within the health ministry/sector, the development of the public health response to climate change.

12. Most countries in the Region cite the need for financial and technical support to guide the development of their public health response to climate change. Additionally, all countries need technical support and training to develop the capacity of health sector personnel to be able to assess vulnerability to the impact of climate change on health, and on developing plans of action for a health system response.

13. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that curtailing and regulating unsustainable human activities (such as some forms of transportation) can have a positive impact on air pollution and climate change, ensuring that this has a lasting effect and that there is a “green” recovery remains a considerable challenge.

Way forward

14. Member States are encouraged to undertake the necessary action to continue implementation of the provisions of resolution EM/RC64/R.3 and the framework for action on climate change and health in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. WHO will continue to offer guidance and technical support, but political commitment, resources and ownership will need to come from countries.

15. It is of the utmost importance to continue to mobilize financial resources via different avenues (including the Green Climate Fund, currently co-chaired by Pakistan) to support Member State progress on health and climate change. WHO will continue to support countries to access the Green Climate Fund to advance the health and climate change adaptation and mitigation agenda.

16. Health ministries are encouraged to ensure that health protection from climate change is well positioned within the building blocks of national health systems in order to increase resilience, and to enhance advocacy with all relevant development and services sectors and authorities.

17. WHO will provide technical guidance, support and training to build the capacity of the designated national health and climate change focal points and other health personnel for developing the various components of public health preparedness and response to climate change, including establishing early warning systems, adapting to the inevitable health consequences of climate variability, and building resilient health care facilities.