



Report of the twentieth 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 twentieth meeting on 17 July 2024 as a virtual meeting through videoconferencing technology. 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.

2. The objectives of the meeting were introduced. The main objective was to review arrangements for the 71st session of the Regional Committee including key strategic initiatives and plans, the draft agenda and timetable for the session, and several related items of governing bodies business. Subcommittee members were also invited to provide feedback on the latest draft technical papers and resolutions.

Update on strategic initiatives

3. The Subcommittee received an update from the Regional Director on progress in developing her three flagship initiatives for the Region. It was explained that the flagships were designed to fit into a coherent complex or system of key strategic instruments guiding action on health at the global, regional and country levels, from the Sustainable Development Goals and targets through WHO's new Fourteenth General Programme of Work (GPW14) to regional strategies and workplans, country workplans and countries' own national health plans. The flagships were intended to complement these instruments by accelerating action in three key areas: expanding equitable access to medicines, vaccines and medical equipment in the Region; strengthening the health workforce; and tackling substance use. Development of the initiatives was well advanced; concept notes had been drafted identifying objectives, priorities for action and expected outcomes for each initiative. These had been shared with the Subcommittee for feedback, and it was proposed that final versions would be shared with Member States in good time before the planned ministerial session to discuss the flagships on 14 October.

4. In addition, it was explained that a regional strategic plan was being developed to guide operationalization of GPW14 in the Region. The plan would provide a comprehensive high-level framework for WHO's work in the Region, complementing the flagship initiatives, while also being flexible enough to align with each country's agreed priorities. Like GPW14, the plan would specify measurable, quantifiable targets and intended outcomes to ensure that WHO's work was driven by results and strengthen accountability and transparency. It was proposed to present the plan to Member States during the Regional Committee session.

Decisions by, and feedback from, the Programme Subcommittee

5. **The Subcommittee noted the progress on the three flagship initiatives and requested that they be further developed and presented to the Regional Committee at its upcoming session.** Subcommittee members gave feedback on each initiative for consideration by the responsible technical teams. **The Subcommittee welcomed the proposal to create a strategic operational plan to guide implementation of GPW14 in the Region.**

Provisional agenda and timetable for the 71st session of the Regional Committee

6. An updated outline of the proposed provisional agenda and timetable for the 71st session of the Regional Committee was presented to the Programme Subcommittee. It was explained that a version of the draft agenda

had been shared with Member States earlier than in previous years, to allow them more scope for feedback. Several proposals to include additional agenda items had been received: both Bahrain and Oman had proposed including an item on the prevention and control of vector-borne diseases with a special focus on dengue; Oman had also proposed including items on health insurance and its regulation, regulating alternative and complementary medicine, and regional cooperation on chemical toxins and exposure; and Palestine had proposed that a report on the health and humanitarian situation in Palestine be included as part of the statutory update session on emergencies.

7. Several other items would be included on the agenda as agreed follow-up actions from meetings of WHO's global governing bodies. These included: GPW14; sustainable financing and the WHO Investment Round; the process for the nomination and appointment of regional directors; the process for handling and investigating potential allegations against WHO directors-general; and climate change and health. The Subcommittee received detailed briefings on several of these items.

8. In addition, the Secretariat proposed a new panel discussion on artificial intelligence for achieving universal health coverage and health security.

9. The Subcommittee received updates on arrangements for two previously agreed events to be held in the margins of the Regional Committee session, a special event on the WHO Investment Round and a side event on the health impact of economic sanctions. Draft concept notes for these and the proposed side event on artificial intelligence were shared with the Subcommittee, as were nonfinal versions of technical papers being prepared for the Regional Committee and their accompanying draft resolutions. Subcommittee members were encouraged to share any feedback on the technical papers and draft resolutions with the Secretariat by email during the month of July. In addition, the visual identity for the Regional Committee session was presented to the Subcommittee.

Decisions by, and feedback from, the Programme Subcommittee

10. Discussing the proposals, the Subcommittee noted that the draft agenda and timetable for the Regional Committee session were already crowded. Time would need to be allocated to items where WHO's global governing bodies had adopted resolutions or decisions requiring follow-up by the Regional Committee. Mindful of those constraints, **the Subcommittee agreed to include the proposed special update on health conditions in Palestine and the panel discussion on artificial intelligence. It was also agreed to include a side event on an integrated approach to the prevention and control of vector-borne diseases, with a special focus on dengue.**

11. **It was suggested that the regulation of alternative and complementary medicine and regional cooperation on chemical toxins and exposures be included in the list of possible agenda topics for inclusion at the 72nd session of the Regional Committee in 2025,** the provisional agenda for which would be discussed by the Subcommittee in February 2025. In that regard, it was also noted that a full technical paper on dengue and vector-borne diseases in the Region might also be proposed to the Subcommittee in February 2025.

12. **The Subcommittee requested that further details regarding the process for the nomination and appointment of regional directors and the process for handling and investigating potential allegations against WHO directors-general be shared with Member States in good time before the Regional Committee session,** to facilitate the consultation and feedback requested by WHO's global governing bodies.

Participation in the Regional Committee session by observers

13. The Subcommittee was informed that the Russian Federation had submitted a formal request to attend the Regional Committee as an observer. It was noted that a WHO Member State from another region that joined the Regional Committee session as an observer would be able to participate in all open meetings, but not closed sessions. Observers could submit written statements (in conformity with established requirements) or make oral statements (with the Chair's permission), but were not entitled to vote. Historically, four Member States with close connections to the Region had participated in sessions as observers. It would be for the Regional Committee to decide whether to accede to the request from the Russian Federation.

14. The Subcommittee was also updated regarding arrangements for the accreditation of non-State actors to participate in the Regional Committee session as observers. It was explained that the Secretariat had applied the procedure established by the Regional Committee through resolution EM/RC67/R.5 in October 2020, but in line with the accelerated timeline that had been agreed by the Subcommittee at its nineteenth meeting in February. Non-State entities that had participated in recent Regional Committee sessions had been reviewed, and thirteen entities had been identified that would require accreditation to participate in further Regional Committee sessions. These entities had been invited to apply for accreditation, and four had applied. The applications had been reviewed by the Secretariat and were shared with the Subcommittee.

Decisions by, and feedback from, the Programme Subcommittee

15. The Subcommittee noted the request from the Russian Federation and agreed that it should be referred for consideration by the Regional Committee at its upcoming 71st session in October 2024. The Subcommittee recommended that an advance communication be shared with Member States of the Region to facilitate their consideration of the issue.

16. The Subcommittee also noted the applications from the four entities for participation in the Regional Committee as accredited non-State actors, and approved the applications to proceed for consideration by the Regional Committee.

Closing of the session

17. 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. Update on the development of the Regional Director's flagship initiatives
4. Update on the regional strategic operational plan
5. Overview of the provisional agenda and timetable for the 71st session of the Regional Committee, including proposed additional topics
6. Proposal from the Russian Federation to attend the Regional Committee as an observer Member State
7. Preparations for the side event on the impact of economic sanctions
8. Preparations for a special event on the WHO Investment Round during the Regional Committee session
9. Applications submitted by four entities for accreditation to attend the Regional Committee
10. Items referred to the Regional Committee by WHO global governing bodies: the process for the nomination and appointment of Regional Directors, and the process for handling and investigating potential allegations against WHO Directors-General
11. Closing session

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

Bahrain	H.E. Dr Samya Ali Bahram
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	Dr Nicknam Mohammad Hossein
Iraq	Dr Riyadh Abdul Amer Al-Hilfi*
Jordan	H.E. Dr Raid Anwar Al Shboul*
Kuwait	Dr Al-Munther Al-Hasawi
Lebanon	Ms Hilda Harb
Morocco	Mr Abdelouahab Belmadani*
Tunisia	Dr Chekib Zedini

(* Apologized)

Observer:

Qatar	H.E. Dr Hanan Mohamed Al-Kuwari
-------	---------------------------------

WHO Secretariat

Dr Hanan Balkhy	Regional Director
Dr Sussan Bassiri	Director of Business Operations
Dr Rana Hajjeh	Director of Programme Management; Director, UHC/Communicable Disease Control (DCD) a.i.
Dr Adham Rasham Ismail Abdel Moneim	Chef de Cabinet (CdC) a.i
Dr Mohamed Abdi Jama	Senior Adviser (Strategy)
Dr Rick Brennan	Director, Department of Health Emergencies (WHE)
Dr Asmus Hammerich	Director, UHC/Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health (NMH)
Dr Hamid Syed Jafari*	Director, Polio Eradication (POL)
Dr Awad Mataria	Director, UHC/Health System Development (UHS)
Dr Arash Rashidian	Director, Science, Information and Dissemination (SID)
Mr Omid Mohit	Senior Technical Manager, Communications, Resource Mobilization and Partnership (CRP)

Mr Amr El Tarek	Regional Adviser, Planning, Budget, Monitoring and Evaluation
Mr Tobias Boyd	Manager (Publishing, Editorial and Graphic Design)
Mr Amarnath Das	Regional Compliance and Risk Manager
Ms Samah Abdel Aziz	Governing Bodies Officer
Dr Nasim Pourghazian	Technical Officer
Ms Hala El Shazly	Administrative Officer
Ms Hayet Souissie	Protocol Liaison Officer
Mr Ahmed Shokry	IT Service Desk Assistant
Mr Seif Tageldin	Governance Specialist