



Progress report on implementing the framework for improving national institutional capacity for evidence-informed policy-making for health in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, 2020–2024

Introduction

1. Evidence-informed policy-making is essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and universal health coverage, and its importance is emphasized repeatedly in WHO's global strategies, including the Thirteenth General Programme of Work 2019–2023. However, it can be challenging for countries to obtain and use high-quality evidence.

2. Over the years, WHO has taken important steps to strengthen evidence-informed policy-making in Member States. In the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region, these efforts have intensified since 2015 and resulted in the presentation of technical paper EM/RC66/6 to the 66th session of the Regional Committee in 2019, which focused on enhancing national institutional capacity for evidence-informed policy-making for health, and proposed a framework for action for the Region.¹ In resolution EM/RC66/R.5, the framework for action to improve national institutional capacity for the use of evidence in health policy-making in the Eastern Mediterranean Region was endorsed and WHO was mandated to enhance regional and national institutional capacity for the use of evidence for policy development for health.^{2,3} The technical paper and resolution were pioneering in focusing on enhancing institutional capacity at the national level.

3. Following the resolution, several actions have been carried out to build capacity in the WHO Regional Office, country offices and countries and territories of the Region. Resolution EM/RC66/R.5 also requested WHO to report on progress made in implementing the framework to the 68th and 70th sessions of the Regional Committee. This progress report highlights key activities and achievements since September 2021.

Progress achieved since 2021

Implementation of the regional action plan

4. A regional action plan for the implementation of the framework, developed after in-depth consultation with regional and global experts and policy-makers, was published in 2021.⁴ The regional action plan includes strategies and activities for countries to improve national institutional capacity for evidence-

¹ WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean technical paper EM/RC66/6 on developing national institutional capacity for evidence-informed policy-making for health. Cairo: WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean; 2019 (https://applications.emro.who.int/docs/RC_Technical_Papers_2019_6_en.pdf?ua=1).

² WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean resolution EM/RC66/R.5 on developing national institutional capacity for evidence-informed policy-making for health. Cairo: WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean; 2019 (<https://applications.emro.who.int/docs/RC66-R5-eng.pdf?ua=1>).

³ Framework for action to improve national institutional capacity for the use of evidence in health policy-making in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. Cairo: WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean; 2019 (<https://applications.emro.who.int/docs/EMSID001E.pdf>).

⁴ Regional action plan for the implementation of the framework for action to improve national institutional capacity for the use of evidence in health policy-making in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. Cairo: WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean; 2021 (<https://applications.emro.who.int/docs/9789290229124-eng.pdf?ua=1>).

informed policy-making, and for WHO to support this. It includes six strategies, with the first three focused on Member States' responsibilities and the last three on WHO's role. The first three strategies for Member States aim to enhance demand, decision-making structures and resources for evidence-informed policy-making. The action plan outlines three levels of activity (essential, desirable and optimal) depending on country needs, capacity and priorities, and can be used as the basis for a gradual and progressive capacity-building process. The last three strategies focus on enhancing WHO's capacity and output, its support to countries in improving their national institutional capacity and establishing a regional network and support structure for evidence-informed policy-making.

5. Progress in implementing strategies from the regional action plan was reviewed at an expert consultation meeting in February 2023, which highlighted concerns about the fragmentation of knowledge and efforts in the Region, the importance of political commitment and the need for timely evidence for decision-making. The consultation also noted technical gaps in capacity and data quality, and the importance of considering national values and ethics, as well as addressing the wider ecosystem of external partners to ensure the relevance and usefulness of tools developed.

Development and adaptation of evidence-based guidelines

6. Efforts have been made to improve the standardization and use of clinical practice and public health guidelines in the Region. A policy brief on enhancing the use of clinical guidelines in the private sector for primary health care was developed. In addition, a roadmap for establishing a national guideline programme and a nine-step guideline adaptation flowchart were also developed for the Region.

Development of policy briefs and implementation guides

7. Three Region-wide capacity-building workshops have been conducted on the development of policy briefs, including on the general principles of policy briefs (March 2022), along with advanced workshops for researchers and policy developers (October 2021) and policy-makers (June 2022). In addition, a template on good practice for the development of a policy brief was developed (July 2022) which has been utilized in the development of recent WHO policy briefs, and a policy paper on hospital resilience was developed.

Rapid response processes for evidence-informed policy recommendations in emergency settings

8. In 2021, 10 national treatment guidelines for COVID-19 were assessed, identifying gaps and limitations compared to the related WHO COVID-19 guidelines. Efforts are underway to establish a rapid response system for emergency situations in the Region.

Strengthening national institutional capacity

9. Technical support is being provided to countries to develop and strengthen their national institutional capacity. A web-based training package was launched in April 2022 which includes a flow chart specific to the needs of researchers and policy-makers guiding the user through 13 subject areas; the training package is available on the WHO regional website.¹ The package includes publicly available and free-of-charge training materials to support countries to enhance their technical capacity on the key elements of evidence-informed policy-making. A second update to the package was released in March 2023.

¹ Evidence-informed policy-making training package [website]. Cairo: WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean (<https://www.emro.who.int/evidence-data-to-policy/training-package/index.html>).

10. A rapid advice tool for country action on evidence-informed policy-making was developed in January 2023 to provide countries with a set of priority actions to facilitate institutionalization of evidence-informed policy-making and development of a national action plan based on country contexts and aligned with the regional action plan.

11. In response to requests by countries and regional experts for standardization, a glossary of evidence-informed policy-making terms and concepts has been developed to promote shared definitions. This is the first glossary of its kind, and a draft was reviewed at an expert consultation in February 2023.

12. A regional health technology assessment (HTA) transferability tool is being developed to support countries in using the results of HTA studies conducted by other countries in their national settings. The tool takes into account feasibility and implementation issues in adapting HTA results to different national contexts. A draft of the tool was reviewed at an expert consultation in February 2023.

13. In 2021, Kuwait, Morocco and Somalia were selected as pioneers for institutionalizing national capacity for use of evidence in health policy development in the Region. In 2022, Egypt joined these countries when it established a national programme for guideline development and adaptation. WHO supported the establishment of the National Center for Guideline Development and Adaptation in Egypt, the Evidence to Policy Unit at the Ministry of Health in Kuwait and the Knowledge Management Center in Morocco. WHO also worked closely to support Somalia's National Institute of Health and the Department of Policy and Planning at its Ministry of Health. In collaboration with King Saud University, topic-specific guidelines were adapted for the Ministry of Health of Qatar with support from WHO. In 2023, a capacity-building event for senior policy-makers on evidence-informed policy-making processes was organized for Palestine.

Communication tools and advocacy

14. WHO has developed various communication tools and advocacy strategies to enhance evidence-informed policy-making in the Region. These include the evidence and data to policy webpage on the Regional Office website,¹ short informative videos, regional events and a special issue of the Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal on evidence-informed policy-making.

Establishing a regional network of institutions for evidence and data to policy

15. The Network of Institutions for Evidence and Data to Policy (NEDtP)² is a regional network established by WHO in 2021 to facilitate the development and implementation of evidence-informed policies and practices through strengthening national capacities for the generation and use of research evidence, data and knowledge translation processes.³ It also aims to promote collaboration among institutions in the Region for sharing knowledge and expertise in evidence-informed policy-making. The members of the network include research and academic institutions, ministries of health and civil society organizations from 21 out of 22 countries and territories in the Region, as well as 13 supporting institutions from countries both within and external to the Region.

¹ Evidence and data to policy [website]. Cairo: WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean (<https://www.emro.who.int/evidence-data-to-policy/about.html>).

² Network of Institutions for Evidence and Data to Policy (NEDtP) [website]. Cairo: WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean (<https://www.emro.who.int/evidence-data-to-policy/network-of-institutions/index.html>).

³ Scope of and strategies for the Network of institutions for Evidence and Data to Policy (NEDtP) in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. Cairo: WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean (https://www.emro.who.int/images/stories/NEDtP_scope-strategy_-_English.pdf).

COVID-19 response-related activities

16. The Regional COVID-19 Vaccine Effectiveness Study was initiated in September 2021 to collect reliable data, increase the statistical power of vaccine effectiveness estimates by pooling data across countries and build capacity among participating countries. WHO's two main protocols for evaluating COVID-19 vaccine effectiveness (cohort study in health care workers and test-negative design in severe acute respiratory infections) were used to select four proposals from countries (Egypt, Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan and Pakistan) for inclusion in the study. The study's activities have included: development of a dashboard to track planned, ongoing and completed/published COVID-19 vaccine effectiveness studies; establishment of a multidisciplinary regional COVID-19 vaccine effectiveness team to provide technical support to researchers; ethical clearance for national studies from the Eastern Mediterranean Research Ethics Review Committee; creation of a regional data-entry platform (REDCap) hosting country questionnaires; technical support for the design and implementation of the studies and on data management, including data collection, entry, validation and statistical analysis; and capacity-building workshops and training for researchers.

17. In 2021 and 2022, with a view to enhancing technical capacities in the Region, 15 case-studies were jointly developed with 13 countries/territories (Afghanistan, Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen). The case-studies describe how countries used global/national evidence and data to inform policy-making processes in response to the challenges of COVID-19. These case-studies were discussed at a seminar in October 2022, where countries exchanged experiences of evidence-informed policy-making during the COVID-19 pandemic. The consolidated lessons learned will be published in 2023.

18. A final progress report on implementing the framework for improving national institutional capacity for evidence-informed policy-making for health in the Region will be submitted to the Regional Committee in 2025.