

Summary report on the

WHO-EM/EDP/001/E

**Intercountry consultative meeting for the Network of Institutions for Evidence and Data to Policy (NEDtP) and finalizing the regional action plan for evidence-informed policy-making**

Cairo, Egypt  
16 November 2020



REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE

**World Health  
Organization**

**Eastern Mediterranean**

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## 1. Introduction

Evidence-informed policy-making is essential to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and universal health coverage, and its importance is emphasized in WHO's Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2023 (GPW 13). However, it can be challenging for countries to obtain and use valid and relevant evidence in a timely manner. Over the years, WHO has taken important steps to strengthen evidence-informed policy-making in the countries of the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region. The Science, Information, and Dissemination Department of the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean coordinates these efforts in close collaboration with countries.

A [technical paper](#) presented to the 66th session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean in 2019, highlighted the challenges and opportunities for evidence-informed health policy-making in the Region. It argued for the adoption of a multi-dimensional analytical approach that brings together different sources of evidence to ensure the priority questions and concerns of policy-makers are addressed. In addition, it proposed a framework to help countries improve their national institutional capacity for evidence-informed policy-making.

In a landmark resolution ([EM/RC66/R.5](#)), the [Framework for action to improve national institutional capacity for use of evidence in health policy-making in the Eastern Mediterranean Region \(2020–2024\)](#) was endorsed by the Regional Committee in 2019. The resolution called for WHO to develop a regional action plan for the implementation of the Framework in consultation with Members States. In addition, the Regional Office was mandated to establish a regional network of institutions to support evidence-informed policy-making at the national level.

The regional action plan is intended to support countries to develop national mechanisms to support and enhance evidence-informed

policy-making and the regional network is intended to play an important role in strengthening regional and country capacity to improve the availability, quality and use of evidence for decision-making and institutionalizing the use of evidence at national level.

It was against this background that an intercountry consultative meeting was held by the WHO Regional Office on 16 November 2020 in Cairo, Egypt.

The objectives of the meeting were to:

- discuss the draft 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 (2020–2024); and
- seek the support of the countries in the Region to finalize the formal arrangements for establishing the regional Network of Institutions for Evidence and Data to Policy (NEDtP).

The meeting was attended virtually by senior policy-makers from ministries of health, as well as managers and key researchers from national institutions, from Egypt, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Pakistan, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic and United Arab Emirates. International experts from supporting institutions for the NEDtP, including McMaster University, Canada, the Norwegian Institute of Public Health, Norway, and Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium, also attended, along with WHO staff from the Regional Office and WHO headquarters.

The meeting was inaugurated by Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, Dr Soumya Swaminathan, WHO's Chief Scientist, and Dr Rana Hajjeh, Director of Programme Management for the WHO Regional Office. The meeting

was chaired by Dr Arash Rashidian, Director for Science, Information and Dissemination at the WHO Regional Office.

Dr Al-Mandhari, in his opening remarks, observed that strategic thinking and coherent action were required for countries to institutionalize evidence-informed policy-making, with WHO's support and advice. Noting the critical role of evidence for policy development, he said that ministers, deputy ministers, directors, and heads of departments had to have the right tools to enable them to make the right decisions. He highlighted the role of the regional network of institutions, saying it would play an important role in strengthening regional and national capacity to improve the availability, quality and use of evidence for decision-making and institutionalizing the use of evidence at national level. The countries in the Region should take account of their existing internal programmes and technical streams to promote a systematic unified approach to using evidence for policy development for health, he said.

Dr Hajjeh said that the COVID-19 pandemic had underlined the need for evidence-informed policy-making and that it had become clear that not only was valid and timely evidence vital, but that the correct interpretation of the available evidence was also very important. She noted that it was strategically the right time to establish national mechanisms for the systematic and regular use of evidence for policy-making for health, and that it was the joint responsibility of WHO and countries to promote and enhance evidence-informed policy-making, which would require the strengthening of capacity in countries to ensure that they were able to implement the regional action plan.

Dr Swaminathan observed that the Eastern Mediterranean Region had taken a lead in advancing the area of evidence-based policy-making, and that WHO's role was to support countries to enhance their capacity in this

area, learn from other country experiences and share lessons learnt with other countries. She said that the idea to establish a regional network of institutions was an excellent one, because it was always good to have networks of peers and collaborators for the exchange of ideas and advice, to be able to learn from each other and grow together. She also highlighted the importance of the commitment of policy-makers to the issue and the ability to identify the right time for the right intervention.

## **2. Summary of discussions**

*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 (2020–2024)*

A brief presentation was made on the rationale, objectives and components of the regional action plan by Dr Rashidian. He also introduced the new structures created in the Regional Office to enable it to more effectively support countries in institutionalizing the use of evidence for policy development. He then outlined some of the key points of the 2019 technical paper for the Regional Committee, noting that it brought together the key issues for evidence-to-policy in a coherent approach, not only concerning the knowledge translation process, but also including guideline programmes, health technology assessment, data-to-policy, and the small studies done within ministries of health; and that this was also important for WHO, which also sometimes had parallel workstreams. Dr Rashidian observed that the regional action plan included two strategic directions (for Member State and WHO action) and six strategies, and that in order to effectively cover the different needs and priorities of the countries in the Region, the deliverables were categorized into three levels (essential, desirable and optimal), to allow for the gradual capacity-building of countries. He noted that the deliverables defined as essential were the minimum activities needed to ensure the programme was in line with its expected outcomes, while the optimal level related to a situation of strong



institutionalization of evidence-informed policy-making for health, which may or may not be the aim depending on the country; the action plan therefore needed to be adapted to the national context. He said the action plan was intended to play a critical role in achieving harmonization between different parallel programmes and technical streams.

In discussion, countries noted that despite the existence of research evidence, fragmented health system structures obstructed the integration needed for using evidence for policy development, preventing the effective and efficient use of evidence in decision-making. It was emphasized that the regional action plan could support countries to evaluate their policy-making processes, locate the root causes of problems, and develop and strengthen integrated structures for evidence-informed policy-making by bringing all processes and actors together. All participating countries felt that an efficient evidence-informed policy-making process required the development of an integrated multi-dimensional approach and agreed to promote the concept within their national health systems.

The issue of sustainability was raised as a major challenge, and countries stated that they needed the support of WHO to ensure the sustainability of national evidence-informed policy-making structures. One solution discussed was their inclusion within laws and regulations, to enable the structures to have some measure of permanence, despite the various changes within national health systems.

Monitoring and evaluation were discussed, and it was agreed that a framework should be developed for the evaluation not only of results but also of processes. There was agreement that any framework should include both regional and country-related activities. Also, there was a strong consensus on the need for a collaborative learning network of regional and national actors, and the enhancement of collaboration with international counterparts in order to achieve the optimal goals.

The regional and global institutions that participated in the meeting as supporting institutions, highlighted the importance of the recent initiatives of the WHO Regional Office to enhance national institutional capacity in using evidence for policy development for health, and stated their willingness to work with countries in the Region to accelerate progress in this area.

*Regional Network of Institutions for Evidence and Data to Policy*

Presentations were made by senior WHO staff on the role of evidence-informed policy-making in the areas of noncommunicable diseases, communicable diseases, health systems, healthier populations and health emergencies, and on recent initiatives in the Region in these programmes.

The establishment of the regional Network of Institutions for Evidence and Data to Policy (NEDtP) was discussed, including its mission, objectives, the role of the WHO Regional Office and member institutions, and the role it will play at regional and national levels. The main actors in the regional network will be member institutions that are expected to play a key role in collaborating with ministries of health and other key partners to enhance health policies, monitor and improve their implementation, and evaluate their impact on health outcomes.

In discussion, it was noted that the member institutions should have the capacity or experience in the different steps and processes of evidence-informed policy-making. The participating countries emphasized the importance of the network for improving the capacity of ministries of health to appraise, generate, interpret and use evidence for health policy development. There was strong consensus on the critical role to be played by the NEDtP in enhancing country capacity in the use of evidence within a systematic policy development process and countries

felt that the network could provide a good platform for sharing country experiences and helping to strengthen each other.

It was concluded that the time was right to establish national mechanisms within the Region for the systematic and regular use of evidence in policy-making for health. It was emphasized that the WHO Regional Office and country offices should enhance and maintain their technical capacity in order to support and become ambassadors for the use of evidence in health policy-making. It was agreed that the countries of the Region should promote a systematic unified approach of evidence-informed policy-making at the national level, taking into account their internal programmes and technical streams.

All the countries recognized that the implementation of the regional action plan and the establishment of the NEDtP were requirements for the institutionalization of evidence-informed policy-making at the national level and stated their commitment to cooperation and collaboration with the WHO Regional Office to develop their national institutional capacity for evidence-informed policy-making for health.

### **3. Recommendations on the way forward**

#### *To Member States*

1. Increase demand and advocacy for evidence-informed policy-making (2021–2022).
2. Enhance decision-making structures and processes for use of evidence through:
  - building the technical capacity of ministry of health staff in the critical appraisal of knowledge products and evidence synthesis reports (2021–2022);

- establishing dedicated evidence-to-policy team(s) within the ministry of health, including all key areas of expertise (2021–2023);
  - improving national policy-making committees’ decision-making processes (2021–2022);
  - establishing special programmes, such as national health technology assessment and guideline adaptation/development programmes, for evidence-informed decision-making (2022–2024);
  - establishing mechanisms to regulate and manage conflicts of interests and enhance transparency in policy-making (2021–2023);
  - establishing support structures and affiliations (2021–2022).
3. Enhance resources for evidence-informed policy-making through:
- increasing access to sources of knowledge and research evidence for health (2021–2022);
  - ensuring adequate and sustainable financing to support evidence-informed policy-making (2021–2022);
  - building national academic capacity for evidence-informed policy-making (2021–2024).

*To WHO*

4. Enhance WHO Regional Office capacity and output in support of evidence-informed policy-making in the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region through supporting:
- the development and adaptation of evidence-based guidelines for high priority topics (2021–2022);
  - evidence-informed policy-making processes and the development of policy briefs and implementation guides (2021–2022);
  - rapid response processes in adaptation or development of evidence-informed policy recommendations in emergency settings (2021–2022).

5. Support countries in improving national institutional capacity for evidence-informed policy-making through:
  - providing technical support to strengthen national institutional capacity-development (2021–2023);
  - strengthening communication tools and advocacy to enhance evidence-informed policy-making (2021–2022).
  
6. Initiate a regional network and support structure through establishing:
  - a regional network of institutions for evidence and data to policy (NEDtP) (2021);
  - an NEDtP secretariat (2021).



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