

Summary report on the

WHO-EM/EDP/003/E

**First formal meeting of  
the regional Network of  
Institutions for Evidence  
and Data to Policy (NEDtP)  
to enhance national  
capacity for evidence-  
informed policy-making**

Virtual meeting  
30 March 2021



REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE

**World Health  
Organization**

**Eastern Mediterranean**

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## 1. Introduction

To ensure that health policies are appropriate, effective and cost-effective, they need to be based on sound evidence. Evidence-informed policy-making is therefore essential to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and universal health coverage, and its importance is emphasized in WHO's Thirteenth General Programme of Work 2019–2023.

Over the years, WHO has taken important steps to strengthen evidence-informed policy-making in countries. The WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean coordinates these efforts in the Region in close collaboration with countries to enhance the institutionalization of evidence use in policy-making. In October 2019, a technical paper<sup>1</sup> presented to the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean pioneered a multi-dimensional analytical approach to bringing different sources of evidence together to address policy-makers' needs. This was followed by a landmark resolution (EM/RC66/R.5) on developing national institutional capacity for evidence-informed policy-making for health, in which a framework for action to improve national institutional capacity for use of evidence in health policy-making in the Region was endorsed and calling for a regional action plan for its implementation.<sup>2</sup> The resolution also called for country-to-country learning through sharing experiences and lessons learnt and the establishment of a regional network of institutions to support evidence-informed policy-making at national level.

An intercountry consultative meeting was held in November 2020 to finalize the scope and strategy of the regional network. This was an

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

important landmark in the establishment of the resulting Network of Institutions for Evidence and Data to Policy (NEDtP), which aims to play an important role in strengthening regional and national capacity to improve the availability, quality and use of evidence for decision-making and institutionalize the use of evidence at national level. It serves as a platform for sharing experiences between countries and supports Member States in implementing the framework for action to improve national institutional capacity for the use of evidence in health policy-making in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. Members of the NEDtP commit to active and regular participation in related activities, including participating in annual meetings of the network and active participation in teleconference calls.

Based on the agreements from the intercountry consultative meeting, the first formal meeting of the NEDtP was convened virtually and physically in Cairo, Egypt, on 30 March 2021. The aims of the meeting were to inform NEDtP members of progress on evidence-informed policy-making initiatives in the Regional Office and reinforce collaboration with Member States through the development of joint work.

Other key objectives of the meeting were to:

- identify different paths for the efficient functioning of the NEDtP;
- share insights and experiences in support of evidence-informed policy-making at national level;
- create a consensus on priority evidence-informed policy-making needs and projects in the Region; and
- identify high-priority health problems in the Region for policy brief development.

The meeting was attended virtually by senior policy-makers from ministries of health, as well as managers and key researchers from national institutions in Afghanistan, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Iran (Islamic

Republic of), Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, occupied Palestinian territory, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Yemen. International experts from supporting institutions for the NEDtP, including the Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research, American University of Beirut, American University of Cairo, Cochrane Collaboration, King Saud University, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, McMaster University, Norwegian Institute of Public Health, Ottawa Hospital Research Institute, Royal Tropical Institute, and Vrije Universiteit Brussel, also attended, along with WHO staff from the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, WHO Regional Office for Europe, Pan-American Health Organization and WHO headquarters.

The meeting was inaugurated by Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, followed by Dr Rana Hajjeh, Director of Programme Management, and Dr Arash Rashidian, Director of the Division of Science, Information and Dissemination, from the WHO Regional Office. They recognized the meeting as a key milestone in ensuring progress in improving evidence-informed policy-making in the Region, and emphasized the urgent need to advance this programme of work to ensure that evidence is used to develop appropriate, effective and cost-effective policies. Recognizing the importance of networks like the NEDtP during health emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic, WHO's commitment to evidence-informed policy-making was reiterated. In particular, the Regional Office's model of an "integrated multi-concept approach" to evidence-informed policy-making was highlighted, which involves the alignment of different sources of evidence, benefitting from other countries' experiences, the active engagement of academic institutions and other stakeholders, and the standardization of methods and processes, including for the management of conflicts of interest.

## **2. Summary of discussions**

National experiences in enhancing evidence-informed policy-making in response to the COVID-19 pandemic were presented from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Lebanon. The presentations described the different approaches to rapid reviews and engagement with policy-makers undertaken during the pandemic, including the use of policy dialogues to disseminate evidence and facilitative policy-making.

During group discussion, participants emphasized the importance of considering institutions with an established focus on evidence-informed policy-making processes, suggesting that these can share knowledge and experiences with institutions that are at an earlier stage of evidence-informed policy-making. Participants also highlighted that demand for evidence-informed policy-making is not high enough in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, with suggestions being made to focus on rapid response products that respond to local needs. It was also suggested that there is an urgent need to understand how to best handle the influence of politics, the media and other power dynamics, as these are important forces in the decision-making process, whilst recognizing that there is a variety of stakeholders that affect decision-makers in the Region. Participants also emphasized the importance of sharing success stories, lessons learnt and experiences, including by using tracking measures such as indicators.

In reflecting on high-priority health problems, participants highlighted the importance of identifying the roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders involved across the different stages of the priority-setting process, and of having a defined set of criteria. Identifying priorities at regional and local levels was also mentioned, and it was recommended to have robust and transparent processes for oversight and to identify high-priority problems on a recurring basis.



Participants suggested that for efficient functioning of the NEDtP, meetings between the Secretariat and network members should take place between two to four times a year. Between NEDtP meetings, participants highlighted the importance of communication, including through online modalities, meetings and emails. Communications between the Secretariat and NEDtP members are expected to be online, with network members and national ministries of health communicating through established teams within ministries. These teams would also support the implementing of NEDtP recommendations, tools and guidance and in monitoring progress; and in addition, would help identify relevant partners, as participants indicated the importance of partnerships and engagement with stakeholders for the success of the NEDtP. Another suggestion regarding stakeholder engagement, was to develop a country-based network of NEDtP members. Participants also suggested the importance of sharing success stories.

In supporting short- and long-term capacity-building, participants highlighted that the NEDtP is expected to provide recommendations for decision-makers. Participants also agreed that the NEDtP should support Member States by providing frameworks and manuals for the conduct of situation analyses. The importance of situation analysis was emphasized, as this supports the development of tailored action plans.

Participants also discussed how to enhance regional priority-setting, suggesting that the NEDtP could help in providing reports, research, data and needs assessments for the updating of regional needs. For this purpose, participants suggested that the NEDtP deliver workshops for policy-makers, as well as facilitating cross-regional meetings between different members, for the exchange of information, knowledge and best practices. This would also support capacity-building.

Participants highlighted the need to develop a culture of evidence-informed policy-making in the Region. To do this, it was suggested to develop standard operating procedures, facilitate capacity-building activities and encourage the use of tools for evidence-informed policy-making. It was felt that a culture of evidence-informed policy-making can be enhanced by lessons learnt and success stories. In addition, it was recommended to explore how information, products and learning can be shared, with a view to identifying synergies and capacity-strengthening opportunities, both at the national level and within partner institutions. This would in turn be helpful in establishing national networks of institutions for evidence-informed policy-making, which can become formally recognized through the Network.

Participants also discussed how the COVID-19 pandemic had highlighted the importance of a strong and timely global evidence response, as well as the need for a more coordinated approach to supporting evidence-informed policy-making, both in the short- and long-run and at country, regional and global levels. In addition, it was highlighted that capacities at the national and institutional level are an important area of focus for improving use of evidence for policy development during health emergencies. Participants therefore recommended that the NEDtP builds technical capacity across the Region.

### **3. Recommendations**

#### *To Member States*

1. Foster the use and demand of evidence-informed policy-making by:
  - hosting activities, such as workshops and capacity-building exercises, to ensure ministerial “buy-in”;
  - contributing to the establishment of ministerial subcommittees to support evidence-informed policy-making activities;

- engaging with a broad range of stakeholders across relevant platforms of communication, including the media and online fora; and
  - identifying avenues for citizens, policy-makers and evidence synthesis communities to engage with and contribute to recommending priority needs.
2. Support the NEDtP's structure and activities through:
- identifying institutions at national level and potential areas of engagement with NEDtP activities;
  - providing regular updates on progress and needs;
  - contributing to the development and implementation of a plan to monitor progress;
  - raising national awareness of evidence-informed policy-making and the activities of the NEDtP, including through the media and online communications; and
  - contributing to "living" evidence resources by sharing lessons learnt, challenges and plans.

*To WHO*

3. Enhance and continue WHO Regional Office support for evidence-informed policy-making in the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean through:
- developing tools and capacity-building to strengthen processes in evidence-informed policy-making;
  - offering a platform for discussing challenges, lessons learnt and relevant capacities to encourage regional collaboration through the NEDtP;
  - fostering the creation of joint programmes of work; and
  - developing structures that contribute to robust, quality and transparency-oriented work with multiple stakeholders at different levels.

4. Support the NEDtP's structure and activities through:
  - contributing to the development of objectives and indicators to measure progress drawing on established models of successful evidence-informed policy-making;
  - providing input into national action plans based on situation analyses to address weaknesses in national institutional capacity;
  - fostering collaboration between stakeholders in different countries by identifying and developing shared work plans;
  - engaging with country-level stakeholders to identify priority issues at local, national and regional levels;
  - hosting meetings two to four times a year; and
  - engaging and collaborating with global initiatives.



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