



**World Health
Organization**

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR **Europe**

Regional Committee for Europe

Sixty-third session

Çeşme Izmir, Turkey, 16–19 September 2013

Provisional agenda item 5(j)

EUR/RC63/Inf.Doc./5

12 August 2013

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Progress report on the WHO Barcelona Office for Health Systems Strengthening

This information document contains a progress report on the work of the WHO Barcelona Office for Health Systems Strengthening, a geographically dispersed office of the WHO Regional Office for Europe.

Introduction

1. A Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Autonomous Community of Catalonia and WHO for the establishment of the WHO Regional Office for Europe project office in the Autonomous Community of Catalonia was signed on 21 December 1998, valid for five years. No host agreement with the Spanish Government was established at the time. The office began operations in April 1999, with formal inauguration on 8 September 1999. Since the end of the initial 5-year agreement, the office has operated on one-year signed extension agreements, each with a provision that the extension would be superseded by the Host Agreement if and when it was signed.

2. The preamble to the agreement with the Government of the Autonomous Community of Catalonia refers to the Ministerial Conference on Health Care Reforms held in Ljubljana in June 1996, at which ministers pledged to develop, strengthen and support work in the field of health care systems development. This was the motivation for establishing the office.

Technical area and structure

3. The technical focus of the office was initially to support Member States in developing service delivery systems and particularly “integrated health care systems”. This focus was modified considerably in accordance with WHO Regional Committee resolutions EUR/RC50/R5, EUR/RC55/R8 and EUR/RC56/R3 and after the WHO European Ministerial Conference on Health Systems held in Tallinn, Estonia, in June 2008. Currently, the name of the Barcelona geographically dispersed office (GDO) is the “Barcelona Office for Health Systems Strengthening” with a focus on health financing. The Barcelona GDO concentrates on both country support and strengthening its multicountry and intercountry work in recent years.

4. In terms of office structure, the technical team comprises the Head of the GDO (currently vacant) and four P5 positions, the incumbent of one of which is acting Head. The team works closely to support Member States, conduct trainings and lead intercountry policy dialogues as part of the Division of Health Systems and Public Health. The administrative team comprises an administrative officer (P2) and four programme assistants, who support the technical work, financial management and other tasks related to maintaining a GDO. The Head of the GDO reports directly to the Director of the Division of Health Systems and Public Health.

Relation to the WHO Regional Office for Europe and its work programme

5. The health systems financing team is one of five technical teams within the Division of Health Systems and Public Health, which report to the Director. It is therefore fully integrated into the work programme of the Division in terms of strategic thinking, planning and implementation. Management meetings are held weekly, and joint work is conducted among technical units. In addition, the Barcelona GDO holds two capacity-building courses each year and reserves places for WHO staff to support internal capacity-building; approximately 15 WHO staff were involved in the past three years, including six from the Division of Health Systems and Public Health.

Achievements

6. **Health financing policy.** Technical support is provided to Member States on a wide range of health financing policy issues. Analysis of policies to improve financial protection for patients is a high priority, as is support for health financing policy options to promote universal health coverage. Support is provided to about 25 Member States. Recently, the office supported work to assess the impact of the financial crisis on health and health systems, including a high-level meeting in Oslo on 17–18 April 2013 and support to Member States including Greece and Ireland.

7. **Health systems strengthening with other divisions.** The Barcelona GDO is taking the lead in the Division of Health Systems and Public Health for collaboration with other divisions, most notably with the noncommunicable disease programme, to bring a health systems perspective to analyses of the barriers to the provision and uptake of services. A conceptual framework was prepared, with a country assessment guide, and analyses are being conducted in a number of countries. Policy dialogues will be held and a synthesis report produced.

8. **Capacity-building and training.** The office organizes two courses each year for senior health officials and policy-makers from Member States in the WHO European Region. The Barcelona Course on Health Financing, held in May each year, was launched in 2011 and has 150 alumni to date. The Flagship Course on Health Systems Strengthening has been run since 2003 jointly with the World Bank Institute and other partners and has more than 1500 alumni to date. Since 2011, the course has focused on noncommunicable diseases

Financing, budgets and expenditure

9. The Barcelona GDO has received funding from the Government of the Autonomous Community of Catalonia each year since the signing of the original agreement. The annual amounts provided are summarized in Annex 1. Following a significant increase in funding in 2007, mostly for staffing and programme activities, there has been a slight reduction since 2010; the current level of funding is considered the minimum to fund the office and is in line with the GDO policy of the WHO Regional Office for Europe. In-kind support for office rent, information technology and other office supplies amounts to an estimated €159 000 per annum.

10. The pie chart in Annex 2 shows funding from the Government of the Autonomous Community of Catalonia in the context of the total funding received, including that for technical work managed outside the office, and includes funding from the European Commission for work in Moldova and Tajikistan, funding from the United Kingdom Government to take forward the universal health coverage agenda in a number of countries, and funds from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation to strengthen monitoring and evaluation with a series of policy dialogues in Kyrgyzstan.

Outstanding issues

11. The lack of a host agreement with the Government of Spain is the main outstanding issue for the office. In addition, there are some delays in the approval of annual budget extensions from the Government of the Autonomous Community of Catalonia. Discussions to ensure more stable arrangements for funding, such as a 5-year agreement, are under way.

Conclusions

12. The Barcelona GDO has an established work programme with Member States on health financing policy and is leading work on a number of high-profile issues, most recently the impact of the financial and economic crisis on population health and health systems. It is also leading a new programme of interdivisional work on health systems strengthening and noncommunicable diseases, as well as analyses of financing policy for universal health coverage as a follow-up to *Health systems financing: the path to universal coverage*.¹

¹ *The world health report. Health systems financing: the path to universal coverage*. World Health Organization, Geneva, 2010.

Annex 1. Financial arrangements

Figure 1. Funding received by WHO from the Government of the Autonomous Community of Catalonia

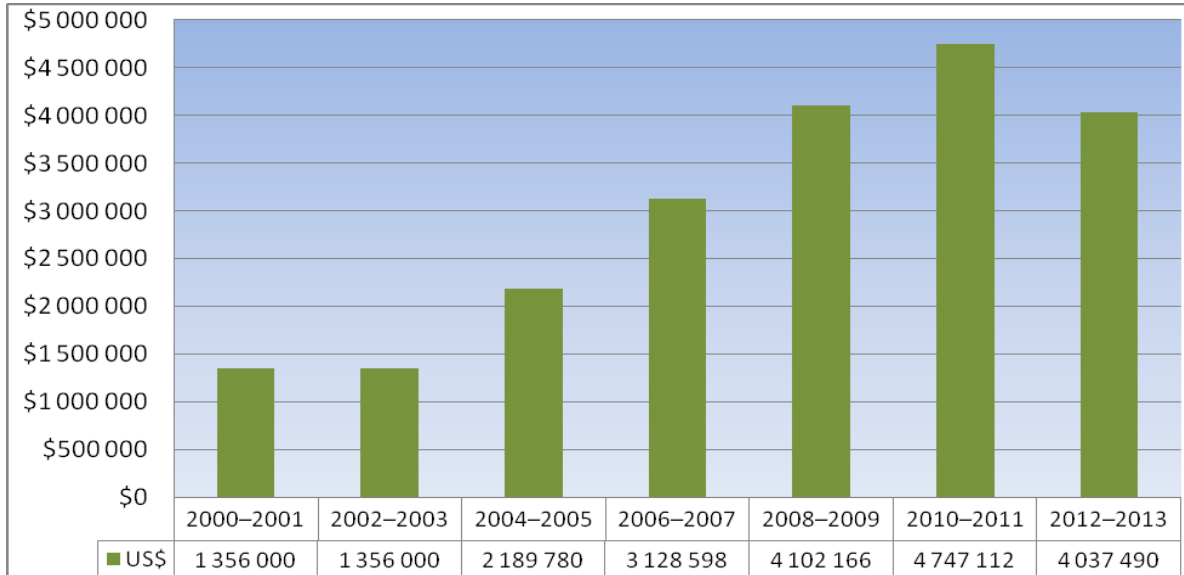
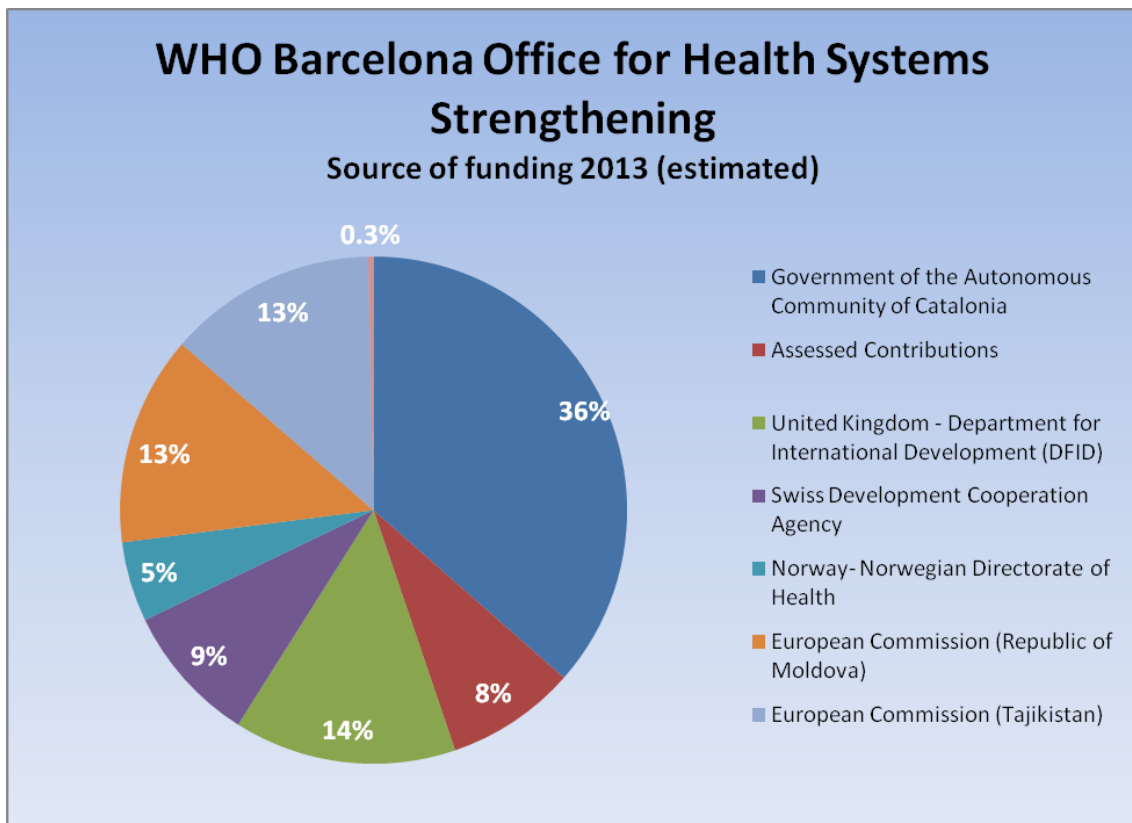


Figure 2. Funding from the Government of the Autonomous Community of Catalonia in the context of all funds managed by the WHO Barcelona Office



Annex 2. Selected bibliography

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Kutzin J et al. (2009). Bismarck meets Beveridge on the Silk Road: coordinating funding sources to create a universal health financing system in Kyrgyzstan. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, 87(7).

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