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The WHO transformation and its implications for the WHO European Region

At the 61st session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe, in 2011, the Regional Director made a commitment to report annually on WHO reform and its impact on the work of the WHO European Region.

To deliver on WHO's Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2023, adopted in 2018, and to provide the leadership and action needed to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 3 and other health-related Sustainable Development Goals, WHO embarked on a transformation agenda to ensure seamless work across the three levels of the Organization and to reposition its work within the broader United Nations development system reform.

This document highlights the key developments in relation to this transition and their implications for the work of the WHO Regional Office for Europe. It is an update of the report submitted to the 68th session of the Regional Committee in 2018.

This report is submitted to the Regional Committee for consideration at its 69th session.

Introduction

1. In 2011, at the 61st session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe, the Regional Director pledged to keep European Member States regularly informed about the WHO reform process. Subsequently, the same commitment was made regarding the WHO transformation.

2. The WHO European Region has been proactive in WHO's reform work over several years. In particular, a comprehensive process of strategic reform has been under way in the Region since 2010, when the Regional Committee, at its 60th session, adopted resolution EUR/RC60/R2 endorsing a report entitled "Better health for Europe. Adapting the Regional Office to the changing European environment: the Regional Director's perspective" (document EUR/RC60/8). The report identified seven key strategic priorities for reforming the WHO Regional Office for Europe, namely:

- developing a European health policy framework as a coherent framework for equitable improvements in health and well-being;
- improving governance in the European Region and within the Regional Office;
- further strengthening of collaboration with Member States;
- engaging in strategic partnerships with other stakeholders to jointly improve health and policy coherence in Europe;
- strengthening the European contribution to global health;
- reaching out through an information and communication strategy; and
- promoting the Regional Office as an organization with a positive working environment and sustainable funding for its work.

3. The seven strategic priorities for action reflect the understanding that a cross-sectoral integrated policy framework would be useful for all Member States. They identify the need to actively promote improved governance, collaborative working, partnerships and information and communication systems to support the implementation of policy. The importance of improving the working environment in the Regional Office, the geographically dispersed offices (GDOs) and country offices in the Region is also acknowledged.

4. Follow-up action on the above priorities has taken place since 2010, in close consultation with, and with the political endorsement of, the Regional Committee at its subsequent sessions. Major achievements of the reform process include the development of Health 2020, the European policy for health and well-being; the establishment of successive working groups on governance by the Standing Committee of the Regional Committee for Europe, which formulated recommendations on governance for the Regional Committee, resulting in the adoption of reforms at the 60th and 63rd sessions of the Regional Committee (resolutions EUR/RC60/R3 and EUR/RC63/R7, respectively); revision of the strategies relating to the GDOs and WHO offices in countries; the development of new operating models for collaboration with Member States, including the biennial collaborative agreements and the establishment of a network of national counterparts in Member States; and the development or strengthening of multilateral platforms for the engagement of countries and subnational levels of government, including the Small Countries Initiative, the South-eastern Europe Health Network, the Regions for Health Network and the Healthy Cities Network.

5. The Regional Office also actively engaged in multilateral platforms for multisectoral action in countries together with United Nations agencies and other partners, including: the Issue-based Coalition on Health and Well-being; multilateral treaties (such as the International Health Regulations (2005) and the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control); multilateral environmental agreements; the European Environment and Health Process; and the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Process. The Regional Office has also taken numerous initiatives to strengthen country offices and promote capacity building and peer-to-peer exchange. These include the development of common and advanced health information systems, including the European Health Information Gateway, the regional Respectful Workplace Initiative, and the promotion of a stronger dialogue with the Staff Association.

6. The achievements of this reform process, which is aligned with the objectives set out in WHO's Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2023 (GPW 13), and with the global conceptual model for transformation launched by the Director-General, provide a firm foundation from which the Region can continue to contribute to the global transformation agenda.

7. The present update on the ongoing WHO transformation focuses on the main developments that have occurred since the 68th session of the Regional Committee in September 2018, which are intended to align the work of WHO more closely with the strategic goals of GPW 13 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) across the three levels of the Organization. The work is based on the guidance provided by the Executive Board at its 143rd session, the Twenty-sixth Standing Committee of the Regional Committee and the resolutions of the Seventy-second World Health Assembly on WHO reform processes, including the transformation agenda, and implementation of United Nations development system reform (World Health Assembly resolutions A72/48 and A72/49).

8. The Regional Office is contributing fully to this new global transformation plan for the Organization, through the active collaboration between the Director-General and the Regional Director for Europe in her new capacity as Deputy Director-General; the Regional Director's contribution to steering the transformation agenda in the Global Policy Group; and a broad, strategic shift that will place country collaboration at the centre of the Region's future work.

9. Several reports will be submitted for consideration by the Regional Committee at its 69th session in September 2019 detailing the progress made within the Regional Office on the implementation of Health 2020, including health governance, and on the way the country presence has been strengthened and will continue to be transformed in the next biennium.

Main developments in the WHO transformation

10. The WHO transformation process is aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the decisions on United Nations development system reform. It has implications and provides opportunities for WHO, as for all United Nations agencies. The WHO transformation implies a commitment to coherence and unity of action across the United Nations system, and this was noted by Member States during the Seventy-second World Health Assembly in May 2019. At country level, with a revised and strengthened role, the United Nations Resident Coordinator can help WHO to unify and integrate its multisectoral and system-wide policy advice and actions essential for many health outcomes within a coordinated United Nations response. At the intercountry level, WHO will continue

to further strengthen its unique normative role, providing Member States with evidence-based guidance to support policy-making. At the same time, WHO will continue to provide all Member States with a platform for dialogue and policy-setting through a strong, inclusive and transparent governance structure at the global and regional levels. The need for strong leadership from WHO in order to achieve SDG 3 and other health-related SDGs has been and will continue to be recognized and emphasized in the WHO transformation. This will be achieved by fully aligning the Organization and its ways of working across its three levels (headquarters, regional offices and countries) with GPW 13 and its triple billion targets, themselves aligned with the health-related SDGs, with the aim of leaving no one behind.

11. Much has been done to launch and implement the transformation process, including consultations and diagnostic work to map programmes and enabling processes in the context of GPW 13, and to map administrative processes through quantitative analysis and visits by the global transformation teams. A baseline cultural survey and a “values jam” have been conducted, in which staff were asked to consider the WHO vision and mission and ways of improving performance, knowledge and skills, to sharpen the focus on normative and technical work and to ensure impact of the work at country level in support of Member States.

12. An overview of the objectives and progress made so far on the transformation agenda was presented at the Seventy-second World Health Assembly (in document A72/48).

13. Some of the main achievements of the transformation process so far include: the adoption of GPW 13; the strengthening of the external relations and resource mobilization functions with the release of the first WHO “business case” brochure to reach out to new and existing partners, motivating them to invest in WHO; and the inaugural WHO Partners Forum, held in Sweden in April 2019.

14. The first WHO Global Management Meeting was held in December 2018. A new operating model, intended to break down “silos”, remodel the structure of the Organization and align it with the three strategic priorities of GPW 13, was announced jointly by the Director-General and all regional directors in early March 2019.

15. The new operating model is based on four principles:

- alignment with the strategic priorities of GPW 13 and its triple billion targets;
- reform of technical, external relations and business and administrative processes in a consistent, best-in-class manner;
- alignment of the operating model across the seven major offices and three levels of the Organization to ensure seamless delivery; and
- a new and agile way of working to boost effectiveness and efficiency across and within the three levels of WHO.

16. In the new operating model, the regional offices will lead technical cooperation activities, while headquarters will lead the Organization’s normative work. The budget structure will be based on outcomes and outputs aligned with the triple billion targets of GPW 13, the country support plans and alignment between the three levels of the Organization.

17. The transformation process is intended to create profound organizational change, affecting the work of every staff member. For this reason, staff have been requested to include deliverables under GPW 13 in their regular performance appraisals.

18. An important development, which occurred between the end of 2018 and early 2019, was the engagement of all staff across the entire Organization in the development of the first-ever WHO Values Charter. The Charter is consistent with the WHO Constitution and defines the set of values that guide and underpin the work of the Organization. It is universally applicable to the entire Organization and all its staff members, regardless of their location. It affirms that the values of the WHO workforce are inspired by the WHO vision of a world in which all peoples attain the highest possible level of health and by its mission to promote health, keep the world safe and serve the vulnerable, with measurable impact for people at country level.

Implications of the transformation for the Regional Office

19. As part of these organizational and transformational changes, the Regional Director for Europe was appointed Deputy Director-General, and will continue to work with the Director-General to lead the transformation efforts. In addition, in 2018, she established a regional coordination function for the transformation efforts, led by the Director of Programme Management and supported by a Regional Transformation Coordinator. In 2019, she decided to strengthen the Regional Office further by appointing the Director of the Division of Noncommunicable Diseases and Promoting Health through the Life-course to lead the regional transformation process, with the support of a lean, cross-functional regional transformation team that works in close collaboration with the global transformation team.

20. The regional transformation team aims to facilitate transformation as far as possible through the line management structures in the Regional Office and in countries. Emphasis is being placed on the involvement and engagement of senior management, staff in all offices and other stakeholders, through timely dissemination of information, transparency throughout the transformation process and the use of all relevant platforms. These include the European Network of Change Supporters (which has members in all divisions, GDOs and major country offices), as well as the Respectful Workplace Initiative, the Staff Association, the Learning Committee of the Regional Office, the Office of the Ombudsperson and the Office of the Regional Staff Physician.

21. Thanks to these arrangements and to the mobilization of its entire workforce, the Regional Office is contributing fully to all the workstreams in the WHO transformation process, as further highlighted below.

22. With respect to the development of GPW 13 and the Programme budget 2020–2021, the Regional Office has engaged in a bottom-up planning exercise, placing countries at the centre by engaging the governing bodies of the Region on the topic, and maintaining a close dialogue with all countries that ensures the continued relevance of WHO's work to countries' priorities. To facilitate the matching of country needs and aspirations (as captured in country support plans) with the technical support available at regional and headquarters levels, two face-to-face meetings were held between technical staff from the Regional Office and its GDOs, WHO representatives and heads of country offices, with the participation of headquarters representatives. The planning work is supported by a variety of regional and

global “public health goods” that provide Member States with concrete options for products, methods, guidance, tools and proposals to meet country needs in order to achieve the triple billion targets of GPW 13. In addition, the Regional Office has set up a structure with strategic priority leads appointed from among the divisional directors, and outcome and output focal points to facilitate the planning dialogue and alignment with headquarters on one side, and the country offices on the other.

23. With reference to redesigning and harmonizing WHO’s core technical, business and external relations functions, the Regional Office has already been functionally aligned with the new organizational structure of WHO headquarters, based on four pillars: Programmes, Emergency Preparedness and Response, External Relations and Governance, and Business Operations. The External Relations and Governance pillar in the Regional Office brings together the partnerships, resource mobilization and corporate communication functions.

24. While aligning with these global functions, the Regional Office retains its regional specificities, which reflect the importance of certain health priorities in the Region, such as noncommunicable diseases and risk factors for ill health; these priorities are still addressed by a dedicated division in the Regional Office. In addition, the Regional Office has taken steps to ensure a predictable WHO country presence and a common, core WHO country office structure driven by the needs and the maturity of health systems in countries. This is supported by the Regional Office business model, which provides technical support from the Regional Office and through multicountry technical teams, located in hubs, in order to deploy resources efficiently and flexibly to countries as needed. This is combined with strategic and empowered WHO representatives with sufficient normative and technical capacity to support Member States. Further adjustments to the organization of the Regional Office will be the responsibility of the next Regional Director, who will take office in February 2020.

25. With respect to harmonizing the operating model across the three levels of the Organization and putting countries at the centre of the Organization’s work, the Regional Office is fully engaged in the process through its active participation in and membership of all the working groups and the six global task forces of the transformation which have been established to make recommendations and guide the implementation of the new operating models. These task forces address the department design of WHO headquarters, WHO headquarters office space and layouts, global mobility, global career pathways and capacity building, global delegation of authority and new ways of working, and WHO headquarters general service staff. The Regional Office has already aligned its processes with the global operating models with respect to planning, external relations, resource mobilization and communications. In addition, it is contributing with its first-hand experience to a redesign of managerial processes, such as recruitment, supply chain and performance management, and to technical processes that are part of the core business of the Organization. In particular, the Regional Office is contributing to reform of the processes for the development of norms and standards, the conduct of research, the provision of data and technical cooperation, with the overarching objective of ensuring that WHO’s advice to Member States meets their needs and is based on the best available evidence, in order to make a stronger and faster impact at the country level.

26. With respect to promoting culture change and developing and implementing the WHO Values Charter, the Regional Office is developing a culture change plan. The plan is based on the Values Charter and builds on and aligns with the global action plan on culture that is under development, with the aim of creating an organizational culture and environment that

will enable effective internal and external collaboration, align staff culture and ways of working with the Organization's values and with GPW 13, and bring out the best in staff, in order to deliver on WHO's mission, and continue to attract and retain top talent.

27. The European culture change plan will follow up on the findings of the culture survey conducted in October 2017 and the recommendations of the Respectful Workplace Initiative, which became available in February 2019. Other available surveys, such as the United Nations perceived sexual harassment survey, will also be taken into account. The Acting Regional Director launched the process in July 2019, aiming to approve the Regional Office culture change plan, including divisional plans, by the end of 2019, and to use Respectful Workplace Day 2019 to exchange experiences and celebrate achievements.

28. The development of the culture change plan will be supported by focus group discussions that will analyse the factors underlying the cultural strengths and weaknesses of the Regional Office. By the end of 2019, specific action will be defined for inclusion in staff appraisals, linking individual performance to the goals of GPW 13 and promoting accountability for results. Periodic "pulse-check" surveys will be issued to support implementation of the transformation.

29. The regional transformation team will also work with colleagues at all levels of the Organization on the establishment of the WHO Academy, an innovative digital learning platform intended to enhance the competencies of a large number of health professionals in areas of work required for the achievement of the health-related SDGs and the triple billion targets of GPW 13, and to address the social determinants of health, strengthen health systems and services and ensure optimal emergency preparedness and response.

30. The Staff Association has expressed support for the transformation vision, including the focuses on country impact, a respectful workplace, optimal utilization of the workforce skill set and the adoption of the WHO Values Charter. Staff will continue to be involved and consulted throughout the transformation process, including through consultations on substantive restructuring that might have an impact on the Regional Office, GDOs and country offices.

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