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Review of the commitments of WHO European Member States and the WHO Regional Office for Europe between 1990 and 2010

Analysis in the light of the Health 2020 strategy

By

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ABSTRACT

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Review of the commitments of WHO European Member States and the WHO Regional Office for Europe between 1990 and 2010: analysis in the light of the Health 2020 strategy

This study provides an overview and analysis of the commitments made by the WHO European Member States and the WHO Regional Office for Europe between 1990 and 2010 in:

- WHO Regional Committee for Europe resolutions on technical matters (82 documents);
- policy statements adopted at ministerial conferences convened by the Regional Office (13 documents); and
- three legally binding WHO instruments adopted at the global or regional levels: the International Health Regulations, the Protocol on Water and Health to the 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes and the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

The study was undertaken to accompany and facilitate the preparation of the Health 2020 strategy and its upcoming implementation. It aimed at identifying existing commitments that could be referred to and at facilitating the preparation and adoption of the strategy. It also aimed at identifying public health areas that have been scarcely addressed in the past and need more attention in designing and implementing the Health 2020 strategy.

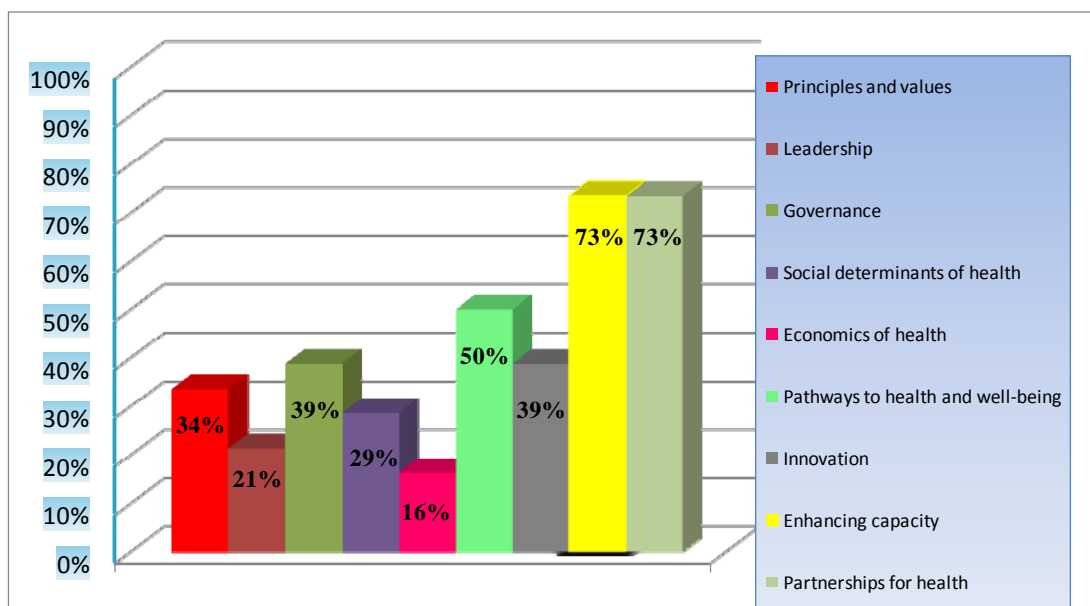
Methods and results

For the purposes of this study, each document was analysed and reviewed in detail and classified according to categories and key terms based on the priorities set out by the Health 2020 strategy policy framework available in Health 2020: policy framework and strategy.¹ Annex 1 summarizes the main priorities and subcategories used in the study. By design, each resolution could be counted several times if different Health 2020 terms and subjects were used in the same document.

Fig. 1 summarizes the overall distribution of the documents by topic. In this particular analysis, the term “governance” does not reflect the modern approach outlined in the Health 2020 document but rather refers to terms such as multisectoral approach, comprehensive policies at the local, national and international levels, public participation and impact assessment.

¹*Health 2020: policy framework and strategy*. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2012.

Fig. 1. Coverage of Health 2020 topics and subtopics in commitments from 98 documents (resolutions (82) and policy and legal documents (16) combined)



The study confirmed that most of the public health topics included within the Health 2020 strategy were extensively addressed between 1990 and 2010, particularly for issues such as partnerships and building capacity, which were mentioned in 73% of the documents studied. However some issues require more attention, such as the needs of specific vulnerable groups such as older people, the management of selected noncommunicable diseases, the life-course approach and the economic implications of health and disease.

We have observed the frequent reference to the adoption of complex approaches to public health promotion and action such as the multisectoral policy. However, our analysis shows that a better definition of the terms, mechanisms and principles comprising the basis of the implementation of these complex strategies should be developed to avoid limiting the action to theoretical statements and to support effective implementation.

The study also showed that the resolutions and declarations do not seem to fully consider the progress made on the subject addressed over time, following previous commitments. In some cases, commitments are repeated using the same wording after a few years without apparent consideration of the changes occurring in the Region. It is suggested that resolutions include a brief overview of the progress made with respect to previous commitments and indicate mechanisms and tools to support implementation and evaluation. A strategy to cancel and supersede previous resolutions on similar topics should also be developed to bring past resolutions to an end.

Finally, looking at the combined commitments at the regional level and at the global level by WHO governing bodies, concerns arises about their very large number each year (>2000 in the period studied). It is suggested that WHO governing bodies look at the decision-making mechanisms and aim at focusing commitments on a few very critical ones to facilitate implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the resolutions as well as accountability and transparency. The current WHO reform process is an extraordinary opportunity to address this aspect of WHO governance.

Annex 1. Health 2020 priorities and keywords

Health 2020 priorities – keywords	Health 2020 subcategories – keywords
Principles and values, setting targets	Universality, equity, solidarity, sustainability, right to participate, dignity, qualitative and quantitative targets
Leadership for health	WHO leadership, health ministry leadership
Governance for health	Intersectoral/multisectoral approach, mechanisms, whole of government, health in all policies
Social determinants of health	Early years, education and family, employment and working conditions, social exclusion, disadvantaged and vulnerability
Economics of health	GDP taxation, income and welfare; cost of inaction; consequences of unhealthy policies; economic impact of healthy policies; economic crisis
Pathways to well-being	Age, sex, behaviour and environmental determinants of health, health conditions (HIV, TB, malaria, influenza, vaccine-preventable diseases, cancer, cardiovascular diseases, cerebrovascular and respiratory diseases, obesity, diabetes, mental health, injuries/accidents)
Innovation	Public health infrastructure, health promotion and disease prevention, health care professionals, chronic diseases, health systems performance and accountability, new medical technologies, research
Enhancing capacity	Strengthening health capacity, strengthening financial and other resources, education and training of health professionals, improving and sharing of information, knowledge, good practices, monitoring and evaluation
Partnerships	Intercountry collaboration, international agencies, health professionals, civil society, private sector, role of WHO