Annual progress report towards the implementation of the Roadmap for health and well-being in Central Asia (2022–2025)
“WHO is committed to working with you, facilitating the process of co-creation of such a Roadmap, finding synergies, and pooling our efforts, leveraging the opportunity we have to firmly position health as a driver for integration, recovery, peace, stability and development of Central Asia with health in the centre.

Only together, both in co-creation and implementation, can we make such a Roadmap a successful tool to implement important political, investment and technical objectives for better health and well-being in Central Asia, 2021–2025”.

Dr Hans Henri P. Kluge, WHO Regional Director for Europe
At the occasion of CARM endorsement, 11 September 2022
The Roadmap for health and well-being in Central Asia (2022–2025) (CARM) is the first subregional strategy for health and well-being endorsed by the Ministers of Health of the following Central Asian countries (CACs): Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan at their meeting on September 11 2022, under the auspices of the 72nd Session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe. CARM encompasses multi-country efforts and adds to tailored country support to advance CACs and partners coalescing in working towards attaining vital milestones of progress and expresses WHO/Europe’s unwavering support to CACs in achieving their 2022–2025 CARM objectives.

This report is intended to present a snapshot rather than a detailed account of WHO/Europe’s engagement in Central Asia and should be read in conjunction with the WHO Regional Office for Europe’s published documents and progress reports, including the Report of the Regional Director on the work of WHO/Europe in 2021–2022 presented at the 72nd Session of the Regional Committee.

Accelerating attainment of CARM objectives

CARM accelerates the implementation of the European Programme of Work, 2020–2025 – “United Action for Better Health” (EPW) amongst CACs and partners and forges partnership, solidarity, and opportunities for synergistic action in attaining its political, investment and technical objectives. In CARM, CACs have designated 11 high impact action areas, and identified 32 reform initiatives to guide their and their partners’ efforts and investments in technical cooperation, thus contributing to progress across EPW priorities and flagships in Central Asia.

WHO/Europe pursues facilitative leadership in convening countries and partners and contributes technical support to advancing CARM achievements primarily through four avenues, namely, meeting with ministers, maintaining a presence in CACs, convening partners and partnerships, as well as convening CARM expert stakeholders at technical meetings (Fig. 1). The First Technical meeting – the Central Asian Health Triathlon in June 2022 – gathered over 80 experts from CACs and partners, deliberating on CARM development and deciding on critical action areas and reform initiatives, in preparation for the meeting of the CAC ministers of health and their endorsement of CARM.

Fig. 1. Key avenues of CARM-related support from WHO/Europe

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<th>Avenues</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>CARM Meeting of ministers</td>
<td>Joint yearly and individual political events with the CAC ministers of health.</td>
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<td>The WHO/Europe’s presence in CACs</td>
<td>High Level meetings with ministers of health and CAC counterparts facilitated by WHO heads of offices.</td>
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<td>Convening partners and partnerships for synergistic support to CARM</td>
<td>Collaboration with subregional organizations and partners.</td>
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<td>CARM technical meetings of countries and partners</td>
<td>Subregional and country gatherings of technical experts from CACs and partners, for investment alliance and powering human resource capacities for advancements across CARM action areas and reform initiatives.</td>
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1 The WHO Regional Office for Europe (WHO/Europe) consists of the head office in Copenhagen, Denmark; 32 country offices (for Israel, host agreement is being finalized); field, liaison, representation and sub-offices including subregional WHO Health Emergencies Programme (WHE) hubs; five geographically dispersed offices (GDOs); one WHO-hosted Partnership; and one office for Health Systems Financing. It is through these offices that Programme budget 2022–2023 has been delivered, with the support of a broad partnership community, including over 265 WHO collaborating centres.
Positioning health high atop CACs’ development agenda

Central Asia moved decisively towards development with a profound focus on a social and environmental footprint and sustainable development goal (SDG) attainment, as expressed in current individual CAC development strategies and high-level events. Key forums in Central Asia in 2022 (Box 1) confirmed such a trajectory of travel. CACs accelerated the integration of Central Asia through joint vision and multiple initiatives to counteract external shocks and accelerate environmental protection, climate change response, and action under their newly established One Health Framework.

Box 1. Key regional forums in Central Asia in 2022

- The second Regional sustainable development goal (SDG) summit Beyond COVID – Towards Just Recovery in Central Asia, June 2022, Almaty, Kazakhstan strengthened partnerships towards SDG achievement highlighting the intent for a strong social and environmental impact.
- The Fourth Consultative Meeting of the Heads of State of Central Asian countries, July 2022, Cholpon-Ata, the Kyrgyz Republic united CAC leaders over a joint vision and multiple initiatives on better aligning the subregion against external shocks, the creation of the CAC project office for environmental protection and the implementation of a coordinated policy on climate change, as well as on youth policy.
- The subregional ministerial meeting Protecting Livestock and Preventing Pandemics, November 2022 Almaty Kazakhstan gathered health, environment, and agriculture sectors to sign a communiqué for the formal start of developing the Central Asia One Health Framework for Action, including a call for joint resource mobilization.
- The 18th European Union (EU)-Central Asia Ministerial Meeting, November 2022, Samarkand, Uzbekistan that closely following the meeting of the Heads of State of Central Asia and the President of the European Council in October, Astana, Kazakhstan, enhanced the interregional cooperation between Central Asia and the EU. The EU also committed to utilize their new Global Gateway Strategy “to help connect Europe and its partners with investments in sustainable and high-quality infrastructure, inclusive skills development for young people, and more resilient healthcare systems for the region.”

The September 2022 meeting of the CAC ministers of health and the endorsement of CARM fitted well in such a context – further positioning health strongly at the centre of development agendas. The CAC Joint Statement of Action firmly kickstarted a new road towards reaching their ambitious goal of closing the gap in health and well-being between Central Asia and the WHO European Region, most notably by significantly reducing infant, under-five and maternal mortality, and communicable diseases and noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), including environmental threats (Box 2).

Box 2. Joint statement of action of the CAC ministers of health

This Joint Statement of Action represents our endorsement of the Roadmap, which intends to respect, reaffirm and accelerate progress toward our prior global, regional, subregional and local commitments, including the European Programme of Work (2020–2025) – “United Action for Better Health” and the 2030 Agenda’s Sustainable Development Goals.

We co-created the Roadmap in a joint process facilitated by WHO/Europe and supported by development partners to align our efforts in pursuing strong political, investment and technical objectives.

We recognize the need to engage in the following activities to significantly improve health and well-being in Central Asia throughout the Roadmap’s implementation:

- keep health and well-being atop the political agenda of our intergovernmental processes;
- strengthen and expand our ongoing efforts for peace and stability in Central Asia, under the auspices of the WHO Global Peace for Health Initiative;
- follow a pragmatic, One Health approach, involving cooperation between multiple sectors, levels and partners, to design and implement programmes, policies, legislation, and research that achieve better public health outcomes;
- increase investments in robust, resilient, and inclusive health systems, and support innovation;
- share global public goods across the subregion for sustainable improvements in health and well-being;
- expand the technical support of WHO/Europe within and beyond the Roadmap; and
- promote subregional efforts to target investment in the Roadmap’s action areas and reform initiatives, including by: i) improving health system accounting to promote investment; ii) preventing health threats and strengthen preparedness and response; iii) increasing private investment in the health sector; iv) strategizing health governance to reduce the fragmentation of subregional health actors; and v) acting in solidarity to achieve the Roadmap’s strategic results.

Special Event on the endorsement of the Roadmap for health and well-being in Central Asia 2022–2025 in conjunction with the 72nd session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe in Tel Aviv, Israel, 11 September 2022
The Roadmap has accelerated partner and partnership synergies and results, including cooperation between WHO and the EU, with coordinated initiatives to improve sustainability and long-term resilience in CACs. A specialist EU Project Management Office within WHO/Europe promptly executed more than US$ 32.5 million in EU financing support in total, of which US$ 4 million was distributed among CACs in the reporting period. Through a €10 million project, co-financed by the EU and carried out by WHO/Europe in 2022–2026, CACs will further benefit from stronger and more resilient health systems and technical advancement across CARM action areas. This project aims to scale-up COVID-19 vaccination, develop and implement COVID-19 and routine immunization plans, train health-care professionals involved in vaccination, strengthen immunization information systems, and to evaluate and improve the capacities of the CACs.

WHO/Europe continued its collaboration with the CACs’ subregional organizations – the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and its Interparliamentary Assembly (IPA CIS), as well as the Eurasian Economic Organization – on a range of technical issues including primary health care (PHC), the International Health Regulations (2005) (IHR), migration, tobacco control and One health, among others. Most notably, the WHO Regional Director presented the new strategy for cooperation between WHO/Europe and its Member States at the CIS Health Council annual meeting in October 2022 in Turkestan, Kazakhstan. IPA CIS high level representatives addressed the high-level meeting on health and migration, hosted by WHO/Europe in March 2022.

WHO/Europe partnered with the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Program (CAREC) on developing the health chapter of their Strategy 2030 and continues to support the CAREC Working Group on Health that was endorsed at the virtual 20th CAREC Ministerial Conference on Connectivity, Cooperation, and Resilience in a Digital Era held in November 2021 and hosted by Azerbaijan. In March 2023 WHO/Europe participated in the 2nd Meeting of the CAREC Working Group on Health Moving towards a joint future for health cooperation: Innovation, Digitalization, Regional Health Security and Cooperation in CAREC, which brought forward the Regional Implementation Framework 2022–2026 – contributing to synergies in action with CARM.

WHO/Europe continues its cooperation with and support to the Organization of Turkic States (OTS), of which CACs are members. The 2nd Meeting of the ministers of health from OTS countries was held around the Turkic Medical World Congress in October 2022 in Istanbul, where health priorities were discussed, including close cooperation related to joint production and procurement possibilities in the fields of personal protective equipment, vaccines, medicines, medical devices and materials, as well as removing barriers against free movement of these supplies.
Accelerating action under CARM’s technical objective

CARM was developed to also support the implementation of the EPW in Central Asia in the areas prioritized explicitly by CACs (Table 1). WHO/Europe has contributed to CARM advances mainly through three action streams, namely: 1) ensure Central Asia is well reflected/included in Regional and global initiatives; 2) create specific opportunities for subregional cooperation and dialogue in Central Asia, and 3) implement biennial cooperative agreement programmes of work in individual CACs.

Table 1. Collaboration between the EPW priorities and flagships and CARM action areas and reform initiatives

<table>
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<tr>
<th>EPW Priorities</th>
<th>CARM action areas and reform initiatives</th>
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| Priority 1: Moving toward universal health coverage (UHC) | Strengthen PHC  
Enhance PHC capacities across Central Asia  
Improve PHC performance measurement and management  
Improve health governance and human resources for health (HRH)  
Improve HRH governance  
Develop sustainable and integrated HRH planning and delivery capacities  
Strengthen CACs’ engagement with the private sector  
Increase investments to improve financial protection and health equity  
Strengthen health financing policies for UHC |
| Flagship Initiative 1: The Mental Health Coalition | Promote mental health and social care services  
Cross-cutting (PHC, HRH, health emergencies, NCDs, communicable diseases, behavioural and cultural insights) |
| Flagship Initiative 2: Empowerment through digital health | Advance the digital transformation of health care  
Strengthen the capacities of CACs’ data and health information systems to inform impactful policy and action  
Improve governance of the digital transformation of health care in CACs |
| Priority 2: Protection against health emergencies | Strengthen health security  
Implement the IHR Monitoring and Evaluation Framework assessment and develop national action plans for health security  
Develop key IHR core capacities in line with national action plans for health security  
Strengthen border health capacities  
Establish the Central Asia One Health Initiative  
Ensure the readiness and timely deployment of medical countermeasures to emerging pathogens  
Improve emergency training for the health workforce  
Strengthen laboratory capacity and improve the quality and biosafety of laboratory services  
Strengthen infection prevention and control capacities at national and facility levels  
Mitigate, detect, and respond to health emergencies  
Build subregional emergency response workforces and emergency management systems  
Prevent epidemics and pandemics  
Detect, assess, and report public health events under IHR  
Guarantee rapid, effective, and coordinated responses and recovery |
| Priority 3. Promoting health and well-being | Reduce the burden of communicable diseases  
Reduce the burden of tuberculosis (TB), HIV/AIDS, viral hepatitis and sexually transmitted infections (STIs)  
Reduce the burden of NCDs  
Reduce the burden of cardiovascular disease  
Accelerate action on diabetes prevention and control  
Accelerate action on cancer prevention and control  
Create healthy and green environments  
Establish a subregional initiative for climate, environment and health  
Improve access to WASH services  
Establish a subregional initiative for road safety  
Combat antimicrobial resistance (AMR)  
Promote intersectoral AMR leadership and governance  
Improve human and institutional capacity for AMR |
| Flagship Initiative 3: The European Immunization Agenda | Eliminate vaccine-preventable diseases and reduce immunization inequity  
Reduce morbidity and mortality from vaccine-preventable diseases by sustaining high and equitable vaccination coverage through implementing the European Immunization Agenda 2030. |
| Flagship Initiative 4: Healthier behaviour: incorporating behavioral and cultural insights | Incorporate behavioural and cultural insights  
Establish a subregional initiative for behavioural and cultural insights |
Highlights of EPW-related Regional and global achievements that have powered up CARM-related action

WHO/Europe’s support for CACs runs strong, as demonstrated by its role in the establishment and implementation of CARM in 2021–2022. Developing a comprehensive and feasible CARM has been simultaneously a political and technical process, and both aspects should be repeatedly acknowledged as CARM action progresses. Given the contemporary complexities, one-dimensional approaches were ill suited to addressing multi-dimensional health problems and the needs of present and future CAC generations. Instead, CARM comprises flexible, integrative, and holistic approaches that can rapidly adapt to changing circumstances and an ever-growing evidence base and set the tone of the overall motion of CARM.

The WHO Regional Director for Europe has been frequently present in CACs and met high-level authorities across-the-Government on over 20 direct bilateral occasions. Such a strong presence supported the establishment of health as a driver of overall socioeconomic progress and has helped to increase social capital for health through strengthened and inclusive collaboration among stakeholders and partners, thus channeling and generating wider support for CACs and their subregional health engagements. Hundreds of technical missions have been coordinated by the WHO heads of offices and their teams, focusing on individual country needs. At the same time, these endeavors have been increasing the awareness of CARM’s role in facilitating policy coherence for health and sustainable development across CACs by encouraging countries to consider the effects of their action in a holistic manner, within and beyond their own borders, now and in the future, as well as the impact for sustainable development.

Overall, the WHO Regional Office for Europe published over 450 publications in 2022–2023: reports, policy briefs, operational guidance, health profiles, fact sheets and others, each providing evidence to support CARM action across all the action areas or advice for future efforts. Recent reports continue to demonstrate WHO’s role as a beacon for the endeavors of CACs and their partners, including the European Health Report 2021 and those relating to a number of different topics including obesity; antimicrobial resistance surveillance; the health and care workforce; childhood cancer inequality; the scaling up of action on climate change mitigation and health adaptation; alcohol digital environments; and challenges and policy options for better health, as well as Regional and seasonal influenza surveillance reports, reports and updates from the WHO Technical Advisory Group on COVID-19 and other technical groups, networks and WHO centres of excellence. In the same period, there have also been multiple potent initiatives that include CACs, some of which are highlighted in this Digest (Box 3).
Box 3. Exemplifying WHO/Europe support to CARM through Regional initiatives

- **WHO/Europe Access to Novel Medicines Platform** - is a neutral platform for the public and private sectors to reshape political discourse, create partnerships, build momentum for change, and identify potential, pragmatic solutions to improve access to effective novel high-cost medicines in the Region.

- **The Pan-European Mental Health Coalition** – under which WHO/Europe continues to support countries engaging in dialogues on mental health frameworks and scaling up activities such as WHO Quality Rights.

- **WHO Regional Director for Europe’s Advisory Council on Innovation for Noncommunicable Diseases and its six signature initiatives** – alcohol, cardiovascular disease, childhood obesity, data and digital health, digital marketing, and greener cities – aims to design innovative approaches to the respective topics.

- **A cloud-based platform** for real-time collaboration and peer-to-peer knowledge sharing between member cities and the entire Healthy Cities Network.

- **Regional Behavioural and Cultural Insights Technical Advisory Group** has been established, and 49 official country focal points have been nominated and engaged in developing a behavioural and cultural insights action framework for 2022–2027.

Technical support and capacity-building efforts remain a sturdy focus of WHO/Europe. Gathering experts across the vast and diverse European Region allows joint learning and knowledge exchange and stimulates awareness of cross-border health considerations, especially related to building Regional and global resilience in the face of multiple crises of global health impact. Hundreds of Regional events in the past year alone have supported technical networking and the strengthening of professional communities, equipping them with tools and training material. For an illustration of the magnitude of country support across the Region in 2022, WHO/Europe conducted 419 support missions and deployments to 27 countries and areas, including in CACs; mobilized 40 partners under the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network and facilitated the deployment of eight Emergency Medical Teams. Supplies worth US$ 96 million, including vaccines, were procured for 31 countries and areas in the Region. WHO/Europe’s efforts to build country-level capacity resulted in hundreds of webinars, trainings and workshops related to the COVID-19 response, which engaged more than 55 500 participants.

The Seventy-second Regional Committee for Europe in 2022 brought forward the resolution, *Delivering United Action for Better Health – a strategy for collaboration between the WHO Regional Office for Europe and Member States in the WHO European Region*. The strategy describes the Regional Office’s offer across its six core capabilities: three technical capabilities in the areas of moving towards UHC, protecting against emergencies and promoting population health and well-being, and three enabling capabilities in the areas of leadership, communications and operations for health. Member States emphasized the role of the Region’s Subregional collaboration strategies, roadmaps, and memorandums of understanding in facilitating valuable collaboration among groups of countries with shared agendas and the added value of technical and programmatic networks in the sharing of learning across the Region, including the subregional networks.
Highlights: WHO targeted technical support at the subregional level across CARM prioritized areas

EPW Core priority 1: Moving towards UHC and its flagship initiatives

CARM action area: Strengthen primary health care (PHC)

The WHO European Centre for Primary Health Care located in Almaty, Kazakhstan (the PHC Centre) organized 13 PHC technical assistance missions to CACs in 2022 to accelerate PHC development including: the establishment of PHC task forces (the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan); agreeing on a joint statement of shared intent by PHC stakeholders (Tajikistan); refining a multidisciplinary PHC model (Uzbekistan); documenting the transformation of PHC from a biomedical to bio-psycho-social model (Kazakhstan); and the development of a Roadmap for enhancing PHC in Turkmenistan. In 2022 the WHO PHC Demonstration Platform was launched in rural Kazakhstan, which has already also added value to neighbouring CACs, with visits of the high-level delegations from the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Additionally, through the second season of the pan-European dialogue platform’s “Let’s Talk” talk show, the PHC Centre continued to offer opportunities for CACs to contribute and influence subregional and Regional exchange though the the show’s six episodes in 2022 on the PHC policy issues most relevant in CACs, including leadership for PHC transformation, creating a motivating environment for the PHC workforce, and scaling up mental health strategies in PHC. The September episode of the show, organized alongside the annual meeting of CIS Council on cooperation for health, gathered health ministers from Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Uzbekistan, the Deputy Minister of Health of Tajikistan and the Director General of Turkmenistan. In March 2023 for the first week of the Strengthening Actionable PHC Performance Measurement and Management Tailored Training and Mentorship Programme, the PHC Centre partnered with Amsterdam University Medical Centre (a WHO Collaborating Centre) and teams including from the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, and helped kick off the year-long programme and define the scope of the priority projects. Moreover, two online roundtables on “Mobile PHC Services - Agile Mechanism for UHC” and “Innovations in Primary Health Care” held for CACs provoked the interest of over 450 participants in total. The PHC Centre also published progress made in its annual report for 2022, which was launched at the meeting of the Ministerial Collegium of Kazakhstan in April 2023, before over 400 participants, including ministerial officials, health-care managers and leaders of medical universities.

CARM action area: Improve health governance and human resources for health

In 2022 WHO/Europe supported health workforce strengthening and service delivery in CACs by conducting joint interdivisional missions between the Health Workforce and Service Delivery unit at the head office in Copenhagen, Denmark, and the PHC Centre. Furthermore, the first Meeting of the Government Chief Nursing Officer Council opened discussions on the need for and components of a 5-year roadmap for strengthening nursing and midwifery in the subregion, and the second demonstration project for the Pan-European Leadership Academy was launched in April 2023, involving mid-career officials from CAC national ministries and institutes of health: the 6-month programme focuses on transformational leadership competency enhancement and peer-to-peer exchange. Under CARM, a high-level policy dialogue on health labour market analysis was organized in late April 2023 in Tajikistan to discuss possible policy actions to improve the health workforce situation and tackle challenges such as uneven workforce distribution and difficulties with retention and shortages of workers, with a focus on PHC.
CARM action area: Increase investments to improve financial protection and health equity

The WHO Barcelona Office for Health Systems Financing (Spain) is monitoring financial protection – a core dimension of UHC and an SDG indicator – in all countries of the WHO European Region. Realizing the capacity gap in Central Asia, WHO/Europe has intensified work in this area and provided direct, hands-on technical support on producing relevant indicators and using the relevant analytical tools developed by WHO. CACs benefited from a number of Regional events as well as targeted events for central Asia under this action area related to financial protection, including, a February 2022 meeting gathering the statistical offices, health ministries and independent national experts from CACs, which was coupled by individual country consultations; a meeting in September 2022, which brought together specialists from eastern Europe and central Asia to assess the financial difficulties people encounter when they must pay out-of-pocket for health care. Moreover, the 5th Sub-regional European meeting on tracking health spending using the SHA [System of Health Accounts] held in Istanbul in April 2023, saw renewed commitment to better and more transparent data in health spending across CACs. Also, in April 2023 a joint workshop for health policy-makers and financing experts, including from CACs, encouraged governments to move to a new phase of health spending tracking. Simultaneously, WHO/Europe and the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies convened CACs in Almaty, Kazakhstan over the policy dialogue Ensuring sustainable and affordable access to medicines to enhance national policies on medicines and to promote collaboration among central Asia and other subregions.

CARM action area: Promote mental health and social care services

The EPW flagship mental health initiative has made great strides in motivating mental health action following the adoption of the European Framework for Action on Mental Health, 2021–2025. Activities in this area included the first subregional health systems policy dialogue on mental health in a series designed to support CARM implementation, which continued in April 2023 with experts from WHO/Europe and within the subregion gathering to address issues such as stigma, inclusion, mental health in PHC and youth and child mental health. For the first time, people living with mental health conditions and advocates featured prominently in the policy dialogue on the issue of service user’s rights. As part of this dialogue, WHO/Europe executives and experts met ministers and held technical consultations to discuss country-specific support and actions. Dialog with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) focused on joint action for child and adolescent mental health.

CARM action area: Advance the digital transformation of health care

CAC efforts in the use of novel digital tools and methods for integrating public health and PHC systems have contributed to the development of the Regional digital health action plan for the WHO European Region 2023–2030 adopted in 2022. Numerous activities under CARM have brought forward significant developments in digital transformation, including: the establishment of a subregional telemedical network in central Asia that was launched at a workshop held in Uzbekistan in 2022; the launch of the Informatics and Data Science for Health fellowship by WHO, the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and I-TECH in eastern Europe and central Asia in April 2023, to support country governance of the digital transformation in the health sector and digital health literacy, with the first selected cohort of 20 fellows including individuals from Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, and Uzbekistan; and the impact training Big Data in Health care was organized in May 2023 for 15 participants from CACs to enhance capacity and address key aspects for the successful implementation and maintenance of a Big Data health infrastructure and related tools in a health-care system. Furthermore, a comprehensive assessment of the core components of health information systems with a focus on digital health and immunization information systems was undertaken in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. And, through a webinar series CACs experts coalesced over the implementation of the WHO Family of International Classifications, focusing on the eleventh revision of the International Classification of Diseases. Uzbekistan also benefited from a webinar series on the digitalization of health information systems to keep up the progress and contribute to subregional knowledge exchange. The Central Asian Republics Information Network (CARINFONET) hosted a range of meetings contributing to the technical progress in this area. Additionally, in December 2022 CAC experts exchanged information on the secondary use of health data and methods to improve, assess, and report on data quality.
EPW Core Priority 2: Protecting against health emergencies

CARM action area: Strengthen health security

WHO/Europe Health Emergencies Program (WHE) has been providing emergency preparedness capacity-building activities in CACs in various areas, such as risk communication and community engagement, infodemic management, infection prevention and control, laboratory strengthening, epidemiological surveillance, clinical management, and medical countermeasures. The 2022–2023 focus has been largely on the response and recovery stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, with WHO/Europe mobilizing partners under the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network and facilitating the deployment of eight Emergency Medical Teams. A subregional consultation in Tashkent, Uzbekistan in 2022 focused on exploring future collaboration on pandemic prevention and at a Regional workshop in September 2022, CACs benefited from exchange on the development and management of the Emergency Operation Centre, jointly organized by WHO/Europe and the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Activities on One Health in Central Asia

Following the establishment of the One Health Coordination Mechanism for the WHO European Region in April 2022, which set the path for coordination and collaboration between the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Organization for Animal Health, and the United Nations Environment Programme, a Joint Statement of intent to coordinate One Health priorities in Europe and central Asia was signed in November. Moreover, as part of the collaboration of WHO/Europe and the World Bank on health and the environment on One Health, the World Bank organized a subregional consultation in Tashkent, Uzbekistan in July 2022 where the Regional Director met with World Bank high-level officials to explore future collaboration on pandemic prevention and agree on a joint interregional approach convening different sectors in addressing One Health. Turkmenistan hosted a subregional conference for central Asian Republic Member States and partners in July 2022 where the commitment to One Health was reaffirmed and common priorities for its innovative operationalization were defined at the highest governmental level. One Health activities are notably progressing in Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan. WHO/Europe’s current Chairmanship of the European Quadripartite on One Health accelerated Regional activities through a Regional Quadripartite retreat held in May and an Executive Group meeting held in May, the conclusions from which enable CACs to navigate their country and CARM related policies and actions under One Health.
**CARM action area: Mitigate, detect and respond to health emergencies**

Moving beyond the direct response to COVID-19, WHO/Europe has continued supporting CACs according to their needs and interests in assessing, building and strengthening preparedness and response capacities for points of entry, mainly through conducting risk assessments, the development and implementation of contingency and emergency plans, the provision of multisectoral training for relevant border staff and collaboration with designated health-care facilities. The subregional training on the WHO IHR points of entry assessment tool was conducted in 2023 in Aktau Kazakhstan, convening representatives from all CACs. In 2022 the WHO European Centre for Preparedness for Humanitarian and Health Emergencies in Istanbul, Türkiye organized 15 capacity building events, including a conference on Sustainable Development and Preparedness for 25 experts from CACs and five partner organizations. Under the Gender, Equity and Human Rights Action Plan for the ACT-Accelerator Health Systems Connector Implementation Project, the WHO European Office for Investment for Health and Development in Venice supported Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic in understanding who was left behind during the COVID-19 response to better prepare for future emergencies, and a policy dialogue led by the Ministry of Health of the Kyrgyz Republic and including several civil society organizations in March 2022 took place alongside the analysis of evidence in this regard.

**EPW Core Priority 3: Promoting health and well-being**

**CARM action area: Reduce the burden of NCDs**

As part of the childhood obesity signature initiative of the WHO Regional Director’s Advisory Council on Innovation for Noncommunicable Diseases, CAC’s obesity policy dialogues were launched in June 2022 at a high-level event. Dialogues, coupled with a training course on childhood obesity management for primary care physicians, gathered vital health sector stakeholders in CACs to guide the implementation of evidence-based policy interventions that enable the application of an NCD framework in addressing obesity. CACs have also benefited from the 2022 Regional workshop on Evidence-informed Policy to Fight Obesity jointly conducted by the Asian Development Bank Institute and WHO/Europe. The benefits of gathering and using health data on NCD risk factors was the main topic of a workshop in Kazakhstan in September 2022. WHO/Europe’s support also extended to 2023, offering dialoging, training and new tools to professional communities of practice and scholars. In March a workshop on comprehensive tobacco cessation services was held in Astana that focused on designing and integrating comprehensive tobacco-cessation services into health system structures using existing capacities. WHO/Europe also launched a seminar series for graduate and postgraduate students, early career researchers and other relevant young professionals who are interested in alcohol from a public health perspective, as well as a new WHO tool aimed to protect children from unhealthy food marketing – complementing the wide array of existing tools to equip practitioners and policy-makers.
CARM action area: Create healthy and green environments

WHO/Europe advanced the political commitment and the engagement of the health constituency in the climate and health agenda and further accelerated policy and action under the COP26 Health Programme in CACs through numerous activities. In 2022–2023 the European Centre for Environment and Health (ECEH) (Bonn, Germany) held policy dialogues on environment and health priorities and climate change which reflected upon: the agenda and priorities of CACs; support for CACs in developing evidence-informed policies and actions; CAC uptake of WHO tools; and CACs political input to the Seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health in 2023. Findings from the preparatory work for this Conference validated the decision set out in CARM to prioritize this area of action and justified the intense engagement of the ECEH in central Asia.

The second online edition of the Bonn Environment and Health School in November 2022 scoped CAC participants on the topics of contaminated sites and impact assessments. CACs also benefited from ECEH capacity-building activities in chemical risk assessment and the development of tools and educational materials, including on mercury and health, contributing to implementing the WHO Chemicals Road Map and international environmental agreements, such as the Minamata Convention on Mercury. ECEH engagements in CACs supported other significant achievements, most notably in strengthening capacities in road safety data systems, and in developing of cause of death registry systems and integrated/intersectoral road safety data systems. CACs also participated in the Road Policing survey and the compilation of case studies for the Technical Manual on Road Policing. Furthermore, in 2023 the ECEH published version 2.2 of the WHO Regional Office’s AirQ+ tool featuring improved functions for estimating the health effects of exposure to the most relevant air pollutants and is supporting its use in CACs.

CARM action area: Combat antimicrobial resistance (AMR)

Both Regional and targeted actions under the CARM action area on AMR enabled: the increased integration of CACs technical communities at subregional level; the further strengthening of technical capacities in CACs to identify, prioritize, implement and monitor AMR measures; and the closing of the technical gap for AMR high impact interventions with the European Region – in 2022–2023 AMR activities were particularly rich in data gathering and capacity building to close this gap, as an overarching CARM objective. CACs have now contributed AMR data to the WHO Antimicrobial Medicines Consumption Network and the Central Asian and European Surveillance of Antimicrobial Resistance network (CAESAR) network. CACs also took part in the 2022 assessment of supply patterns of antiviral and antibacterial agents in community pharmacies in CACs in the early phases of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as in the comparative review on the latest national medicine selection lists of 17 countries in central Asia and eastern Europe, with antibiotics on the WHO Model Lists. In addition, the 2022 CAESAR External Quality Assessment involved over 300 laboratories from across most CAESAR network countries, allowing the participating laboratories to test their performance in identification and susceptibility testing of well-defined challenge organisms, including those in Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Uzbekistan. In 2022 WHO supported Kazakhstan in piloting the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control point prevalence survey on health care-associated infections and antimicrobial use. Furthermore, in-depth assessments of IPC programmes at national/area level and revision of national IPC manuals were conducted in the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan data for the first time enriched the second joint WHO/Europe and European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control report on AMR surveillance in Europe, published in April 2023, clearly demonstrating CAC intent for integration in the public health community at Regional level. In parallel, WHO/Europe rolled out AMR-related curricula and training in CACs, and gathered around 40 clinical pharmacologists and hospital pharmacists in Kazakhstan for training on hospital AMC surveillance to top up capacity building efforts in other CACs. Such developments not only built capacities to progress CACs in developing and implementing their respective AMR action plans, but also fueled the CAC subregional policy dialogue and consultation on the new AMR Roadmap for the WHO European Region conducted in March 2023.
CARM action area: Reduce the burden of communicable diseases

In addressing the challenges under CARM in the action area of communicable diseases, WHO/Europe has continued to integrate CACs under its Regional initiatives, notably: 1) on the concomitant treatment of hepatitis C and drug resistant (DR)-TB initiative launched in 2022 to improve collaboration between the respective health service fields at national level and to strengthen the clinical care of TB patients, 2) by completing the Tuberculosis Regional eastern European and central Asian Project (TB-REP) 2.0, in partnership with non-State actors and with financial support from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM), to improve TB and DR-TB prevention and quality of care; and 3) the Regional operational research initiative on the introduction of fully oral modified shorter treatment regimens for DR-TB, that has already reached more than 900 patients from central Asia. WHO/Europe has also provided tailored technical support to CACs to strengthen and ensure continuity of national responses on TB and DR-TB with financial support from United States Agency for International Development, GFATM, and the Government of Germany.

WHO/Europe partnered with the European Commission and UNICEF in providing targeted technical assistance to CACs to scale-up COVID-19 vaccination amongst vulnerable population groups, and supported selected CACs to ensure access of COVID-19 vaccine from COVAX and the deployment of funds from Gavi, to ensure robust implementation of the COVID-19 deployment plan. Under the European Immunization Agenda 2030, strategic policy dialogues in 2022 brought together the CACs’ national immunization programme managers and Regional and global partners to draft the operational framework for the implementation of the European Immunization Agenda 2030 and a plan of action to address immunization inequity in CACs. WHO/Europe additionally provided strategic support in the assessment of vaccine management systems; carried out formative research on COVID-19 vaccine demand; developed a tailored communication plan for the scale-up of HPV vaccination; provided communication training for health-care workers on HPV and COVID-19 vaccination; and developed a routine immunization information system using an electronic immunization registry. In view of keeping the Region polio-free, targeted technical assistance was provided to Tajikistan in successfully validating the assessment of the circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus outbreak and its response. All these activities are aligned to the targets and goals of the European Immunization Agenda 2030 in eliminating vaccine-preventable diseases and in building resilient immunization systems.

CARM action area: Incorporate behavioural and cultural insights

In 2022 the behavioural and cultural insights October School took place with 35 participants from 14 countries, including CACs. Outcomes included increased self-assessed knowledge and skills related to behavioural and cultural insight frameworks, research and evaluation methods, intervention design and the initiation of relevant projects in countries.
Conclusions

Multiple, simultaneous and complex emergencies impacting our Region, and their consequent responses, characterized the 2022–2023 period covered in this Digest. WHO/Europe mobilized and sought to respond to each emergency. WHO/Europe’s work is driven by three core priorities and substantial advancements have been made within each of these over the past two years – advancements that have benefited CACs. This has included delivering workshops and training; setting up critical new initiatives; providing invaluable data and evidence to inform policy and decision-making; leading the health response amid major overlapping emergencies; and more. WHO/Europe has also provided specific and tailored technical support to the subregion in the various health areas scoped by CARM.

In all, WHO/Europe has contributed to progress across CARM objectives through high-level promotion, technical contribution, investments, and significant efforts to facilitate CAC leadership in their joint endeavors with partners towards full delivery on CARM.

CACs growing integration within the subregion and with the EU, and solid subregional collaboration has contributed to realizing their political objective under CARM and has facilitated the increased investment of partners and of CACs in health, as central in developing their economic well-being.

Bibliography


2 All weblinks were accessed on 12 May 2023.