

Engagement plan with non-State actors



World Health
Organization

European Region

Abstract

This Engagement plan with non-State actors (NSAs) is to help people from NSA organizations, the WHO Regional Office for Europe (including all WHO offices across the WHO European Region), Member States and other key stakeholders understand the key areas that are being progressed to strengthen collaboration. The plan was developed in close consultation with NSAs and sets out three years of action that will enhance engagement through three key areas: dialogue that better informs engagement; institutionalization that enables more systematic engagement; and collaboration that integrates NSAs into the WHO Regional Office for Europe's ways of working both at the regional and country level.

Keywords

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION
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Engagement plan with non-State actors

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Abbreviations

CSC	Civil Society Commission
EPW	European Programme of Work
GPW13	Thirteenth General Programme of Work
GPW14	Fourteenth General Programme of Work
NSAs	non-State actors
RC	WHO Regional Committee for Europe
WHA	World Health Assembly

Purpose

This Engagement plan with non-State actors (NSAs) aims to help people from NSA organizations, the WHO Regional Office for Europe (including all WHO offices across the WHO European Region), Member States and other key stakeholders understand the key areas that are being progressed to enable and strengthen collaboration and the tools available to all stakeholders. The plan sets out a series of actions that will help to progress three key objectives.

Objectives

The objectives of this engagement plan are to:

- 1. streamline collaboration**, ensuring purposeful and sustained partnerships that drive impactful outcomes in addressing evolving national, regional and global health challenges;
- 2. enhance opportunities for collaboration** and co-creation between the WHO Regional Office for Europe, Member States and NSAs in all areas of work; and
- 3. integrate this plan with the WHO Regional Office for Europe's wider strategic outlook for collaboration**, including the current (1) and future European Programme of Work (EPW) and country strategy (2), to help countries achieve their health ambitions by sharing expertise, insight and learning across the Region.

Background

In the context of this engagement plan, NSAs refer to nongovernmental organizations, business associations and philanthropic foundations, in line with the official relations process outlined in the Framework of Engagement with Non-State Actors (FENSA), established during the 69th World Health Assembly (WHA) (3), and the aligned process of accrediting regional NSAs to attend sessions of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe (RC). It does not include individual private companies.

WHO's commitment to NSA engagement is underscored in its key documents, including the Thirteenth General Programme of Work (GPW13) (4), the EPW (1) and the upcoming Fourteenth General Programme of Work (GPW14) (5). During the development of this engagement plan, the WHO Civil Society Commission (CSC) has been recently launched (6) and the resolution on *Social participation for universal health coverage, health, and well-being* was adopted at the 77th WHA in 2024 (7). This milestone resolution underscores the World Health Organization's strengthened commitment to pursuing participatory, inclusive and representative approaches to health governance. This engagement plan builds upon that commitment by enabling clearer and more effective engagement with NSAs.

NSAs are crucial partners in achieving WHO's health objectives globally, regionally and in countries, and enabling WHO to serve as a global health leader. They contribute valuable technical expertise, advocacy, agency and proximity to their constituencies and communities. By giving voice to the experiences and perspectives of people, patients, workforces and marginalized groups throughout the European Region, NSAs bring the experiential dimension into public health action and strengthen health equity.

Collaboration with NSAs is essential for aligning WHO with perspectives, assets and needs of communities. NSAs maintain close relationships with specific population groups, governments and broader regional and global communities. NSAs are adept in translating insights from these into health policy and navigating political landscapes to improve the uptake of public health actions at all levels. Fostering more effective, cohesive and visible partnerships with NSAs helps advance public health across the Region and deliver upon the European and global programmes of work for countries.

This plan will enable staff from WHO Regional Office for Europe, Member States and other key stakeholders to engage with NSAs across a range of public health areas, sectors and stages of work. The plan builds on existing engagement methods and inspires the creation of new ones, primarily at country level.

The plan is based on what WHO Regional Office for Europe is learning from ongoing consultation and engagement with NSAs, Member States and its own staff, and can be considered a living document that can continue to evolve through the strengthened engagement it helps to achieve.

Consultation

WHO Regional Office for Europe sought feedback on its existing engagement with NSAs during an informal side session at RC73 in October 2023. While NSAs expressed satisfaction, there was a push for a more strategic approach, aligned with the priorities and flagships of the EPW and building on successful approaches already being developed, including partnership platforms (Box 1) and technical consultations.

Box 1.

Examples of partnership platforms, engaging NSAs and other partners on regional health priorities.

European Mental Health Coalition (8). The WHO Regional Office for Europe collaborates with the European Mental Health Coalition, a network of over 80 organizations and individuals committed to improving mental health across Europe. This partnership focuses on advocating for mental health policies, raising awareness and promoting evidence-based practices to support mental well-being in communities. Through this coalition, the WHO Regional Office for Europe facilitated the development of the *WHO European framework for action on mental health 2021–2025* (9) and its implementation, which provides a roadmap for policy-makers to enhance mental health services and promote mental health literacy. The coalition also successfully advocated for the inclusion of mental health as a key priority in the EPW.

Youth4Health Network (10). The WHO Regional Office for Europe established the Youth4Health Network, a platform that engages young people in the development and implementation of health policies and programmes. This network brings together youth organizations, student groups and individual advocates to amplify the voices of young people and ensure their perspectives are reflected in the Region's health agenda. Through this collaboration, the WHO Regional Office for Europe has supported the creation of youth-led initiatives, facilitated the exchange of ideas and best practices, and empowered young people to become active agents of change in their communities.

Throughout 2024, WHO Regional Office for Europe has undertaken further consultations with NSAs on this NSA engagement plan and engaged Member States of the Standing Committee of the Regional Committee, WHO colleagues from Regional and Country Offices, WHO headquarters. See Annex 1 for more information on this.

This plan seeks to learn from NSAs to institutionalize NSA collaboration and inspire methods of engagement that are directly aligned with enhancing WHO relevance and support to countries.

Principles of engagement

To facilitate meaningful and productive partnerships, the following collaboration and engagement principles are based on what WHO Regional Office for Europe learned through the NSA consultations and are foundational to the engagement approach and to WHO's key documents mentioned above.

- 1. Inclusivity:** Engagement with NSAs should be inclusive, welcoming diverse perspectives, expertise and contributions from various stakeholders across the WHO European Region. WHO Regional Office for Europe commits to this to strengthen the participation of and capacity building in the parts of the Region where there is a geographical focus and a subregional strategy (e.g. with the *Roadmap for health and well-being in Central Asia (2022–2025) (11)*), and help ensure that a wide range of voices is heard and that health initiatives reflect the needs and priorities of different populations and communities.
- 2. Transparency:** Open communication and clarity about processes, decision-making and expectations are crucial for building trust and accountability. The WHO Regional Office for Europe commits to this in its engagement with NSAs, providing timely information on engagement opportunities, objectives and outcomes.
- 3. Equity:** Engagement efforts should prioritize equitable partnerships that address health inequalities and ensure that marginalized and underrepresented groups are given a voice in health discussions. The WHO Regional Office for Europe commits to this, emphasizing the importance of empowering all stakeholders to contribute to and benefit from health initiatives.
- 4. Sustainability:** Collaboration should be sustainable, established on a clear understanding of resource needs and availability, and designed for lasting impact by embedding health initiatives within systems and communities. The WHO Regional Office for Europe commits to this so that health improvements are achieved and maintained, to foster resilience and capacity building.
- 5. Responsiveness:** The engagement process must be flexible and responsive to the changing health landscape and emerging challenges. The WHO Regional Office for Europe commits to this as part of its general shift to greater agility in the ways it collaborates, actively adapting and learning based on feedback.
- 6. Accessibility:** All interactions should be in accessibility-aware formats including language selection and other established methods to increase accessibility. The WHO Regional Office for Europe commits to this as part of its leadership for inclusivity and equity.

Through these principles, we strive to build effective partnerships grounded in shared goals, respect and a commitment to the health and well-being of all people and communities, leaving no-one behind.

Engagement plan

WHO technical units and country offices routinely engage with NSAs utilizing various institutional methods and processes including collaborative platforms and networks, memorandums of understanding¹ or grant letters of agreement.

To streamline collaboration, enhance opportunities for NSAs and integrate the approach with the WHO Regional Office for Europe's wider strategic outlook, this plan covers three key areas identified through the consultations: dialogue, collaboration and institutionalization (Box 2). It sets out actions to progress each of these, intended to be delivered and evaluated over three years, starting in 2025.

Box 2.

The three areas in which engagement with NSAs can be enhanced for all stakeholders.

Dialogue. Create opportunities for active and open dialogue with NSAs through the multilateral flow of information, fostering productive, transparent and respectful exchanges among stakeholders.

Institutionalization. Formalize relations with NSAs through structured mechanisms, ensuring collaboration is strategic and aligned with WHO's objectives at every level.

Collaboration. Leverage NSA expertise to support the WHO Regional Office for Europe's work at the country level, ensuring contributions are integrated into technical networks and aligned with national and regional health goals.

This aligns with the WHO Regional Office for Europe's country strategy (2) which describes the flowchart of collaboration (Annex 2)² and mechanisms across four building blocks, namely:

1. regional resources, which NSAs are a fundamental part of alongside other key partners
2. active dialogue, so that collaboration is informed and strategic priorities can be agreed
3. models for collaboration, which are the offices and roles that coordinate collaboration
4. the existing and innovative ways of working, through which collaboration is delivered.

1 Examples of memorandums of understanding with NSAs include those between the WHO Regional Office for Europe and the European Public Health Association (12), the European Public Health Alliance(13); the European Forum of National Nursing and Midwifery Associations_(14).

2 The flowchart is part of a forthcoming two-page summary.

The foundation of the proposed activities across the three areas are based on feedback from NSAs, WHO staff and Member States, and they will help to realize the purpose of this plan and deliver its three objectives. The WHO Regional Office for Europe gratefully acknowledges the many suggestions and valuable input for all three strategic approaches that have been received throughout the development of this plan and has aimed to capture this vast input in the concise and abbreviated action descriptions presented below. It should be noted that this document is a living document that can be updated regularly as needed.

The plan will be coordinated by the Partnerships and Collaboration team within the WHO Regional Office for Europe's Country Support and Partnerships Division and supported by WHO's relevant technical divisions and country offices. The WHO Regional Office for Europe will also lead on necessary convening for ongoing engagements and other key development activities, and on the necessary revision of any documents, websites and other outputs that will help inform delivery of the engagement plan (Box 3).

Box 3.

Initial contact and first steps

The **Partnerships and Collaboration Team** within the WHO Regional Office for Europe serves as the dedicated team to be the first point of contact for NSAs in the Region. Please contact europar@who.int.

The Partnerships and Collaboration team also advises NSAs and WHO staff on WHO policies related to partnerships and NSA engagement, including FENSA. For more information, please see WHO's engagement with non-State actors (15).

Further information for NSAs can also be found on the relevant WHO webpage (3).

Dialogue

This key area focuses on creating opportunities for active and open dialogue through the multilateral flow of information, fostering productive, transparent and respectful exchanges among stakeholders and ensuring feedback informs the WHO Regional Office for Europe's work with countries. Meaningful dialogue is characterized by open communication that promotes understanding, trust and collaboration among stakeholders. Through structured opportunities for information flow, the WHO Regional Office for Europe seeks to bridge gaps; enhance mutual understanding of its roles, expectations and ways of working; and promote innovative solutions that advance health outcomes across the Region.

Actions

- 1. Establish a regional branch of the CSC.** The WHO Regional Office for Europe will align its engagements with the global CSC, establishing a regional branch to systematize relations with civil society and streamline activities without duplication. Regional NSAs already involved in the global CSC will automatically be included in the regional branch.
- 2. Develop and promote joint communication strategies.** The WHO Regional Office for Europe will work with NSAs to document collaborative achievements and create joint messaging for various platforms, including social media and podcasts. The WHO Regional Office for Europe will not promote NSA initiatives unrelated to collaborative work.
- 3. Set up efficient information exchange mechanisms.** The WHO Regional Office for Europe will create platforms such as a dedicated intranet page or social media group for real-time updates for stakeholders and use newsletters to ensure regular, consistent communication with NSAs.
- 4. Organize regular briefing sessions on WHO processes and technical topics.** The WHO Regional Office for Europe will hold regular briefing sessions on relevant governance, topical issues and technical collaborations, including timely briefings relating to WHAs and RCs. Additionally, the WHO Regional Office for Europe will create a video resource outlining the accreditation process for access to key events and governance.
- 5. Expand existing NSA engagement sessions to include country-level focus.** The WHO Regional Office for Europe will extend engagement sessions with NSAs to address country-specific strategies and technical collaboration, improving NSA connections with country activities and WHO country offices.
- 6. Host briefings on resource mobilization and joint application opportunities.** The WHO Regional Office for Europe will offer regular briefings to explore funding and resource opportunities, particularly for joint applications.

Institutionalization

This key area focuses on formalizing relations with NSAs through structured mechanisms, ensuring collaboration is strategic and aligned with WHO's objectives at every level, by strengthening existing institutional frameworks and introducing new mechanisms for engagement. By standardizing these processes, the WHO Regional Office for Europe can enhance its collaboration with NSAs and ensure that partnerships are aligned with its goals at global, regional and country levels.

Actions

1. **Global-level: make the relationships with NSAs official.** WHO will continue to engage NSAs through an "official relations" status, reviewed every three years. NSAs with such a status participate in WHO Governing Bodies, delivering joint oral and written statements during key sessions such as the WHA and RC.
2. **Regional-level: regional accreditation of NSAs.** The WHO Regional Office for Europe will continue to accredit NSAs to participate as observers in RC, where they can submit joint statements. Accreditation is reviewed every three years.
3. **Memorandum of Understanding.** The WHO Regional Office for Europe will continue to institutionalize collaboration with NSAs using Memorandums of Understanding that outline objectives and areas of cooperation, formalizing partnerships without conferring participation rights in WHO Governing Body meetings.
4. **Country-level: Grant Letters of Agreement.** The WHO Regional Office for Europe will continue to collaborate with NSAs through Grant Letters of Agreement, enabling project-specific partnerships and defining grant allocations and outcomes.
5. **Comprehensive register of all NSAs engaged with WHO.** The WHO Regional Office for Europe will develop a register of NSAs engaged at regional and country levels. This will be regularly updated and made accessible across all levels of WHO to ensure consistent and accurate management of NSA partnerships.
6. **Annual pre-RC event for NSAs.** The WHO Regional Office for Europe will provide a regular platform for NSAs to network with the Regional Office and Member State representatives at the RC, beginning with RC74 in October 2024. This will help increase the visibility of NSAs, including those not currently accredited or in official relations with WHO (while RC is not open to NSAs that are not accredited or in official relations with WHO, this event will be).
7. **Standard onboarding process for newly accredited NSAs.** The WHO Regional Office for Europe will develop a standard process to ensure NSAs are fully informed about their roles, responsibilities and opportunities for engagement. This will include briefings on institutional mechanisms and participation guidelines.
8. **Governance input and feedback.** The WHO Regional Office for Europe will develop a mechanism that allows NSAs to submit comments on agenda items for RC and other key governance, setting clear timelines for submissions, review and response. This will further strengthen engagement, transparency and accountability.

Collaboration

This key area focuses on leveraging NSA expertise to support the WHO Regional Office for Europe's work at the country level, ensuring contributions are integrated into technical networks and aligned with national and regional health goals. With enhanced dialogue helping to maintain shared understanding on priorities and needs in the Region and countries, and institutionalization helping to formalize and document agreed goals, collaboration then aims to create the environment for this to be translated into beneficial public health impact. The WHO Regional Office for Europe wants to create equal engagement opportunities, integrate NSA contributions into its technical networks, and align NSA efforts with national and regional health goals. By strengthening collaboration, the WHO Regional Office for Europe and NSAs can amplify their impact on health for all, leaving no-one behind.

Actions

- 1. Work plans for technical and country-level priorities.** The WHO Regional Office for Europe will collaborate with NSAs to develop work plans tailored to technical priorities, subregional roadmaps, and country-specific needs. This will help to ensure NSAs align their work with the Regional Office's strategic goals.
- 2. Participation in technical networks and partnerships.** The WHO Regional Office for Europe will develop ways to enhance NSA engagement in its technical networks and partnerships.³ Regular dialogue and institutional mechanisms will facilitate NSA involvement.
- 3. Equal opportunities for NSA engagement.** The WHO Regional Office for Europe will facilitate equal engagement opportunities for all NSAs by connecting them with WHO country offices and matching NSAs with specific expertise to the relevant country needs and activities.
- 4. Stronger ties with WHO country offices.** The WHO Regional Office for Europe urges NSAs to explore relationships with WHO country offices, enhancing collaboration at the national level and creating more engagement opportunities. The Partnerships and Collaboration team can help facilitate this if existing contacts with country offices aren't active.
- 5. Leverage NSA expertise for policy, advocacy and implementation.** The WHO Regional Office for Europe will work with NSAs to advocate for its priorities and implement relevant programmes at the country level, using NSA platforms to promote WHO policies and develop collaborative interventions.
- 6. Integrate NSA contributions into Country Cooperation Strategies.** The WHO Regional Office for Europe will strengthen ties with Member States by facilitating the integration of NSA collaboration into Country Cooperation Strategies and guide the establishment of steering committees or technical groups with NSA membership at the country level.

³ Key networks and partnerships include: the Pan-European Mental Health Coalition (8); Strategic Partners Initiative for Data and Digital Health; The Novel Medicines Platform (16); EHP Partnerships (17); a new initiative to engage with non-State actors on the health and care workforce crisis (18); Youth4Health Network (10); Europe Infodemic Preparedness and Response Alliance (19); Regional Collaborating Committee on Accelerated Response to Tuberculosis, HIV and Viral Hepatitis (20).

- 7. Capacity building for WHO staff.** The WHO Regional Office for Europe will conduct regular training for its staff on NSA engagement methods, especially for country-level representatives. This will include workshops on FENSA compliance and best practices for collaboration.
- 8. The WHO Regional Office for Europe's Youth4Health Network.** The WHO Regional Office for Europe will continue to strengthen the role and influence of youth voices in its work by expanding the Youth4Health Network and its activities. This will help to provide young people with meaningful ways to engage with WHO's agenda and work.
- 9. Inclusion of special interest groups.** The WHO Regional Office for Europe will ensure more meaningful inclusion of special interest groups, such as people with disabilities, in its NSA engagement strategies by hosting one-on-one meetings with their representatives and conducting case studies on their involvement in public health. This will enhance the organization's understanding of the challenges certain groups and communities face and inform tailored interventions to address diverse public health issues.

Monitoring and evaluation

To ensure the effectiveness and accountability of this plan, the WHO Regional Office for Europe will undertake annual progress reviews to evaluate the implementation of actions and progress over the initial three-year delivery period. Feedback from NSAs and other stakeholders will be gathered through surveys and focus groups. Additionally, a repository of case studies showcasing successful collaborations and lessons learned with NSAs will be maintained to identify effective strategies that can be replicated and areas for improvement.

Call to action

As we implement this plan together, we urge all NSAs to take an active role in helping to realize its purpose and objectives. NSA engagement is essential in translating this plan into tangible outcomes that enhance public health across the WHO European Region and making lasting change. By leveraging the expertise and resources of NSAs across the Region, we can create meaningful partnerships that ensure the voices of communities and marginalized groups are represented and amplified in our public health actions.

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Annex 1.

Engagement plan co-development timeline

January

- Virtual meeting with NSAs who attended RC73 on the Engagement Plan
- Briefing of newly accredited NSAs
- Establishment of an internal working group in the WHO Regional Office for Europe

February

- **First virtual consultation session with NSAs** in official relations and accredited NSAs to attend WHO Regional Committee for Europe sessions
- Meeting with WHO headquarters secretariat of the WHO Civil Society Commission
- Survey to NSAs and WHO representatives; survey feedback on NSA engagement at RC73 received

March/
April

- Development of SCRC concept note and communication plan
- NSA Engagement Concept Note and proposal for a RC74 side session submitted to SCRC
- Internal working group: Scoping of NSA entities to be added to the consultation and collection of engagement opportunities

May

- Joint meeting of SCRC subgroups on governance and country support, discussing NSA engagement

June

- **Second Virtual Consultation Session with NSAs**
- Update SCRC on the preparation of the engagement plan
- Issue Call for Interest to NSAs to join smaller consultation groups around key topics

July/
September

- Meeting of NSA Consultation Group on the preparation of NSA event/in-person meeting at RC74
- Three consultation group calls on key topics of the NSA engagement plan
- Briefing of NSAs on the topics and processes of RC74
- Finalization of the Engagement Plan

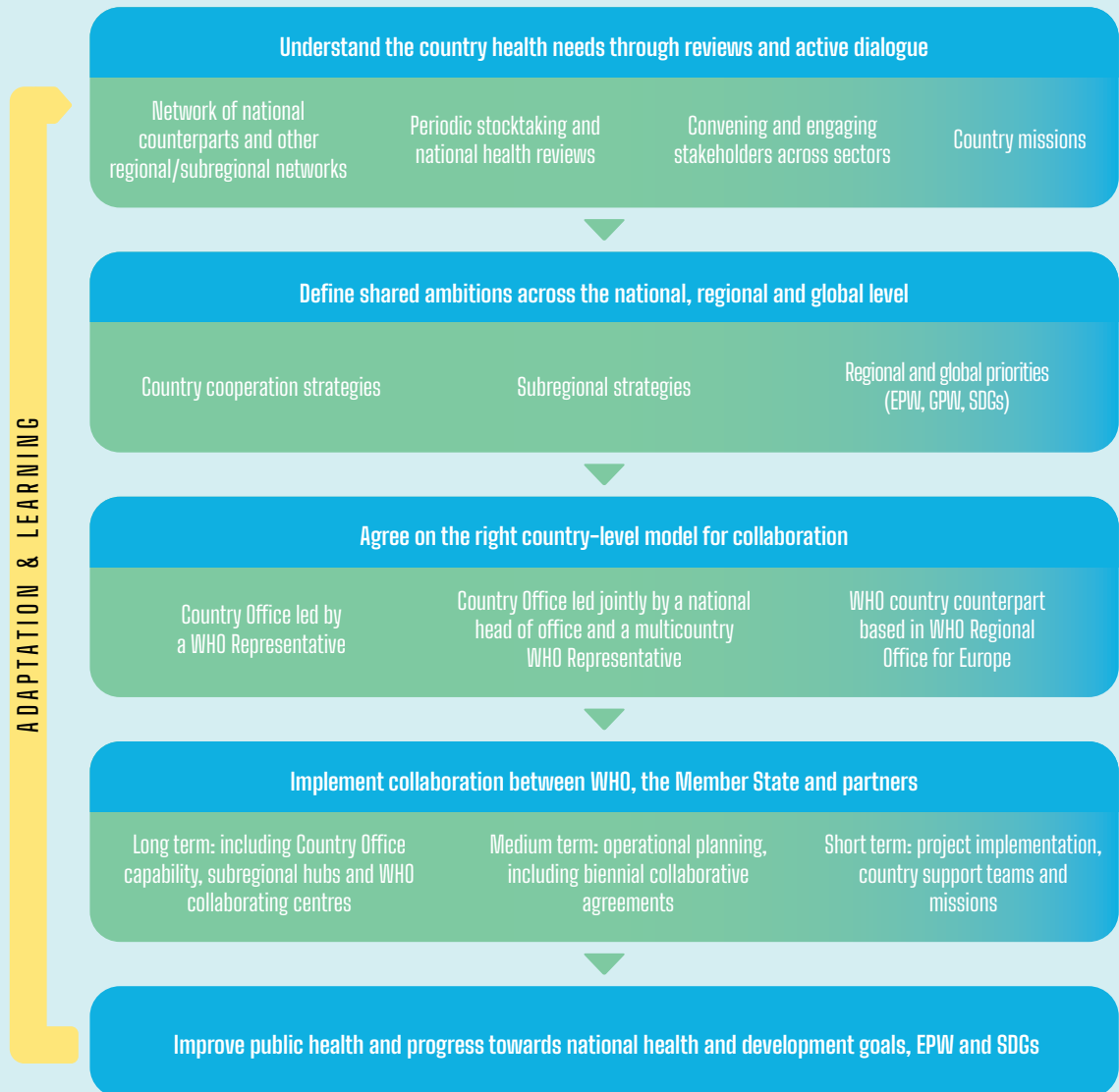
October

- NSA Engagement Event: **Inaugural non-State actor event: Celebrating and strengthening engagement opportunities to promote health in the WHO European Region**
- NSA engagement plan as RC74 background document

Notes: NSA: non-State actors; RC73: 73rd Session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe; RC74: 74th Session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe; SCRC: Standing Committee of the Regional Committee for Europe.

Annex 2. Country collaboration flowchart

Tailoring the collaboration with each Member State



WHO works across its three levels to support countries:

Headquarters produces global public health norms, standards, policies and initiatives and determines the priorities and capabilities through which WHO can support countries;

regional offices interpret these for a region, develop their own capacity to support countries with these and leverage regional resources and partners;

country offices (COs) and counterparts coordinate collaboration with Member States to apply these capabilities for country-level impact working with key stakeholders and across sectors.

Notes: EPW: European Programme of Work; GPW: General Programme of Work; SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals.

The WHO Regional Office for Europe

The World Health Organization (WHO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations created in 1948 with the primary responsibility for international health matters and public health. The WHO Regional Office for Europe is one of six regional offices throughout the world, each with its own programme geared to the particular health conditions of the countries it serves.

Member States

Albania	Greece	Portugal
Andorra	Hungary	Republic of Moldova
Armenia	Iceland	Romania
Austria	Ireland	Russian Federation
Azerbaijan	Israel	San Marino
Belarus	Italy	Serbia
Belgium	Kazakhstan	Slovakia
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Kyrgyzstan	Slovenia
Bulgaria	Latvia	Spain
Croatia	Lithuania	Sweden
Cyprus	Luxembourg	Switzerland
Czechia	Malta	Tajikistan
Denmark	Monaco	Türkiye
Estonia	Montenegro	Turkmenistan
Finland	Netherlands (Kingdom of the)	Ukraine
France	North Macedonia	United Kingdom
Georgia	Norway	Uzbekistan
Germany	Poland	

World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe

UN City, Marmorvej 51,
DK-2100, Copenhagen Ø, Denmark
Tel.: +45 45 33 70 00
Fax: +45 45 33 70 01
Email: eurocontact@who.int
Website: www.euro.who.int