

ACHIEVEMENTS IN SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH: MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS FROM WHO MEMBER STATES



Armen Muradyan



Vjekoslav Mandi

The Republic of Armenia

Based on the strategy developed by the WHO in 2001 and Resolution 57.12 of the 2004 World Health Assembly, in 2006 the *Strategy of reproductive health improvement and 2007-2015 timetable* was adopted by the WHO, UNFPA and approved by the Government protocol decision #29 dated 26 July 2007.

Throughout this period a number of strategies and projects, laws and decrees were adopted and implemented to regulate the sphere of sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and ensure that maternal and infant health services were consistently provided within the framework of state guaranteed free of charge health services. Work was also done to reduce regional disparities. A number of health care facilities were renovated and equipped, access to quality reproductive health care was improved and the capacities of service providers were enhanced through continuous education and the introduction of several evidence-based clinical guidelines. As a result there is: increased modern contraceptive use (20% to 27%); improved antenatal care (90% of pregnant women had 4-6 antenatal visits and 3 ultrasounds); reduction of infant deaths due to perinatal causes by 1/3; and increased inpatient deliveries to 99.7%. During 2006-2014 we also saw significant declines in our maternal, infant and under-five mortality, as well as our abortion and infertility rates.

Despite the achievements, the SRH situation in the country faces many challenges. The level of maternal and perinatal mortality and morbidity still remains high in comparison to other European countries. The accessibility and the affordability of family services are limited, there are high rates of sexually transmitted infections and the increase in the rate of HIV-affected people is alarming, especially among the youth. Abortion is still being used as a method of family planning and recently, a new challenge has emerged, which is that of abortion on the basis of sex-selection. Cancer of reproductive

organs and breast has also become quite widespread.

Continued improvement in SRH remains a priority for the country. Currently the country has committed to elaboration of a new *2016-2020 National Strategy on Reproductive Health, the Programme of Action and the Action Plan*. The strategy aims to improve the SRH of the Armenian population, as well as the accessibility and quality of the services, by giving populations the opportunity to exercise their SRH rights throughout the life-course. The guidance and expertise contained in the new *WHO European Action Plan for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights* will be invaluable in helping us achieve this goal.

Mr Armen Muradyan,
Minister of Health,
Republic of Armenia

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)

In BiH health issues are regulated at different levels in the country. At the level of the state, health issues are regulated through the Ministry of Civil Affairs of BiH, which is responsible for defining basic principles, co-ordinating activities, harmonizing plans of the entity authorities and defining a strategy at the international level in health. The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare of the Republic of Srpska and the Ministry of Health for the Federation of BiH are responsible for administering, organizing and funding their own health system. The Council of Ministers adopted the *Policy of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights* in BiH in 2012. In relation to sexual and reproductive health (SRH), the two entity ministers described the situation as follows:

Ministry of Health in Federation of BiH (FBiH)

The Ministry of Health together with its partners and in line with the *Strategy for Improvement of Sexual and Reproduc-*

tive Health in Federation BiH 2010-2019 intensively works on the implementation of SRH activities with the goal of advancing the situation in this field. The strength of our strategic framework is its multi-sectoral approach. Besides the health professionals, users of services, the NGO sector as well as educational institutions participate in the development and implementation of the *Strategy*. Some of the most important partners in implementation are UNFPA and IPPF.

Our strategic approach promotes the right to information and education, as well as health services that are customized for individual needs, protection and participation in decision-making. Activities are based on identified priorities in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and include family planning, assisted reproductive technology, lowering the abortion rates and strengthening prenatal, antenatal and postnatal care. Activities also target youth, vulnerable groups and marginalized groups with the goal of increasing knowledge on prevention of sexually transmitted infections and promoting SRHR through peer education and the curriculum *Healthy Lifestyles* that was developed in cooperation with education sector.

We plan to evaluate and analyze the implementation of the current *Strategy* in order to accelerate the completion of the set goals and advance SRHR in FBiH. Moving forward we want to give special prominence to advocacy and the changes in the field of promotion, prevention and early detection and treatment of malignant reproductive organs. Our experience to date with our *Strategy* has demonstrated the value and importance of having a clearly defined strategic approach to reach our desired outcomes. Global SRH strategies, such as the current *WHO Global Reproductive Health (RH) Strategy* and the pending *WHO European Action Plan for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights* serve as important advocacy tools and references at both the country and



Dragan Bogdani



Nikola Todorov



Nusratullo F. Salimzoda



Maral Ilmamedova



Alexander Kvitashvili

regional level in advancing the SRHR of all people in Europe.

Dr Vjekoslav Mandi,
Ministry of Health in Federation of BiH

**Ministry of Health and Social Welfare
Republika Srpska**

Sexual and reproductive rights are basic human rights. Those rights are recognized in the local as well as international documents on human rights. In order to ensure that individuals develop healthy sexuality, it is necessary to promote and respect these rights, which also serve as the basis for the fight against discrimination. The newly adopted Sustainable Development Goals 2030 further supports this principle by placing access to SRH services as a global goal that secures social justice with the achievement of universal principles of human rights.

The Government of Republika Srpska is committed to this goal. An *Action Plan for BiH (2010-2014)* was signed between the Council of Ministers BiH and the UNFPA Office BiH that allowed specifically for the development of a SRHR policy that would further secure the SRHR (including family planning and universal access to reproductive technology) of our citizens. On 16 August 2012 the Republika Srpska adopted the *Policy for Improvement of SRH in Republika Srpska 2012-2017*. The focus of the *Policy* was guided by recommendations from the WHO and its current *Global RH Strategy*, covering topics such as: sexual and reproductive rights, SRH of youth, SRH of general population, safe and wanted motherhood, control of malignant diseases and research, monitoring and evaluation. A key achievement was when the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare of Republika Srpska in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Culture Republika Srpska, Institute of Public Health Republika Srpska and Asocijacija XY developed a textbook for the students in high schools, *Healthy Lifestyles* focusing on relevant health,

including SRH, topics. Furthermore, with the development of the *Policy* and with its implementation, we commit to comprehensive improvement in the areas of SRH, which is in line with the goals defined in the *Programme for Health Policy and Strategy for Health in Republika Srpska* until 2010.

In May 2015 UNFPA in cooperation with the Ministry conducted an assessment of the *Policy* with the conclusion that UNFPA and the Ministry continue to partner to evaluate, implement, revise and improve the current *Policy*. As we continue to collaborate on the *Policy* together, the new *WHO European Action Plan for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights* will be a welcome addition to inform our ongoing efforts in this field.

Dr Dragan Bogdani,
Ministry of Health and
Social Welfare,
Republika Srpska

**The former Yugoslav Republic
of Macedonia**

In 2010 the country officially committed itself to advancing sexual and reproductive health with the development of the *Safe Motherhood Strategy (2010-2015)* and the *Sexual and Reproductive Health Strategy (2010-2020)*. Through the lens of improving maternal and newborn health, a multifaceted approach has allowed for successful initiation of interventions on various fronts, in partnership with the UNFPA, NGOs and other UN Agencies, such as the WHO, OHCHR UNICEF, UN WOMEN and UNDP. To better understand the contributing causes of maternal and newborn morbidity and mortality the change with Ministry of Health has: conducted national assessment of all 30 maternity facilities for provision of emergency obstetric and neonatal care services; strengthened the health system through introduction of over 40 evidence-based policies and guidelines; and introduced the WHO methodology for confidential inquiry for

maternal deaths. In addition, for the first time ever, the foundation of the three main pillars of comprehensive family planning services has been set, addressing both the “demand” and “supply” side. The country is also recognized in the region for speedy and successful introduction of the Minimum Initial Services Package (MISP) for sexual and reproductive health into country policies and services, serving as an example of true collaboration among all stakeholders in the country. Positioning of the health sector in the multi-sectorial approach to gender based violence management has also been strengthened in partnership with the UNFPA.

All these interventions have been guided by human rights principles and international standards. Most of the implemented efforts are part of the national strategies, but not all. Revision of the existing national strategies is required to synchronize and align with these efforts as well as new global and regional initiatives. In this regard new initiatives, strategies and action plans such as the recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals, the *UNFPA Family Planning Strategy* and the draft *WHO European Action Plan for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights* are essential aids and tools to ensure that our country SRH initiatives have universality of services, human rights principals and evidence-based medicine at their core. We strongly rely on the UNFPA’s and WHO support; the new cycle of the UNFPA Country Programme provides a five year framework to jointly implement the regional and national strategies, aimed at advanced health and well-being of the population in the country and entire Region. As we go through this process, we count on furthering the existing partnerships aimed at development of effective, people oriented regional strategies and action plans, such as the new *WHO European Action Plan for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights*.

Mr Nikola Todorov,
Minister of Health

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(CONTINUED)

The Republic of Tajikistan

H.E. Emomali Rahmon, the President of the Republic of Tajikistan (RoT), declared the year of 2015 as the Year of Family; evidence of a steadily developed governmental policy and strategy on maternal and child health (MCH) protection and reproductive health and rights (RHR).

Special attention of the government to the health of women and children led to passing of the *Law on Reproductive Health (RH) of Population* and a number of strategic documents, including the *National Health Strategy, Safe Motherhood National Plan, RH Strategic Plan and the National Strategy of the RoT on Children and Adolescent Health*. This in turn led to improvements of key health indicators: decreased maternal mortality ratio from 45 per 100 000 live births in 2002 to 29.2 in 2014; increased antenatal care coverage from 58.7% to 98%; increased contraceptive prevalence rate from 15% to 35.3%; decreased number of abortions from 113.9 to 68.6 per 1000 live births; decreased number of home deliveries from 38.7% to 7.4%; and increased rates of cesarean section from 2% to 4.2%.

Achievement of these results became possible thanks to the political will and leadership of the government, as well as joint coordinated actions with development agencies and partners, including UNFPA, WHO, UNICEF, GIZ and USAID. The Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population (MoHSPP) RH Coordination Council unites all the partners, donor community and NGOs. This mechanism helps us to track attainment of the targets within the mentioned strategic documents and jointly develop plans and programmes meeting the country's needs and requirements. Duplication of actions is avoided. Such collaboration demonstrates effective utilization of available resources from all parties for achievement of common goals.

Despite substantial progress, challenges and opportunities still exist. Currently the new *National Strategy on RH,*

Maternal, Child and Adolescent for the period of 2016-2020 is being developed. In contrast to the previous strategies, it will be complex in nature and cover all the areas of RH, MCH and adolescent health. Flexibility, concordance and coordination of all institutions of maternal, child and adolescent health protection are key elements of the new strategy. The new strategy will help to maintain our progress while responding to new threats, challenges and the changing needs of our population. In addressing these issues the strategy will also build partnership with new actors with widening of their functions and roles, to positively change the traditional roles and public perceptions. We will follow the international principles, standards and approaches, based on human rights and gender sensitivity, as outlined in the draft *WHO European Action Plan for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights*, for the benefit of the population of Tajikistan and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Dr Nusratullo F. Salimzoda,
Minister of Health and
Social Protection of Population,
Republic of Tajikistan

Turkmenistan

The Government of Turkmenistan and the United Nations Populations Fund (UNFPA) have been strategic partners for over two decades. With the contribution of UNFPA, Turkmenistan champions international good practice in maternal and newborn health, emergency obstetric care and reproductive health service delivery, including in humanitarian response preparedness.

The UNFPA country team mobilized Turkmenistan's best medical scientists and practitioners to design and introduce 31 clinical protocols on reproductive health services into clinical practice, as well as develop several key strategic documents, such as: the *National Reproductive Health Strategy 2011-2015; the National*

Breast and Cervical Centre Prevention Strategy 2011-2015; the National Strategy on Response to HIV for 2012-2016; and the National Action Plan on Minimum Initial Service Package endorsed in 2014. In conjunction with UNFPA, UNICEF and WHO our experts were the first in the region to develop a *National Strategy on Maternal, Newborn, Adolescents and Children Health 2015-2019*. This important strategy is based on the life-cycle approach of the *Global Strategy on Maternal, Newborn, Adolescent and Child Health 2016-2030* and is in line with the regional strategic guidance. Currently as a result of these efforts, clinical practice in over 70 percent of maternities across the country complies with clinical protocols and there are over 90 family planning service delivery points in all cities and districts, providing free services to married couples and people individually.

By ensuring qualified and timely technical expertise and advisory support at all levels of planning and implementation, UNFPA has been an essential partner in achieving our national health priorities. Together we have achieved declines in maternal mortality, averted unsafe abortions, provided families with affordable and comprehensive family planning services and piloted innovations both in medical training for professionals and reproductive health education for general population. We have also been working together to develop a comprehensive legal and policy base, build infrastructure, integrate new technologies and methodologies, improve medical education and train practitioners in line with the national data and international standards.

Last year the Government of Turkmenistan and UNFPA signed a Memorandum of Understanding to embark on a new model of partnership due to our new status as an upper middle income country as identified by the World Bank. This new model will enable us to contribute to the next Country Programme cycle to build sustainable health systems and development platforms while placing the needs,

rights and overall well-being of women and girls, young people and adolescents at the heart of our shared mandate. The new *WHO European Action Plan for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights* will be an excellent resource to help guide us in this mission.

Dr Maral Ilmammedova,
Chief Obstetrician of the Ministry of
Healthcare and Medical Industry of
Turkmenistan

Ukraine

In the past years, Ukraine has made considerable progress towards national and global health goals, including in the areas supported by our current state programme on “*Reproductive Health of the Nation*” which was designed for the period from 2006 to 2015. National data and an independent assessment confirmed the positive impact of the programme for all indicators on reproductive health, including maternal and newborn health, as well as on increases in the use of modern methods of contraceptives. Despite this progress we are still lagging behind and the ongoing significant economic and social crisis endangers the progress achieved towards the implemen-

tation of the health related Millennium Development Goals.

In light of these new emerging challenges and the adoption of a new global development agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals, Ukraine is currently reforming its national health care system under my leadership. In our efforts, reproductive health, including maternal health, is a key priority as it is at the very heart of the future development of Ukraine and important to national safety and security. The new strategy on reproductive health and reproductive rights will be designed to protect and support the reproductive health of the Ukrainian people and address ways to overcome the pressing economic and social challenges while not losing momentum on progress made on maternal and newborn health.

Together with a strong coalition of partners in the field of reproductive health (including UNFPA, WHO, USAID, UNICEF, SDC and the NGO Women Health and Family Planning) the Ministry of Health will ensure that the new strategy also addresses existing unresolved challenges around: the integration of reproductive health into primary health care; strengthening existing referral systems; reproductive health services in

emergency situations; and access to and quality of care for vulnerable groups. Our efforts will also ensure the systematic coverage of adolescents and young people with healthy lifestyle and prevention activities, in combination with access to youth-friendly services.

Under the overall reform of the health care system, the next *Reproductive Health Strategy* will become the tool for implementing the reforms in the reproductive health sector and lead to tangible, measurable and solid results. We are looking forward to working with partners in developing the new strategy. The *WHO European Action Plan for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights 2017-2021* will be an important tool to aid us in this goal.

There can be no development without health and there can be no health development without reproductive health! The Ministry of Health and I personally are committed to the improvement of our health services and the reinforcement of the reproductive health for the people and the future development of Ukraine.

Mr Alexander Kvitashvili,
Minister of Health,
Ukraine



Addressing the Needs of Women and Girls in Humanitarian Emergencies in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, UNFPA, 2015.

This regional supplement to UNFPA's State of World Population 2015 provides an overview of the increased risk women and girls face during humanitarian crisis and how ensuring access to SRH services strengthens the well-being, health and resilience of individuals and communities. Available in English and Russian at: <http://eeca.unfpa.org/publications/addressing-needs-women-and-girls-humanitarian-emergencies-eastern-europe-and-central>