Delegations spanning the World Health Organization (WHO)’s 53 European Member States convened in the city of Copenhagen, Denmark, between 15-18 September to debate prevalent public health issues alongside matters relating to the future progress of the organisation. Here, International Innovation presents event highlights and a selection of the key speeches.

**DAY 1**

Launching the conference, President of the 64th session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe (RC64) and the Minister of Health for Denmark, Nick Hækkerup stated: “The outcomes we produce here today, and in the coming days, are so important because they will have an impact on the daily lives of hundreds of millions of European citizens. [...] We must do our utmost to improve the lives of these people”.

Subsequently, Her Royal Highness, Crown Princess Mary of Denmark, Patron of the WHO Regional Office for Europe (WHO/Europe), outlined the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals and paid particular attention to the issues surrounding maternal mortality, gender equality, as well as sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Noting the many breakthroughs in healthcare made by WHO/Europe and the key foci for future improvement, WHO Regional Director for Europe, Zsuzsanna Jakab emphasised the importance of the Health 2020 framework to realising their goals: “What we want to achieve is more equity in health and closer links between health and sustainable development”.

**DAY 2**

At the start of the second day of RC64, Director-General of WHO, Dr Margaret Chan spoke passionately about the Ebola epidemic: “In the simplest terms, this outbreak shows how one of the deadliest pathogens on earth can exploit any weakness in the health infrastructure. [...] The world is ill-prepared to respond to any severe, sustained and threatening public health emergency”.

The day continued with Dr Agis Tsouros, Director of the Division of Policy and Governance for Health and Well-being at WHO/Europe and Jakab presenting the first report on the implementation of Health 2020.

Furthermore, RC64 nominated Jakab for a second term as Regional Director of WHO/Europe. On accepting the appointment by the Committee, Jakab enthused: “It’s not only about making health better; it’s about ensuring more equitable and sustainable health for Europe!”
TARGETS
After two years of consultation, Health 2020 was adopted by the 53 Member States of the European Region at the 62nd session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe in 2012. Health 2020 is a health policy framework with specific aims for the Region to achieve by the year 2020:

- Reduce premature mortality
- Increase life expectancy
- Reduce inequalities in health
- Enhance the wellbeing of the population
- Ensure universal coverage and the right to the highest attainable level of health
- Set national goals and targets related to health in Member States

Strategic objectives:

- Improve health for all and reduce health inequalities
- Improve leadership and participatory governance for health

Priority areas for action:

- Invest in health through a life-course approach and empower people
- Tackle Europe’s major health challenges of noncommunicable and communicable diseases
- Strengthen people-centred health systems, public health capacity and emergency preparedness, surveillance and response
- Create resilient communities and supportive environments

HEALTH 2020

DAY 3

- Follow-up meeting on the 2008 Tallinn Charter
- Global conference celebrating the 35th anniversary of the Declaration of Alma-Ata on primary healthcare
- WHO European Ministerial Conference on the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases in the Context of Health 2020
- The European Food and Nutrition Action Plan 2015-2020

DAY 4
The final day of RC64 again brought focus on the global Ebola virus situation, with Dr Keiji Fukuda, Assistant Director-General for Health Security, describing how: “[The Ebola situation in West Africa has] evolved from an outbreak to a top-level regional and global health security challenge”.

Further topics were also explored on the closing day, with discussions conducted on the resolutions and decisions of the World Health Assembly and the Executive Board in hepatitis and malaria, as well as the outcomes of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly meeting on noncommunicable diseases.

Six progress reports were also presented for discussion on:

- HIV/AIDS
- Antibiotic resistance
- Reducing the harmful use of alcohol
- Prevention of injuries
- Child and adolescent health and development
- The future of the European environment and health process

RC64 culminated in the closure of the Session by Regional Director Jakab with her concluding remarks on Health 2020: “It is clear that a lot has already been achieved. In my view this is linked to the participatory approach in which it was developed, which I believe means you feel stronger ownership of Health 2020”.

EVENT REPORT
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Health outcomes in the European Region have significantly improved in the last decades. Overall life expectancy increased by five years. But not everybody benefited equally, and health inequities continue to scar the Region. […] In addition, our Region has seen profound economic recession and austerity over the last five years, resulting in reduced public health functions and poorer access to health services. Responding to these challenges requires new thinking. As we face the future, health must be higher on the political agenda. […]

Public health is at the heart of Health 2020 implementation. Inequalities in the burden of disease in our Region demonstrate that there is still a huge potential for health gains. These can be achieved through prevention, health promotion and appropriate management of diseases. We must invest in highly cost-effective public health interventions. […] Our aim will be ‘better health for Europe: more equitable and sustainable’. […]

[A] key strategic focus is universal health coverage, which guides our work to strengthen health systems in the context of Health 2020. Universal health coverage promotes equity of both access and outcomes, and helps to reduce inequities. It is important to ensuring long-term sustainability while providing financial protection, and this will be a major focus in the years to come. […]

We have strengthened collaboration with partners and networks across the Region, engaging widely and helping to increase policy coherence. This enabled us to support Member States more efficiently. […] Links with new and evolving types of partnerships for health provided important support to our work and will continue to play a critical role. […]

We face a host of new challenges, but also many opportunities. So there should be optimism, because health matters as never before.”

Since taking up the position of Regional Director in 2010, Zsuzsanna Jakab has witnessed the continually evolving health landscape in Europe. In her opening address she reflected on her five years in office and the future challenges in store.
As Programme Manager of influenza and other respiratory pathogens, how will the recent RC64 affect your future efforts?

One of the main drives of our Regional Director has been to launch a new policy framework for Health 2020 and this is all about a holistic approach to help policy. It has to be interministerial as the ministers of health cannot develop health policy on their own; they need the ministry of education, the ministry of environment, and so on.

We are now entering into the implementation phase and many countries are adopting the Health 2020 framework, either applying parts of it or the whole approach. For us it is an entry point. In the countries revising their public health action plans, WHO/Europe helps to strengthen their influenza surveillance and link it to the public health plan.

Health 2020 is definitely an opportunity for our Programme. Allow me to say that the Ebola virus disease outbreak in West Africa is demonstrating to the world that where there is poverty, inadequate or non-existent health systems, a real disaster will ensue. While there is no Ebola spread in European countries – and they are much better prepared than affected nations – there are still countries with weaknesses in their health systems in our Region. The Ebola outbreak reinforces the fact that we must help these countries to be better prepared.

What aspects of TB will the M/XDR-TB Control Programme be focusing on in the near future, particularly in light of RC64?

With our Regional Director’s new term in place, we will focus on using the Health 2020 policy framework to proceed further with an intersectorial approach and assist the Member States to provide integrated care. Our main focus, in addition to developing the new TB Action Plan 2016-2020, will be – at the country level – to lead policy dialogue with the Ministries of health and finance and other stakeholders, particularly civil society organisations, to work together to improve TB and MDR-TB prevention and control.