

MINISTRY OF NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICES, REGULATIONS & COORDINATION

PAKISTAN HEALTH KNOWLEDGE HUB

Success Stories

International Health Regulations / Global Health Security Agenda

International Health Regulations (IHR) 2005 is a defined mechanism to restrict the cross-border transmission of disease, particularly those of international significance from a public health perspective. Pakistan has been a signatory to the IHR convention since 2007 with National Institute of Health (NIH) being the designated focal point since 2014. However, the 2014-15 outbreak of Ebola in Africa highlighted significant weaknesses in the existing IHR mechanisms, leading to the development and launch of the Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA) as a framework for IHR implementation. Pakistan as a signatory to the IHR, volunteered to undergo the GHSA associated Joint External Evaluation (JEE) assessment in WHO Regional Conference meeting held in Kuwait in 2015. The JEE tool was finalized by WHO in early 2016 and Pakistan's assessment was subsequently conducted in April-May 2016 making Pakistan one of the first countries in the world to complete the assessment, and the second to actually develop a costed National Action Plan (NAP) based on the JEE assessment.

The Independent Oversight & Advisory Committee (IOAC) of the WHO which visited the country in late 2017 particularly appreciated Pakistan's efforts for IHR plan development in these words:

“Strong country ownership, cross-government working, and engagement of multiple sectors are key to the success of JEE and NAP. Pakistan could be considered a case study for excellence in high-level political leadership, engagement with the local authorities and multiple sectors, and ownership of the provincial governments. It would be helpful to share best practices and learn from Pakistan's experience with the JEE and NAP”.

Apart from bringing Pakistan into better compliance to the legally binding IHR/GHSA mechanism, the work undertaken as a result of the JEE assessment is generating system wide benefits in the area of health. Many of the technical areas assessed under the JEE have direct relevance to the overall functioning of the health system in the country. Hence, the resulting strengthening of existing institutions and their capacities to undertake IHR related activities will also yield considerable benefits in other areas as well. For e.g. NIH's designation as the National Public Health Institute and hub for Integrated Disease Surveillance & Response, Antimicrobial Resistance, Public Health Laboratory Network will improve national capacities to address communicable diseases in the country.