



National workforce capacity for essential public health functions: time to act

The public health workforce is central to health systems

Against a backdrop of persisting health workforce challenges and rising inequalities,¹ the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need to bolster the public health workforce, including those personnel charged with emergency preparedness and response functions.

Every country needs national workforce capacity to implement the essential public health functions (EPHFs). It is the most cost-effective, comprehensive, and sustainable way to contain and manage public health hazards and to enhance the health of populations. Building this capacity requires expanding, supporting and enabling the diverse range of occupations and specialists that constitute the national workforce for essential public health functions.

Launched in 2022, the National Workforce Capacity for EPHFs Roadmap² was designed through joint efforts across leading public health and emergency response experts, organizations and associations. The Roadmap focuses on priority actions to integrate public health workforce policy and investment decisions in national health sector strategic plans and relevant mechanisms contributing to a vision of a strengthened public health workforce in every country (box 1).

BOX 1.

VISION

A strengthened workforce in every country; delivering all the essential public health functions including emergency, including a emergency preparedness and response for UHC, health security and improved health and well-being.

PURPOSE OF THE ROADMAP

- Outline the actions to identify the skills and competencies needed to deliver the essential public health functions, including a specific focus on emergency preparedness and response.
- Develop a shared understanding on the definition, classification and scope of practice of the workforce engaged in delivering these functions.
- Provide high-level guidance and develop global public goods in public health workforce policy and planning, the measurement and assessment of workforce capacity, and competency-based education to help countries bolster their national workforce capacity and readiness.
- Mobilize global political leadership, stakeholder partnerships and collaboration around an integrated approach to strengthening the public health workforce for the achievement of UHC and global health security.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Policy-makers, health workers and key stakeholders within and outside the health sector involved in public health and emergency preparedness and response.

¹ Boniol et al 2022. The global health workforce stock and distribution in 2020 and 2030: a threat to equity and 'universal' health coverage? *BMJ Glob Health*. 2022 Jun;7(6):

² WHO, 2022. National workforce capacity to implement the essential public health functions including a focus on emergency preparedness and response. Roadmap for aligning WHO and partner contributions.



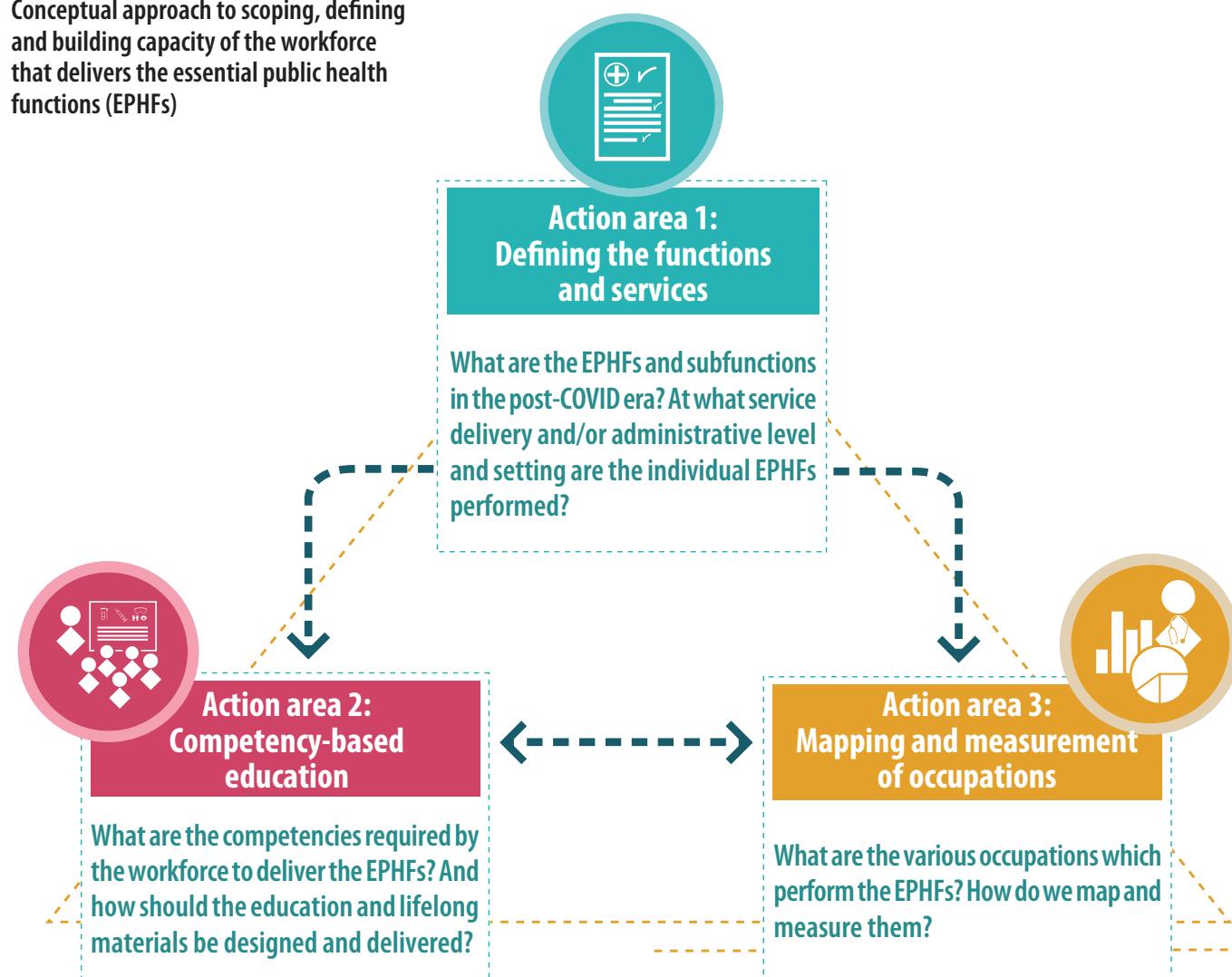
A prioritized action agenda for countries

For countries aiming to strengthen their public health workforce, including those charged with emergency response, the Roadmap theory of change entails a focus on three action areas (figure 1):

- Defining essential public health functions and subfunctions to be tailored to health system needs;
- Delivering competency-based education to build or strengthen the requisite capacities; and
- Mapping and measuring health occupations to enable target setting, planning and monitoring.

FIG. 1.

Conceptual approach to scoping, defining and building capacity of the workforce that delivers the essential public health functions (EPHFs)





Defining essential public health functions

Public health challenges underscore the need for integrated health systems strengthening with strong public health orientation to meet population needs in times of peace and stability as well as during emergencies.

- WHO and partners have identified twelve essential public health functions (EPHFs) (box 2) required to advance UHC and other health-related SDG targets.
- Implementing the essential public health functions is essential to improving health; prevention, preparedness and response to future health risks; and detection and response to emerging health threats.
- Population health needs and each country's context are unique. Roadmap partners can work with countries to contextualize the EPHFs.
- Resource:** *Defining essential public health functions and services to strengthen national workforce capacity* provides an integrated approach to supporting the review, planning, design and delivery of public health.

BOX 2.

- Monitoring and evaluating the population's health status, health service utilization and surveillance of risk factors and threats to health.
- Public health emergency management.
- Assuring effective public health governance, regulation and legislation.
- Supporting efficient and effective health systems and multisectoral planning, financing and management for population health.
- Protecting populations against health threats, including environmental and occupational hazards, communicable disease threats, food safety, chemical and radiation hazards.
- Promoting prevention and early detection of diseases, including noncommunicable and communicable diseases.
- Promoting health and well-being and actions to address the wider determinants of health and inequity.
- Ensuring community engagement, participation and social mobilization for health and well-being.
- Ensuring adequate quantity and quality of public health workforce.
- Assuring quality of and access to health services.
- Advancing public health research.
- Ensuring equitable access to and rational use of essential medicines and other health technologies.

Strengthening competency-based education

Delivering the EPHFs requires specific competencies. The Roadmap public health competency framework can guide alignment of education programmes with health system needs and employment opportunities throughout the lifelong learning continuum of pre-service, in-service and specialization education.

WHO and partners have analyzed existing frameworks and resources and developed a competency framework defining the practice activities for the public health and emergency workforce to deliver the twelve EPHFs.

- Competency-based education is an effective approach to prepare the workforce for delivering the EPHFs, emphasizing outcomes-oriented learning, progressive sequencing, tailored teaching and assessment, and programmatic assessment.
- A modular, foundational tool, adapted to context, can guide strengthening competency-based education programme design and delivery for the practice activities within a worker's roles and responsibilities. Public health and academic institutions are key stakeholders in promoting its uptake and implementation. .
- Resource:** *Global competency and outcomes framework for the essential public health functions* is available for use by educators and educational institutions, as well as employers and regulatory institutions, in reviewing, benchmarking and strengthening public health education and training to meet national public health requirements.

Mapping and measuring the public health workforce

The workforce that delivers the EPHFs is not a single occupation, but a grouping of diverse occupations from health and other sectors, including core public health personnel; health and care workers who contribute to public health functions within their clinical or care roles; and personnel from allied occupations like those involved in water and sanitation, food supply chains and road safety, among others (figure 2). The aligned mapping and measurement approach designed and undertaken through Roadmap partners provides standards within and among countries.

- Comparable measurement within and among countries is further complicated by the differing educational backgrounds, job titles, skills and responsibilities of personnel within and outside the health and care sector.
- In some contexts, insufficient workforce data hinders policy, planning and system strengthening. The National Health Workforce Accounts implementation will enhance public health workforce data.
- Roadmap partners are committed to aligning mapping and measurement and can support governments in the alignment of national health workforce data systems.
- **Resource:** *Essential public health functions: A guide to map and measure national workforce capacity.* Mapping and measurement are ongoing in Benin, Colombia, Georgia, Ghana Cote d'Ivoire, Kenya, Uganda, and more than 30 additional countries have expressed interest.

FIG. 2.

Composition of the workforce that delivers the essential public health functions



Operational handbook

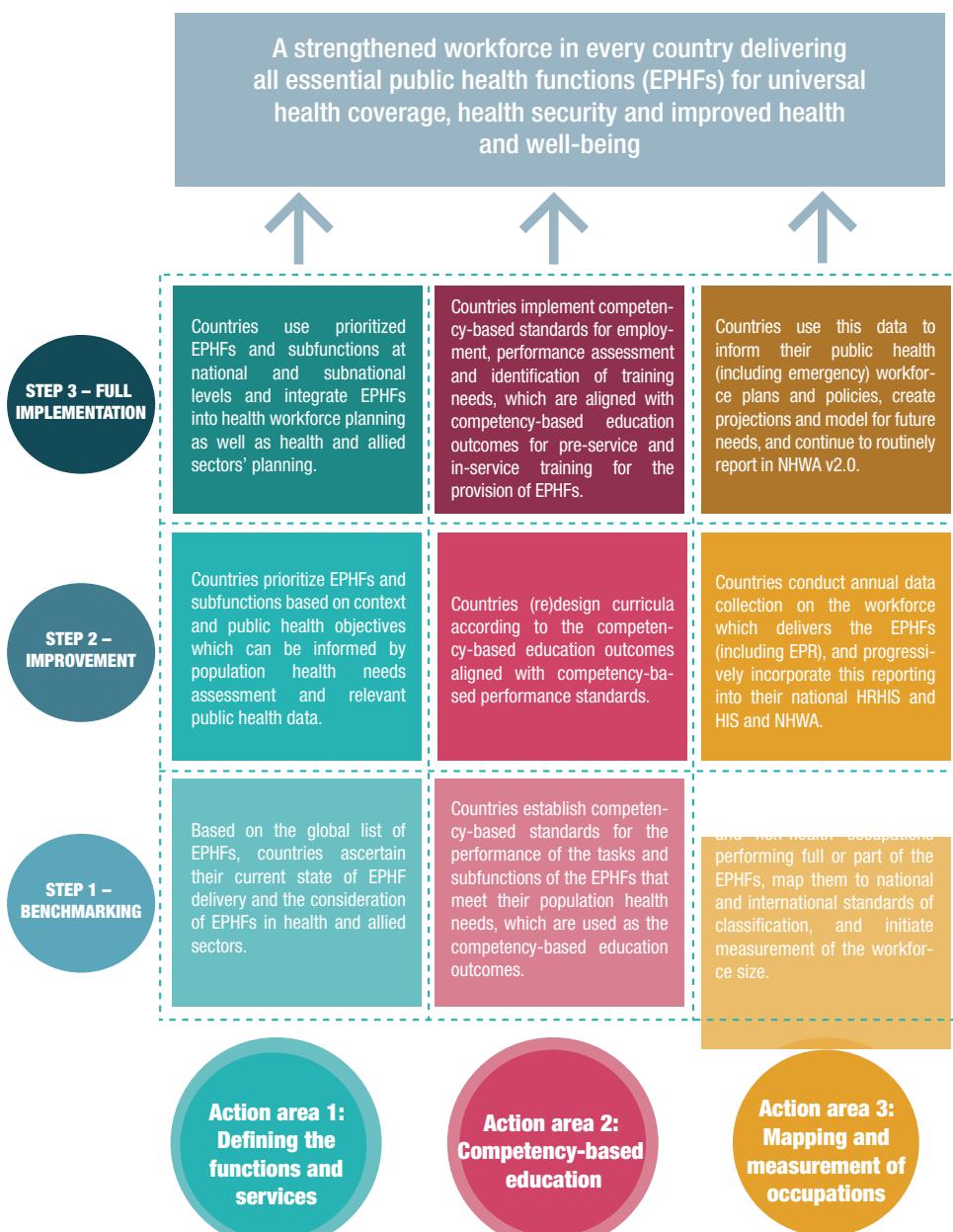
The *Operational handbook for country-led contextualization and implementation* is addressed to policy-makers, planners and educators, with the aim of supporting countries to assess their current public health workforce situation, needs and opportunities for progress across the three action areas. A list of questions is provided to guide the benchmarking process, which involves review, assessment, monitoring performance and contextualization, and how to integrate the findings with health workforce, health systems and health security policies and planning.

Benchmarking to promote policy dialogue and action in countries

Building on international political consensus – pronounced through the Rome Declaration of 2021³, the Italia Declaration of the G20 Health Ministers⁴ and a series of World Health Assembly resolutions⁵ – to prioritize investment to build health workforce capacity and readiness, it is time to leverage that political momentum in countries to support one national plan to strengthen the public health and emergency workforce.

The Roadmap progression matrix outlines actions for benchmarking, improving and achieving full implementation of each of the action areas to achieve the vision of a strengthened public health workforce in every country (figure 3).

FIG. 3. Progression matrix for countries to operationalize the Roadmap



³ <https://global-health-summit-cmrcn-cmrcn.rome-declaration.org>

The results of the national benchmarking exercise can be fed into relevant policy dialogue opportunities and should inform national level planning and investment decisions, including: those relating to the definition of standards and curricula for the public health workforce, the inclusion of public health workforce occupations in national health workforce strategies and in employment decisions, and the update and modification of curricula.

Roadmap partners are committed to working with governments and other national stakeholders to build existing and develop additional capacity, including through support to national governments, public health schools, programmes, regulatory institutions, and accreditation and licensing mechanisms.

Country application, contextualization and benchmarking already are underway in a number of countries.

Who are the Roadmap partners?

Since the October 2022 launch of the Action Plan, 75 governments, national public health agencies, international public health bodies, civil society organizations, academic institutions, philanthropic organizations, and associations have endorsed the Roadmap. Partners are present in at least 123 countries and all regions.



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