Call for Action

Making every school a health promoting school: Scaling up implementation of comprehensive school health programmes for promoting health and well-being of students and staff

Delhi, India, 12 October 2021
We, the Member States of the WHO South-East Asia Region,

Having assembled at the Inter-Ministerial Meeting to Revitalize Health Promoting Schools Implementation organized by the WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia, along with partners from the United Nations Specialized Agencies – UNESCO, UNICEF, UNFPA and WFP,

RECOGNIZING schools to be important settings for delivering education and executing health- and well-being-related interventions for children and adolescents to support their journey through adulthood into becoming responsible and socioeconomically productive citizens, in tandem with the efforts of their respective countries towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals for all their citizens across all ages;

ACKNOWLEDGING that the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent prolonged closure of schools has significantly impacted education, and affected the holistic development of physical and mental health, psychosocial behaviours, and the overall well-being of children and adolescents, and reminding ourselves of the need for robust intersectoral collaboration between the health, education and relevant sectors to sustain health promoting environments and actions in schools and for school-age children, and to ensure the safe reopening and operation of schools in line with COVID-19-mandated precautions and beyond the pandemic;

RECALLING the WHO Health Promoting Schools (HPS) Initiative launched in 1995 to strengthen the capacity of all schools in the Region to promote healthy “living, learning and working”, and the series of follow-up meetings that have been held across Member States since then to address a range of health-risk factors affecting children and adolescents, and keeping in mind the varying levels of implementation of the Initiative that have been achieved across Member countries;

APPRECIATING the availability in 2021 of the Global Standards and guidance for implementation of health-promoting schools for “making every school a health promoting school” that have been developed by the World Health Organization in collaboration with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and international institutional partners; and

TAKING COGNIZANCE of the fact that the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia at its Seventy-fourth Session in Kathmandu, Nepal, adopted resolution SEA/RC74/R3 on “Revitalizing the school health programme and health-promoting schools in the South-East Asia Region” for providing strategic guidance in this regard;

CALL FOR THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS on the part of Member States to regulate the safe reopening of schools as the world progresses on the road to recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and to make every school a health promoting school as we go forward:

(a) based on the pandemic situation, reopen schools where and when possible with adequate public health and social safety measures, undertake “safe school” operations, and ensure preparedness and resilience within schools to be prepared for future emergencies and outbreaks;

(b) re prioritize school health programmes, strengthen national health and education policies, ensure adequate infrastructure, and enhance national efforts to implement a holistic approach for health promoting schools based on the Global Standards and Indicators for Health Promoting Schools;

(c) ensure adequate and equitable distribution of resources at the national, subnational and school levels to bolster the capacity and functioning of the existing school health programmes and to achieve the Global Standards and Indicators for health promoting schools;

(d) enhance collaboration between health, education and other relevant ministries, local governments, communities and other participating sectors to ensure implementation of the Health Promoting Schools Initiative in all schools of the Region, inasmuch that the benefits reach all children and adolescents, including those living with disabilities, as well as children of migrants and the stateless populations, thereby “leaving no one behind”;

(e) establish collaborative mechanisms to mentor school capacities, monitor progress, generate evidence-based information, and document good practices and lessons learnt to advance health promoting school practices across each Member country;

(f) foster partnerships between the health and education sectors, public and private school systems, educational associations, international agencies and youth networks to take immediate actions to address physical and
mental health needs, social well-being, and safety of the students during the reopening of schools, and to sustain these measures beyond the pandemic, by making every school a health promoting school capable of addressing, ameliorating and being prepared for and resilient over any threats from ongoing and future emergencies and challenges;

AND URGE Member States and the World Health Organization to ensure adherence to the targets, goals and benchmarks with invigorated commitment and unflagging initiative for the continued well-being and physical, mental and psychosocial development of schoolchildren across the Region to enable them to grow into adulthood as productive and healthy citizens of the world community assured of the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health as a fundamental right.

H.E. Mr Zahid Maleque
Minister of Health and Family Welfare
People’s Republic of Bangladesh

H.E. Dr Dipu Moni
Minister of Education
People’s Republic of Bangladesh

H.E. Dasho Dechen Wangmo
Minister of Health
Kingdom of Bhutan

H.E. Mr Jai Bir Rai
Minister of Education
Kingdom of Bhutan

H.E. Dr Choe Kyong Chol
Minister of Health
Democratic People’s Republic of Korea

H.E. Mr Kim Sung Du
Chairman Education Commission
Democratic People’s Republic of Korea

H.E. Mr Mansukh Mandaviya
Minister of Health and Family Welfare
Republic of India

H.E. Mr Dharmendra Pradhan
Minister of Education
Republic of India

H.E. Mr Budi Gunadi Sadikin
Minister of Health
Republic of Indonesia

H.E. Mr Nadiem Anwar Makarim
Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology
Republic of Indonesia

H.E. Mr Ahmed Naseem
Minister of Health
Republic of Maldives

H.E. Dr Aishath Ali
Minister of Education
Republic of Maldives

H.E. Mr Birodh Khatiwada
Minister of Health and Population
The Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal

H.E. Dr Keheliya Rambukwella
Minister of Health
Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

H.E. Mr Dinesh Gunawardena
Minister of Education
Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

H.E. Mr Anutin Charnvirakul
Minister of Public Health
Kingdom of Thailand

H.E. Ms Treenuch Thienthong
Minister of Education
Kingdom of Thailand

H.E. Dr Odete Maria Freitas Belo
Minister of Health
Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste

H.E. Mr Amindo Maia
Minister of Education, Youth and Sport
Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste

Dr Poonam Khetrapal Singh
Regional Director
WHO South-East Asia Region