Terms of reference for members of the European Technical Advisory Group of Experts (ETAGE) on Immunization Working Group on Hepatitis B

In September 2016, the WHO Regional Committee for Europe adopted the Action plan for the health sector response to viral hepatitis in the WHO European Region (Regional Action Plan). The Regional Action Plan sets the goal of elimination of viral hepatitis as a public health threat by 2030 by:

- reducing the transmission of hepatitis viruses;
- reducing morbidity due to viral hepatitis and its complications; and
- ensuring equitable access to comprehensive prevention, and recommended testing, care and treatment services for all.

It also sets the following hepatitis B control targets by 2020:

- 95% coverage with the three or four doses of hepatitis B vaccine for infants in countries that implement universal vaccination;
- 90% coverage with timely HBV birth dose vaccination for countries that implement universal newborn vaccination;
- 90% coverage with screening in pregnant women and 95% coverage with post-exposure prophylaxis in infants born to infected mothers for countries that implement screening of pregnant women and post-exposure prophylaxis of newborns; and
- ≤ 0.5% of hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg) prevalence in vaccinated cohorts.

The WHO Regional Office for Europe provides support to countries in implementing the Regional Action Plan strategies and monitoring their progress towards hepatitis B control targets. The European Technical Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization (ETAGE) will advise the Regional Office on operational aspects of strengthening hepatitis B control and will validate the achievement of control targets by Member States and at regional level. The ETAGE Working Group on Hepatitis B (Working Group) is established to provide independent review and expert technical input to ETAGE.
Identity and purpose

The Vaccine-preventable Diseases and Immunization programme (VPI) of the Regional Office in consultation with the ETAGE Chair will appoint the Working Group members. The Working Group will comprise 8–10 members: a Chair, an ETAGE member, and 6–8 experts in the area of viral hepatitis. It will be tasked with providing independent review and expert technical input to ETAGE, with the goal of increasing the effectiveness of ETAGE deliberations on progress towards the hepatitis B control targets in the Region. The Working Group will report to ETAGE and will act according to clear terms of reference.

Terms of reference

Aims and objectives

The Working Group has several aims and objectives.

- Monitor progress towards regional hepatitis B control targets; identify constraints, obstacles and threats preventing the achievement of the control targets; and provide advice to ETAGE/VPI on policies and strategies related to hepatitis B immunization and the prevention of perinatal transmission of the hepatitis B virus.
- Establish and update as necessary the criteria, parameters and procedures validating the achievement of regional hepatitis B control targets.
- Apply the criteria, parameters and procedures to review documents submitted by Member States to validate the achievement of control targets.
- Prepare and submit conclusions and recommendations to be discussed and approved by ETAGE.
- Provide technical advice on the processes and procedures for collecting, analysing and reporting the data required to validate achievement of the control targets by Member States.
- Participate at WHO regional meetings to advocate for the strengthening of hepatitis B control and to encourage countries to participate in validating the achievement of hepatitis B control targets.
Composition of the Working Group and appointment of members

- VPI and the Chair of ETAGE will appoint Working Group members.
- The Working Group will comprise 8–10 members: a Chair, an ETAGE member, and 6–8 experts in the area of viral hepatitis.
- Appointment will be made for the entire period of validation of the achievement of regional hepatitis B control targets. If a member resigns, VPI and the ETAGE Chair will appoint a new member. Rotation of members will be introduced if the validation process is extended beyond 2020.
- VPI and the ETAGE Chair will appoint the Chair of the Working Group. The Working Group Chair is expected to serve for the entire period of validation. Rotation of the Chair will be introduced if the validation process is extended beyond 2020.
- The Chair will represent the Working Group in ETAGE and WHO regional meetings.
- VPI will serve as Secretariat of the Working Group.
- Possible grounds for termination include but are not limited to:
  - failure to attend two consecutive planned meetings with no valid justification;
  - change in a member’s affiliation resulting in a conflict of interests; and
  - a member’s lack of professionalism involving, for example, a breach of confidentiality.

Working Group meetings and operational procedures

- Interaction between the Secretariat and the Working Group members and the Chair will take place throughout the year. In-person meetings of the Working Group will be conducted bi-annually and will be scheduled in advance. Additional meetings may be held as teleconferences as needed.
- Representatives of countries as well as external experts may be invited to attend meetings if and when appropriate.
- In preparation for each meeting, the agenda and the necessary relevant documents will be circulated at least two weeks beforehand.
- Members will need to invest the necessary time in preparing for each meeting by reviewing information ahead of meetings.
- A summary report of the Working Group meeting, including conclusions and recommendations, will be circulated for comments and endorsement by the Working Group members within two weeks of a meeting. Working Group members will be required to respond within two weeks after receiving this communication.
- In addition to attending meetings, Working Group members will review documents that validate the achievement of regional control targets submitted by national immunization programmes and will prepare a report, including conclusions on the achievement of hepatitis B targets and recommendations on sustaining or improving the hepatitis B control effort. Two or three appointed members will accomplish this task through an exchange of email communications with intermittent teleconferences.
- At a meeting or through an exchange of emails, the Working Group will discuss and approve the report submitted by the appointed members.
- ETAGE will discuss and approve the Working Group’s conclusions on the achievement of regional hepatitis B control targets by Member States and at regional level at its in-person or teleconference meetings.
Conflicts of interest and confidentiality

- When the Working Group is formed, and at the start of each Working Group meeting, members should complete a WHO declaration of interest form and a confidentiality agreement.
- All members will be experts in areas relevant to hepatitis B control, serving in their own capacity, and will not represent the interests of a particular group or stakeholder. Members will refrain from promoting the policies and views and products of the organization/institution for which they work.
- All background documents, papers, presentations and reports presented to the Working Group shall be treated as confidential and may not be publicly disclosed or used by members without prior approval.
- As a WHO advisory body, neither the Working Group as a whole, nor individual members, can speak or act on behalf of WHO, or attend meetings on behalf of WHO without prior consent from VPI. Working Group members, including the Chair, may not share any information or make presentations on the topics related to the Working Group without prior approval by VPI.
- Working Group members will not be remunerated for their participation in the Working Group; however, the Regional Office will cover their travel expenses related to participation in Working Group meetings.