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Concept note

“Rehabilitation and assistive technology integration into national strategies of Member States in the WHO European Region” project, in partnership with the WHO collaborating centre for Rehabilitation in Global Health Systems at the University of Lucerne

Background

In 2019, 394 million people in the World Health Organization (WHO) European Region had a condition amenable to rehabilitation. This is more than two in every five people in the Region and demonstrates a significant need for rehabilitation services.¹ The *Global report on assistive technology*, jointly developed by WHO and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF),² indicates that as many as one in three individuals in the Region requires access to assistive technology – including assistive products and the services and systems that are needed to deliver them. This project aims to understand the current status of integration of rehabilitation and assistive technologies into European Region health systems, and provide information on how WHO can best provide Member States with support for rehabilitation and access to assistive technology.

Proposal

The aim of the project is to collect information on how and to what extent rehabilitation and access to assistive technology are included in, or planned to be included in, national strategies and emergency plans in all 53 Member States of the WHO European Region. The information will be used in the development of a national policy dashboard on rehabilitation to be hosted by the WHO Regional Office for Europe.

Objectives

- To conduct an online stakeholder consultation with the national rehabilitation focal points nominated by Member States' ministries of health and/or social protection/affairs.
- To carry out a document analysis of Member States' current national strategies, to complement the consultation.
- To create a database of Member States' rehabilitation and assistive technology national focal persons, for the benefit of the project and for future reference.

Research questions

¹ The need for rehabilitation services in the WHO European Region. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2022 (<https://www.who.int/europe/publications/i/item/9789289058506>, accessed 22 January 2024).

² Global report on assistive technology. Geneva: World Health Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2022 (<https://who.int/publications/i/item/9789240049451>, accessed 22 January 2024).

- Which European Region Member States have developed national strategic plans specifically for rehabilitation and/or access to assistive technology or have included rehabilitation and/or access to assistive technology in other national strategic plans?
- Which Member States are planning to develop or revise their national strategic plans for rehabilitation and/or access to assistive technology?
- For Member States who have included rehabilitation and/or access to assistive technology in their national strategic plans, which elements have been included and what are the reasons for their inclusion?

Methodology

National rehabilitation focal points for all 53 European Region Member States will be contacted by formally requesting the ministries of health and/or social protection/affairs of each country to nominate an appropriate person. The focal point officers will be asked to: 1) to participate in a brief online survey via WHO's secure dataform survey platform; and 2) share national strategy documents with the project, if the national strategies have incorporated aspects of rehabilitation and/or access to assistive technology.

The survey will include a variety of question types, including multiple-choice, open-ended and rating questions. The collected data will be used for a thematic analysis aimed at eliciting insights into the rationale and intentions behind each Member State's strategic plans for rehabilitation. The WHO ethical committee will be approached to seek approval for the project.

Outcomes

- Producing a rehabilitation and assistive technology policy brief for the WHO European Region, including information summary tables, to be used to develop a national policy dashboard hosted by the WHO Regional Office for Europe.
- Incorporating the data collected into the Rehabilitation dataset of the European Health Information Gateway.³
- Publishing at least one peer-reviewed scientific publication in an open-access journal.
- Potentially presenting the findings to Member States in a high-level briefing meeting, with a call to action.
- Producing a database of the Region's 53 rehabilitation and assistive technology national focal persons.

³ Rehabilitation. In: European Health Information Gateway [online database]. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2024 (<https://gateway.euro.who.int/en/datasets/rehab/>, accessed 22 January 2024).