

Africa Public Health Emergency Operations Centre Network (AFR PHEOC-NET) Best practice, and experience-sharing platform and Technical Sub-working group

BACKGROUND

Member States (MS) in the African continent in the (World Health Organization regional office for Africa and the World Health Organization regional office for the Eastern Mediterranean) have made progress in improving their emergency preparedness and response capabilities. One of the tools that have been implemented to improve response coordination mechanisms was the establishment of public health emergency operations centres (PHEOCs). Many countries have already established PHEOCs. In countries with functional PHEOCs, the centres played a pivotal role in coordinating preparedness for and response to various public health emergencies, including during the emergency phase of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings from regional-level meetings, PHEOC surveys, and document reviews indicated there are still key challenges in establishing functional PHEOCs in the two regions. Member States supported by the key Partner Organizations¹ recently developed a joint multi-stakeholder strategic plan (2023-2027) to address these challenges and ensure the establishment of fully functional PHEOCs at least in 90% of the Member States.

RATIONALE

There is an established network to strengthen PHEOCs and address key challenges encountered at the African regional level: The Africa PHEOC network (AFR PHEOC-Net) established in 2015 to support Member States in establishing functional PHEOCs by providing technical guidance and resources including the deployment of experts to support the operationalization of PHEOCs. There

¹ World Health Organisation (WHO), Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), West African Health Organisation (WAHO), U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (US CDC), United Kingdom Health Security Agency (UKHSA), Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), and Robert Koch Institute (RKI).

is an active WhatsApp group (Africa PHEOC Network²) formed to help facilitate communication and information sharing across the continent. Two bi-regional meetings (PHEOC focal points from Member States in Africa and Eastern Mediterranean region and partners) were held in 2019 and 2021 to share experiences and best practices between countries. Recently, PHEOC website³ development is underway to facilitate and enhance information communication between experts in the African continent.

There is a need for a more collaborative and sustainable platform to review progress made, experiences and information sharing to contribute to establishing a functional PHEOC in countries. In addition, there is high demand for technical support and sharing of experiences and lessons learned from Member States (MS) and growing interest from various stakeholders to support PHEOC implementation.

As a result, this calls for the establishment of a regional PHEOC best practice and information and experience-sharing platform to host all the knowledge, materials exchange, webinars and a technical working group (TWG) comprised of PHEOC experts from Member States and key Partner Organizations. The details are provided below.

DESCRIPTIONS

Section 1: Regional PHEOC best practice and Experience-sharing Platform

Purpose: The main purpose of the platform is to serve as information sharing and experience sharing between the Member States in the World Health Organization African Region and the World Health Organization Eastern Mediterranean Region (WHO AFRO and EMRO) via webinars. The platform will also serve as a knowledge repository and engagement among members before, during and after the webinars. Member States and other WHO regions (e.g., Western Pacific Region, European Region, South-East Asia Region, Region of the Americas) will be invited to share best practices in identified areas.

² <https://chat.whatsapp.com/LC0eO8aJVANJAGZup3GOKV>.

³ <http://pheocnet.afro.who.int>

Scope: This will cover Member States in the World Health Organization African Region and the World Health Organization Eastern Mediterranean Region (WHO AFRO and EMRO) via webinar and for peer-to-peer mentoring among Member States.

Meeting schedule: monthly meeting for a maximum of 1.5 hours involving the relevant stakeholders.

Target audience: The primary target audiences are:

- » PHEOC Managers and staff from the Member States of the African continent,
- » Surge/Incident Management System (IMS) staff,
- » Africa CDC's African Volunteer Health Corps-Strengthening and Utilizing Response Groups for Emergencies (AVoHC-SURGE) members,
- » PHEOC technical experts from Partner Organizations, and
- » Other experts from other relevant stakeholders (e.g., National Disaster Management Authorities).

Detailed Terms of Reference (TOR) is found in Annex 1.

Section 2: Regional PHEOC Technical Working Group (TWG)

Purpose: The main purpose of the TWG is to provide technical guidance on key areas of PHEOC to the Member States in the WHO AFRO and EMRO regions and develop regional technical documents and follow up on the implementation of the strategic plan.

Membership: The key Partner Organizations and potential MS will be represented in the TWG and sub-working groups to serve for a period of one year which is renewable after a satisfactory evaluation of contributions during the tenure. Members of the sub-working groups will be based on their area of expertise.

Sub-working groups: There will be four sub-working groups based on the identified priorities, however, additional sub-working groups may be formed when the need arises. The proposed sub-working groups are:

- i. PHEOC plans, procedures and legal instruments sub-working group (will include sub-working discussions specific to legal instruments and plans and procedures),

- ii. Technology infrastructure and information management,
- iii. Workforce capacity development, and
- iv. PHEOC Centers of Excellence.

Leads: Lead and co-lead will be assigned for each sub-working group. Leads could be assigned from the Partner organization and Co-leads from identified MS.

Meeting schedule: The TWG will meet every month and the sub-working groups meet bi-weekly.

Detailed Terms of Reference (TOR) for the Regional PHEOC TWG is found in Annex 2.

Annexe 1: Terms of Reference – Regional PHEOC best practice and experience-sharing platform

1. Background

Member States (MS) in the African continent (World Health Organization regional office for Africa and the World Health Organization regional office for the Eastern Mediterranean) have made significant progress in improving their emergency preparedness and response capability. One of the tools that have been implemented to improve response coordination mechanisms was establishing a public health emergency operations centre (PHEOC). In countries with functional PHEOCs, the centres played a pivotal role in coordinating preparedness for and response to various public health emergencies, including during the emergency phase of the COVID-19 pandemic.

There is an established network to strengthen PHEOCs and address key challenges encountered at the African regional level: The Africa PHEOC network (AFR PHEOC-Net) established in 2015 to support Member States in establishing functional PHEOCs by providing technical guidance and resources including the deployment of experts to support the operationalization of PHEOCs. Furthermore, there is an active WhatsApp group (Africa PHEOC Network) formed to help facilitate communication and information sharing across the continent. Two bi-regional meetings (PHEOC focal points from Member States in Africa and Eastern Mediterranean region and partners) were held in 2019 and 2021 to share experiences and best practices between countries. Recently, PHEOC website development is underway to facilitate and enhance information communication between experts in the African continent.

There is a need for a more collaborative and sustainable platform to review progress made, experiences and information sharing to contribute to establishing a functional PHEOC. In addition, there is high demand for technical support and sharing of experiences and lessons learned from MS and growing interest from various stakeholders to support PHEOC implementation. As a result, this call for the establishment of regional PHEOC best practices and information and experience-sharing platform to host all the knowledge, materials exchange, webinars among others

2. Purpose: The main purpose of the platform is to serve as information sharing and experience sharing between the Member States in the World Health Organization African Region and the World Health Organization Eastern Mediterranean Region (WHO AFRO and EMRO) via webinars. The platform will also serve as a knowledge repository and engagement among members before, during and after the webinars. Member States and other regions (e.g., e.g., Western Pacific Region, European Region, South-East Asia Region, Region of the Americas) will be invited to share best practices in identified areas.

3. Scope: This will cover Member States in the World Health Organization African Region and the World Health Organization Eastern Mediterranean Region (WHO AFRO and EMRO) via webinar and for peer-to-peer mentoring among Member States.

4. Approaches of the meeting

- » Potential Member States will be identified and communicated to share their experiences in PHEOC operations.
- » Selected Member States will deliver a brief presentation based on the regional guidance followed by a plenary discussion.
- » Member States from other regions and regional organizations (e.g., Western Pacific Region, European Region, South-East Asia Region, Region of the Americas) will be invited to share their best practices.
- » Updates on any regional or international PHEOC-related developments or initiatives will also be shared/provided.

5. Term

This TOR will come into effect once approved by the Regional PHEOC Technical Working Group (TWG) members and will continue to be in effect until terminated by TWG. WHO AFRO shall serve as the secretariat of the platform.

6. Members of the platform

- » **All Member States WHO AFRO and EMRO regions**

- PHEOC managers and staff
- Incident Management System (IMS) staff, if any activated PHEOC
- Africa CDC's African Volunteer Health Corps-Strengthening and Utilizing Response Groups for Emergencies (AVoHC-SURGE) members One-Health
- Experts from relevant agencies (National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), etc.)

» **Focal points from the following key Partner Organizations**

- WHO, Africa CDC, WAHO, US CDC, UKHSA, BMGF, and RKI

» **Other invitees**

- Other invitees (individuals and organizations) as required.

7. Meetings

The secretariat shall meet bi-weekly/monthly as needed and be chaired by WHO or Africa CDC interchangeably. The meeting shall be led by the PHEOC workforce development sub working group of the Regional PHEOC Technical Working Group.

Meetings will be held virtually for up to one and a half hours starting specified date and time as agreed. The Secretary will call for the meeting, as well as develop the agenda. A report/notes of each meeting will be distributed to all members.

Apart from the monthly meeting, there will be an in-person Annual Network meeting to bring the members and other invitees. Detailed arrangement will be done including preparing concept notes, dates, venue, and other planning elements.

In addition, a bi-annual (or quarterly) newsletter on the Network's activities will be prepared and distributed to all members and other wider audiences.

8. Revision of the Terms of Reference

If it becomes necessary to amend the Regional PHEOC best practice and experience-sharing platform TWG's TOR, such changes must be agreed upon by the members.

This TOR was approved on MM, 2023.

Annexe 2: Terms of Reference – Regional PHEOC Technical Working Group

1. Background

Member States (MS) in the African continent and the Eastern Mediterranean region have made significant progress in improving their emergency preparedness and response capability. One of the tools that have been implemented to improve response coordination mechanisms was establishing a public health emergency operations centre (PHEOC). In countries with functional PHEOCs, the centres played a pivotal role in coordinating preparedness for and response to various public health emergencies, including during the emergency phase of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings from regional-level meetings, PHEOC surveys, and document reviews indicated there are still key challenges in establishing functional PHEOCs in the two regions. As a result, the Member States in the African continent and the Eastern Mediterranean region supported by World Health Organization (WHO), Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), West African Health Organization (WAHO), US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (US CDC), UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) and Robert Koch Institute (RKI) developed a joint multi-stakeholder strategic plan that runs from 2022-2026. The joint plan aims to have fully functional PHEOCs in 90% of Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean region countries.

There are existing annual review meetings with PHEOC focal points from all Member States (MS) of the two regions aimed at reviewing PHEOC implementation status and addressing key challenges encountered, and two bi-regional annual review meetings were held so far. This, however, was insufficient to discuss progress and address any bottlenecks encountered in establishing functional PHEOCs across the continent.

As a result, a joint technical working group (hereinafter the PHEOC TWG) comprised of the key Partner Organizations and potential MS is formed to provide technical guidance and develop regional technical documents.

2. Purpose

The main purpose of the TWG is to provide technical guidance on the core components of PHEOC to Member States develop regional technical documents, support in the implementation of the PHEOC strategic plan and coordinate the best practice and experience sharing platform.

3. Responsibilities

Coordination and collaboration

- » Fostering strong collaboration and communication between internal and external stakeholders,
- » Review and approve quarterly and annual implementation plans of the strategic plan for strengthening PHEOCs
- » Establish sub-working groups as appropriate, with defined responsibilities, and membership,
- » Execute activities as agreed upon by the members of the TWG.

Technical guidance

- » Provide advice and high-level technical guidance to MS and other stakeholders on PHEOC activities implementation,
- » Guide on program priorities that arise during the implementation of planned activities,
- » Review and disseminate regional-level template documents (guides, plans, procedures, etc.) developed by various sub-working groups,

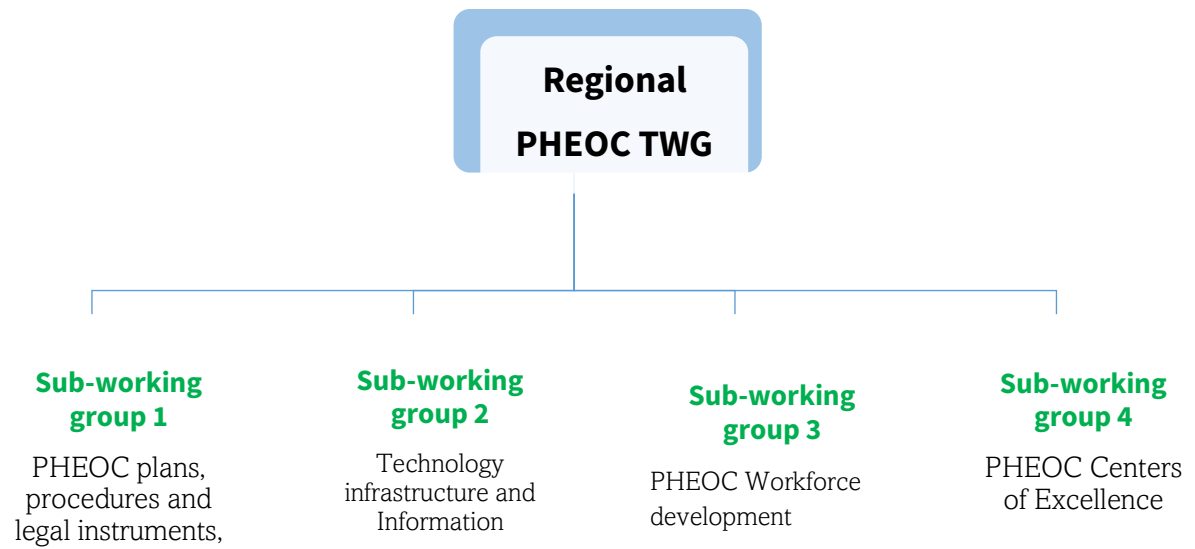
Monitoring and evaluation

- » Review implementation progress and disseminate periodic reports on key PHEOC initiatives,
- » Ensure that all actions are recorded and communicated to relevant stakeholders,

Advocacy and visibility

- » Coordinate documentation of best practices and publishing in scientific journals and,

The structure of the technical working group and its sub-working group is found below.



There will be a sub-working group based on priority thematic areas. These are:

4. Sub-working group

4.1. PHEOC plans and procedures and legal instruments, sub-working group

There will be two sub-working groups:

4.1.1. Legal instruments

This sub-working group's primary responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- » Provide technical guidance on adapting and implementing legal instruments based on legal framework guides for PHEOC operationalization.
- » Address any technical issues arising from MS related to the adoption of the PHEOC legal instruments.
- » Review planned activities related to the development, review, or revision of legal instruments for PHEOCs.
- » Execute related activities as agreed upon by the members of the TWG.
- » Organize and conduct sub-working meetings.
- » Reports to the PHEOC TWG every month.
- » Ensure there is an up-to-date roster of members of the sub-working group.
- » Support and monitor MS implementation of objective 1 of the strategic plan for strengthening PHEOCs (2023-2027)

4.1.2. Plans and procedures

This sub-working group's primary responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- » Address any technical issues arising from MS related to PHEOC plans and procedures.
- » Review/development and implementation of PHEOC plans and procedures.
- » Technical assistance on PHEOC plans and procedures implementation issues or related planning activities,
- » Support MS-to-MS collaboration and sharing of experience and best practices in terms of implementation of PHEOC plans and procedures,
- » Execute related activities as agreed upon by the members of the TWG.
- » Organize and conduct sub-working meetings.

- » Reports to the PHEOC TWG every month.
- » Establishment of a roster of members with relevant experience,
- » Support and monitor MS implementation of objective 1 of the strategic plan for strengthening PHEOCs (2023-2027)

4.2. Technology infrastructure and Information management sub-working group

This working group's primary responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- » Provide technical guidance on adapting and implementing guides or SOPs for information management.
- » Provide guidance on issues arising from MS related to information management including Information Communication Technology (ICT) within the PHEOC.
- » Review planned activities related to PHEOC physical infrastructure and information management.
- » Execute related activities as agreed upon by the members of the TWG.
- » Organize and conduct sub-working meetings.
- » Reports to the PHEOC TWG every month.
- » Ensure there is an up-to-date roster of members of the working group.
- » Support and monitor MS implementation of objectives 3 & 4 of the strategic plan for strengthening PHEOCs (2023-2027)

4.3. PHEOC Workforce development sub-working group

This working group's primary responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- » Ensure engagement of relevant stakeholders in the working group including academic/training institutions.
- » Provide technical guidance on adapting and implementing PHEOC training and exercise guides/plans.
- » Address any technical issues arising from MS related to PHEOC capacity building.
- » Review planned activities related to PHEOC capacity building and simulation exercises.
- » Ensure active engagement of regional ToT members to further build their capacity and coordinate the Regional PHEOC best practice and experience-sharing platform webinars

- » Execute related activities as agreed upon by the members of the working group.
- » Organize and conduct sub-working meetings.
- » Reports to the PHEOC TWG monthly.
- » Ensure there is an up-to-date roster of members of the working group.
- » Support and monitor MS implementation of objective 2 of the strategic plan for strengthening PHEOCs (2023-2027)

4.4. PHEOC Centers of Excellence sub-working group

This working group's primary responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- » Ensure engagement of relevant stakeholders in the working group.
- » Address any technical issues arising from MS related to PHEOC centres of excellence.
- » Review planned activities related to PHEOC centres of excellence.
- » Execute related activities as agreed upon by the members of the working group.
- » Organize and conduct working group meetings.
- » Reports to the PHEOC TWG monthly.
- » Ensure there is an up-to-date roster of members of the working group.
- » Support and monitor MS implementation of objective 5 of the strategic plan for strengthening PHEOCs (2023-2027)

5. Term

This TOR will come into effect once approved by the TWG members and will continue to be in effect until terminated by the TWG.

6. Membership

6.1. TWG membership

The Partner Organizations and selected individuals from MS with demonstrated capacity in PHEOC implementation listed below will form the TWG. Member State representative that meets the criteria shall serve for a period of one year which is renewable after a satisfactory evaluation of contributions during the tenure. However, additional members may be added with the TWG's

approval. A nomination letter from the TWG shall be sent Ministry of Health for the identified person based on the criteria below to serve as a member of the TWG or Sub working group.

Criteria for selection of Member State representative in the TWG and sub working groups.

- a) Representatives have been trained in the bi-regional Training of Trainers on PHEOC.
- b) In active employment of the country's Ministry of Health or National Public Health Institute.
- c) From countries which have established a PHEOC.
- d) From countries that have developed a PHEOC handbook.
- e) From countries that have activated the IMS in the response mode of the PHEOC at least once in the preceding year.
- f) Should be a PHEOC manager/previously held the position of a PHEOC manager or a director in-charge of the PHEOC.
- g) Availability and commitment to work in the group.**

6.2. Working groups membership

All the sub-working group will have their lead and co-lead. The lead may be designated from the AFR-PHEOC secretariate/partner organization and the co-lead from MS. Member State representative that meet the criteria shall serve for a period of one year which is renewable after a satisfactory evaluation of contributions during the tenure.

The complete list of the sub-working group shall be annexed to this TOR for reference.

Each sub working group shall not have more than **15** persons from partner organizations and Member States. There shall be representatives from WHO and Africa CDC in each group and not more than **seven** representatives from Member States.

Criteria for selection of PHEOC Workforce development and exercise sub-working group.

- a) Representative has been trained in the bi-regional Training of Trainers on PHEOC. (m)
- b) Representative has been trained in the SIMEX TOTs. (m)
- c) Representative has an experience in facilitation of any regional training on PHEOC
- d) Representative has planned (in the exercise team) at least one of the regional functional simulation exercise (m)
- e) Experience of training and conduct of SIMEX in a PHEOC at the national or regional levels (m)
- f) Representative has sufficient knowledge of training needs and processes. (m)
- g) Representative has an experience in development of training curriculum and evaluation of training (m)
- h) Availability and commitment to work in the working group (m)
- i) History of employment in an organisation relating to PHEOC field of work
- j) From countries which have established a PHEOC.

Criteria for selection of PHEOC policies, plans and procedures sub working group

General criteria

- Full availability and commitment to serve for a 1-year period,
- Strong participation and engagement in sub-working group regular meetings (biweekly) and technical document development activities,
- Previous training record in the bi-regional Training of Trainers on PHEOCs and SimEx ToT,
- Active employment status with MS/MoH (NPHI, PHEOC, NDMAs, etc.) or other relevant government sectors (optional)
- Applicant from a MS with functioning PHEOC with record of activation for PHE responses.(optional)
- Ability to demonstrate and maintain a respectful, constructive, and professional behaviour throughout the group activities.

Specific criteria

- Proven working experience in a PHEOC, particularly on issues related to PHEOC plans, procedures, and policies development/reviews, implementation, and related planning activities over the past 5 years.

Priority background/areas of expertise for sub-working group membership within WHO AFRO/EMRO regions:

- Member States PHEOC managers and staff
- Member States IMS staff
- Other experts with proven working experience in public health emergency response operations, humanitarian response operations or disaster management in countries

Affiliations of potential sub-working group members include:

- Member States MoHs and related institutions (NPHI/EOC, NDMAs, etc.),
- Other relevant government sectors, incl. civil and military defense services
- Other National, international partner agencies and NGOs engaged in PHEOC/IMS capacity building.
- WHO and its key partner international organizations (...)

Membership processes

- Application to official open call for expressions of interest from WHO AFRO/EMRO to MS
- Nomination letters from the TWG will be sent to Member State/MoH for a formal inclusion of each member

Reporting

- The sub-working group will regularly report to the wider Technical Working Group.

TOR

- The relevant TOR is attached in annex
- Group size: no more than 15 members

Selection criteria for the Technology Infrastructure and Information Management Working Group (TWG) for the AFR PHEOC-Net

- **Expertise in Information Management:** Members should have a deep understanding of information management principles, data handling, data security, and information flow within a PHEOC.(m)
- **Technical Proficiency in ICT infrastructure:** Demonstrated technical skills in information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure, including experience with relevant hardware and software used in PHEOC operations. (m)
- **Experience in Public Health Emergency Response:** Members should have experience in managing information during public health emergencies or disasters, with a clear understanding of the challenges and requirements specific to such situations. (m)
- **Knowledge of PHEOC Operations:** Familiarity with the operations and functions of Public Health Emergency Operations Centers (PHEOCs) is essential to provide guidance relevant to the specific needs of these centers. (m)
- **Adaptation and Implementation Skills:** The ability to provide guidance on adapting and implementing standard operating procedures (SOPs) for information management is crucial. Members should have a track record of successfully implementing such procedures in similar contexts.
- **Analytical and Problem-Solving Skills:** Strong analytical and problem-solving skills to address issues related to information management, ICT, and infrastructure planning within the PHEOC.
- **Communication Skills:** Effective communication and collaboration skills are necessary to organize and conduct sub-working meetings, report to the PHEOC TWG, and interact with various stakeholders.
- **Project Management Experience:** Members should have experience in managing projects related to technology infrastructure and information management to ensure efficient execution of planned activities.
- **Commitment to Objectives:** Demonstrated commitment to the objectives of the TWG, including support and monitoring of MS (Member States) implementation of the strategic plan for strengthening PHEOCs.

- **Team Player:** The ability to work collaboratively as a team is crucial, as the TWG will need to coordinate with other working groups and stakeholders.
- **Availability and Commitment:** Members should be able to commit the time and effort required for regular meetings and follow through on their responsibilities, including monthly reporting.
- **Leadership Qualities:** Leadership skills to help drive the TWG's initiatives and contribute to the overall success of the AFR PHEOC-Net.
- **Continual Learning and Adaptation:** A willingness and ability to stay updated on emerging technologies and best practices in information management and technology infrastructure within public health emergency response.
- **Include physical infrastructure:.....**

6.3 Quorum and language

The quorum for each meeting shall be a least seven persons. Meetings shall be conducted in WHO official languages and sub working groups shall be constituted to ensure all members can communicate in the absence of language interpreters.

7. Meetings

The TWG shall meet monthly and be chaired by WHO or Africa CDC interchangeably. Decisions will be made by consensus and if not possible, by majority vote count.

Meetings will be held virtually for up to one and a half hours starting on a specified date and time as agreed. If required subgroup meetings will be arranged outside of these times at a time convenient to subgroup members.

Members of the TWG will commit to:

- Attending scheduled TWG meetings.

- Reading the prepared materials before each meeting so that they may contribute to the discussion.
- Submitting agenda items at least one week in advance of the meeting.
- Responding to e-mails and/or calls (phone or WhatsApp) requesting confirmation of meeting attendance within three days of receipt.

The Secretary will call and coordinate meetings, as well as develop the agenda, in collaboration with the TWG Chair. The minutes of each meeting are recorded by the Secretary or delegate and circulated to all members.

The Sub-working group (WGs) are expected to hold regular meetings at least twice a week and provide updates to the TWG.

8. Reporting

The WGs shall report to TWG regularly.

9. Revision of the Terms of Reference

If it becomes necessary to amend the TWG's TOR, such changes must be agreed upon by the members.

This TOR was approved on MM, 2023.