

Finnish Working Group on GHSA

The Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA) is a cooperative forum intended to support the work of international organisations and more than 40 countries to transcend borders in the fight against biological and health threats. The scope of operation for the GHSA is restricted to infectious diseases. In Finland the five-year programme on health security is coordinated by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.

Finland chaired the Steering Group in 2015. One of the most significant achievements during the chairmanship was the development and testing of the country assessment process in practice. Led by Finland, the Steering Group has created an approach for independent assessment of preparedness and the required additional measures to safeguard health in countries.

With the assessments, countries can strengthen their own efforts in detecting preventing and responding to infectious diseases and biological threats. The approach has so far been piloted in six countries. The results from the pilots have been promising: peer evaluation supports countries in developing national health systems and preparedness and in strengthening cooperation between different administrative branches. The assessments also help countries implement the requirements in WHO's International Health Regulations.

Finland is continuing in the chairmanship troika until the end of 2016 as the previous chair. Finland will also continue as a member of the Steering Group and as the leader of the country assessment process until the end of the five-year programme. After pilots 60 countries have volunteered to the peer evaluation in the future.

The Global Health Security Agenda GHSA, which comprises 49 countries, key international organisations as well as civil society and the private sector, is a cooperation forum for combating different biological and health threats across borders. Preventing global biological threats requires comprehensive cooperation across administrative boundaries at both national and international level. Countries from all continents take part in the GHSA programme, which makes it possible to open new cooperation between different countries. In addition to individual countries, participants of the GHSA programme include the European Union, the World Health Organization WHO, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation FAO and the World Organisation for Animal Health OIE.

The programme strengthens national structures to help them prevent epidemics that can be avoided, to detect threats in time as well as to respond to different biological threats fast and efficiently. The programme pays special attention to diseases that can spread from animals to humans and the spread of resistance to antimicrobial medicines, AMR.

In recent years, health threats caused by different natural catastrophes, conflicts and pandemics have affected not only people's well-being but also democracy, peace in society and economies of individual countries. The Ebola epidemics has also proved that cooperation is needed between different international organisations, non-governmental organisations and the private sector.

UNISDR has launched the Sendai Seven Campaign to promote each of the seven targets of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk reduction adopted in Sendai, Japan in March 2015. Damir Čemerin award has been connected to the United Nations "Sendai Seven campaign" and therefore the open call for the Damir Čemerin Award focused on reducing mortality through resilient health systems and facilities. Major public health emergencies of international concern occur on a regular basis. Most recently the Ebola epidemic in the impoverished west African countries of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone claimed some 11,000 lives and caused widespread trauma and economic losses. The rapid global spread of the Zika virus is another example.

More information on Finnish Working Group and GSHA: <http://stm.fi/en/ghsagenda>.