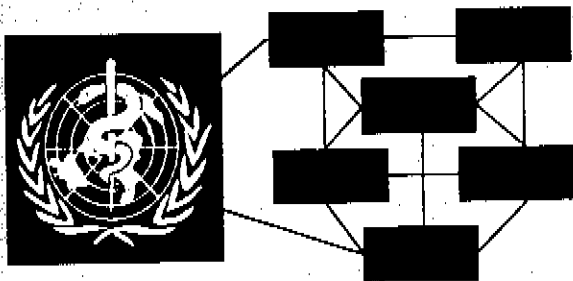




WHO

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR EUROPE



EUR/ICP/ADMN 05 02 01
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH
E58458

STRENGTHENING THE NETWORK OF WHO DOCUMENTATION CENTRES IN EUROPE

Report on a WHO Meeting

Copenhagen, Denmark
29-31 January 1998

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1998

EUR/HFA target 35

TARGET 35

HEALTH INFORMATION SUPPORT

By the year 2000, health information systems in all Member States should actively support the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of health for all policies.

ABSTRACT

Since its inception in 1989, the WHO European network of documentation centres had grown to include 46 centres in 37 countries of the European Region. The WHO Regional Office for Europe held the third meeting of the network at the end of January 1997. Participants from centres in 29 countries discussed common themes of their work in four areas: electronic libraries, promotion activities, networking in countries and evaluation of the use of WHO documentation. All the participants reported successes in these areas, and centres from the eastern countries of the Region provided notable examples of promotional activities and networking within their countries. The participants made 30 specific recommendations on such topics as the use of the WHO bibliographic database, electronic publishing by WHO and working more closely with one another, with WHO and with the European Association of Health Information of Health Information and Libraries (EAHIL). Such partnerships offered important benefits for all three parties.

Keywords

DOCUMENTATION
INFORMATION SERVICES
INFORMATION CENTERS
EUROPE

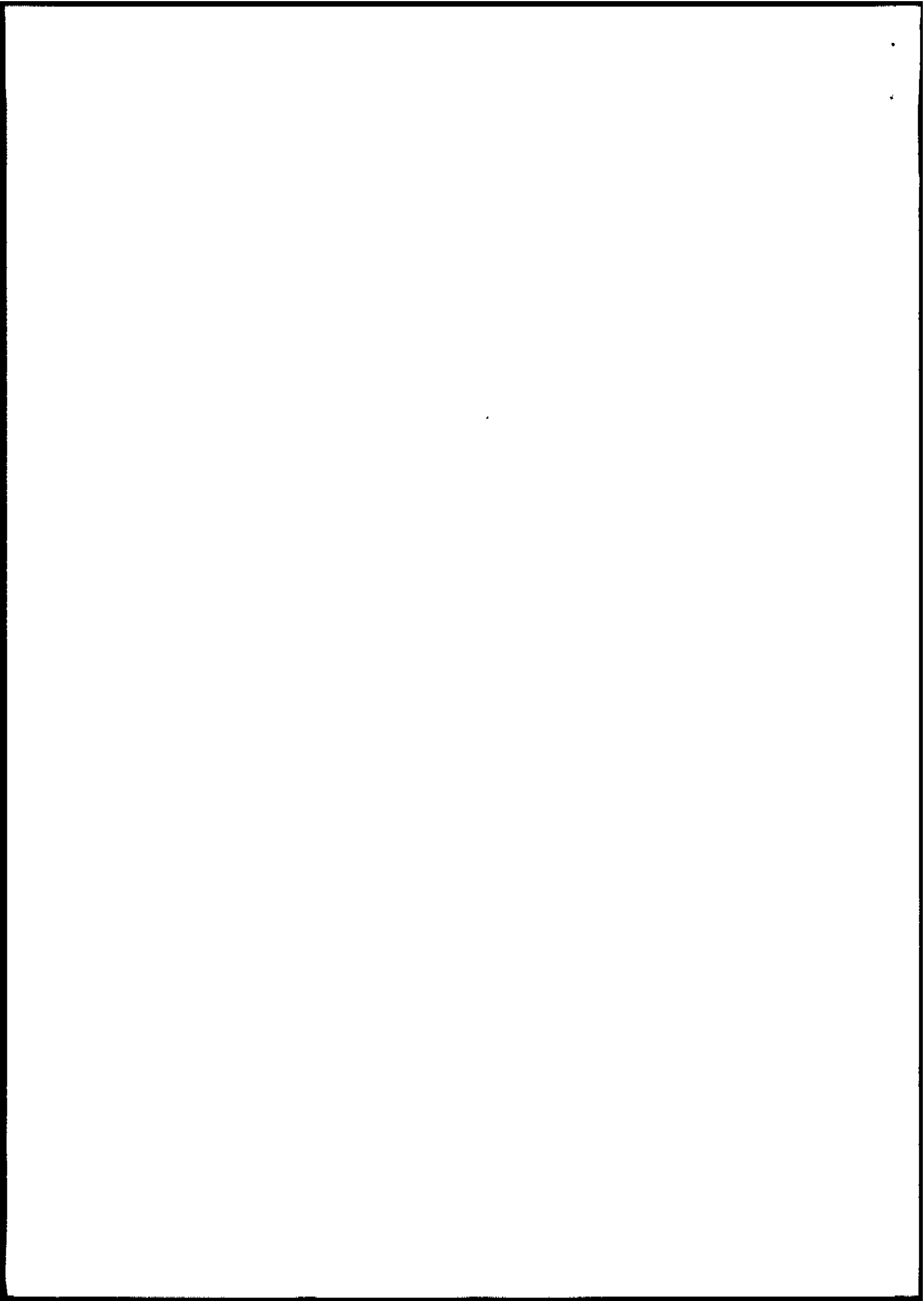
World Health Organization

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CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Introduction.....	1
Discussion.....	1
Electronic libraries.....	2
Promotional activities.....	2
Networking in countries.....	2
Evaluation of use of WHO documentation.....	3
Recommendations.....	3
WHOLIS (WHO bibliographic database).....	3
Electronic publishing and World Wide Web.....	3
Documents and document supply.....	4
Networking.....	4
Evaluation.....	5
Marketing/Promotion.....	5
Annex 1. Working papers.....	6
Annex 2. Participants.....	7



Introduction

The WHO Regional Office for Europe organized a third meeting of its network of documentation centres in Copenhagen at the end of January 1997. The participants comprised representatives from 29 documentation centres in as many countries, staff of the Regional Office and headquarters, and representatives of the joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the European Association of Health and Information Libraries (EAHIL). Annex 1 lists the working papers and the list of participants comprises Annex 2. The participants selected Mr Arne Jakobsson as Chairperson, Professor Arif Smajkic as Vice-Chairperson and Ms Susan Thomas as Rapporteur.

Since its inception in 1989, the WHO European network of documentation centres had grown to include 46 centres in 37 countries of the European Region. While valuable in making WHO documentation available to interested users in their own countries, the centres in the countries of central and eastern Europe (CCEE) and the newly independent states (NIS) of the former USSR were particularly important, in view of the demands for information in the countries, the scarcity of resources for purchasing it and the difficulties of distribution. At their third meeting, network members explored ways to strengthen the network. The participants worked:

- to improve links between the documentation centres;
- to improve links between the centres and WHO, particularly WHO activities in centres' home cities or countries.

The discussions had a special focus on the needs for documentation in the CCEE and NIS.

Discussion

Presentations on specific topics made up a part of the meeting, describing the considerable progress made in carrying out the recommendations of the second meeting, changes in library services in the Regional Office, new services of the library at WHO headquarters, the Regional Office public information activities and its site on the World Wide Web.

An important presentation was given on EAHIL, with which the Regional Office has forged a partnership for 1998/1999. The Regional Office had secured memberships for the centres in the CCEE and NIS; many centres elsewhere in the Region were already members. This partnership offered many advantages to all parties. Each organization could take part in the other's newsletters. Documentation centres could apply for EAHIL grants for travel to conferences, and joins its electronic discussion list to discuss problems and exchange information. In addition, EAHIL could sponsor twinning arrangements, which could supply, for example: free photocopies, duplicate or out-of-date books, help in developing services, recycling of used computer hardware and software, and grants to visit other libraries to improve skills and knowledge.

Aside from the presentations, however, the participants did the bulk of their work, in discussion groups, organized according to the open-space method, which was new to many of them. Recognizing that much of the most useful work in meetings takes place in informal and relatively unstructured discussions before and after formal presentations and at social events, the method aims to integrate such discussions into the business of a meeting. Participants choose topics that interest them, divide into groups to discuss them for a certain period, record their conclusions and recommendations and present them for discussion and agreement by the group

as a whole. The papers submitted by the participants at the documentation centres meeting indicated four topics for discussion using the open-space method:

1. electronic libraries
2. promotion activities
3. networking in countries
4. evaluation of the use of WHO documentation.

Over the course of the meeting, the group members identified their successes and obstacles in these areas and made recommendations on future action. The participants discussed these and agreed on final recommendations, organized under thematic headings, in a plenary session.

Electronic libraries

All centres had automated systems and Web access. The need to ensure access by people in rural areas (in Iceland and Wales, for example) had in many cases led to electronic networking within countries. Common practice was to have bibliographic tools such as MEDLINE on the network, but documents were still delivered in hard copies as well as electronically. Control over the access to the electronic databases was rather less personal than in other forms of bibliographic service. It was difficult to find out how customers use the information obtained electronically. On the national level, information needed to be consolidated, with one key access point in each country to obtain health information. A standardized form would enable libraries to develop and maintain a consistency of approach.

Obstacles in this area included a lack of information infrastructure (insufficient hardware and software resources). WHO could play an important role in promoting links between documentation centres and moves towards realizing the goal of electronic libraries, both by maximizing its electronic distribution of documentation (although not publications) and encouraging development in the network.

Promotional activities

Documentation centres in the CCEE and NIS had scored particular successes in promoting the use of WHO documentation. Users in these countries showed increasing interest in receiving WHO information, and establishing feedback mechanisms. WHO literature, particularly on communicable diseases and environmental health, was widely disseminated. Documentation centres in the Russian Federation and Slovakia had published information on WHO documentation and their own activities in national newsletters for health professionals. The use of the Internet to publicize documentation and activities was particularly well developed in Azerbaijan.

Networking in countries

Documentation centres in the CCEE and NIS also provided impressive examples of success in networking within their countries. The centre in Bosnia and Herzegovina provided extensive translation services, and distributed printed information throughout all the former Yugoslavia. It had distribution networks at individual and institutional levels and was about to introduce an electronic network. The information centre for the central Asian republics was leading subregional activities such as the creation and sharing of databases, the creation of national drug formularies based on WHO data and written in local languages, and the dissemination of information to health professionals.

In addition, documentation centres were influencing the activities of United Nations agencies. The centre in Hungary was coordinating the consideration of a health information strategy, and cooperation at the subregional level. The Romanian centre disseminated information and linked people in networks.

Further, UNAIDS was developing an electronic network for library professionals and journalists, with special provision of information and contacts for World AIDS Day, producing inventories of HIV/AIDS information centres, increasing the number of UNAIDS information support centres and, with the World Bank, funding increased Internet connectivity in the European Region. The aim was to evaluate and replicate or adapt this work in other regions.

Evaluation of use of WHO documentation

The documentation centres did considerable work to evaluate the use of the documentation provided by WHO. For example, in Sweden, 50 users received WHO material through electronic mail and 90% of items were delivered within 24 hours of request. The centre in Croatia promoted WHO materials through a regular bulletin on new items; 20% of recipients used WHO documentation regularly. This core membership was being further encouraged.

One of the documentation centres in the United Kingdom analysed its circulation data to identify the most popular items. A high level of interest in certain WHO documents was noted; 30% of the documents circulated came from WHO. The centre in Sweden found that 80% of the WHO documents listed were never requested. Centres needed to be kept up to date on areas of interest to users. Interest was strong in clinical materials, women's health, environmental health and health promotion.

Recommendations

WHOLIS (WHO bibliographic database)

1. All WHO general documents, regardless of format (printed, electronic, etc.), should be catalogued and indexed in WHOLIS.
2. The full text should be accessible from the bibliographic record (electronic address should be included). In addition, the World Wide Web pages of technical programmes should link users through to WHOLIS and vice versa.
3. Interested documentation centres should test whether they can download bibliographic records from WHOLIS to their library systems.
4. WHOLIS should indicate books for sale and include a hypertext link to ordering information elsewhere on the WHO headquarters World Wide Web site.
5. Where possible, WHO documents should have an additional descriptor to distinguish types of material, using MeSH subheadings.

Electronic publishing and World Wide Web

6. WHO should issue as much documentation as possible in electronic format (in full text) to improve the speed and effectiveness of distribution.
7. The definitive WHO information should be clearly identified as such and distinguished from interim information.
8. The WHO Regional Office for Europe and WHO headquarters World Wide Web sites should contain good summary information for the general public.

9. WHO Web sites should be regularly updated to eliminate outdated and interim material. Older documents should be electronically archived.
10. WHO documentation centres are encouraged to establish electronic links between their home pages and the home pages, databases and electronic documentation of WHO and other United Nations agencies.
11. The staff of documentation centres in the CCEE and NIS should receive training in working with WHOLIS and using the requisite software.

Documents and document supply

12. WHO headquarters should provide a focal point for obtaining WHO documents.
13. WHO should make a larger number of documents available in Russian.
14. WHO should publish and disseminate its newsletters *Ex Libris* and *Liaison* in Russian.
15. Documentation centres should exercise their right to translate WHO publications into national languages under contract agreements with WHO.

Networking

16. WHO should encourage policy-makers to include WHO documentation centres in the health planning process where this is not already in practice.
17. WHO documentation centres should communicate with one another and/or meet regularly. The Regional Office should encourage centres to form subregional or national associations where this is useful. Documentation centre meetings could form part of other events such as the meetings of EAHIL and other professional groups. Building on the successes of the past, documentation centres, particularly those in the CCEE and NIS, should further develop their contact with other libraries in their countries.
18. WHO should establish an electronic discussion group for the WHO documentation centres network with a moderator.
19. Members of the WHO documentation centres network should form a working group to discuss specific topics, with deadlines for completing their work. The group should keep the rest of the network informed by the electronic discussion group. Ultimately, the group's decisions should be brought to the attention of the WHO Regional Director for Europe.
20. WHO documentation centres should work with other parts of the United Nations system and other national or international organizations active in their countries.
21. The activities of WHO documentation centres in the CCEE and NIS should be supported with funding and technology. This support is made necessary by the financial constraints in these countries, which prevent them from overcoming problems themselves. WHO and the documentation centres should jointly seek support from donors. The medium-term programmes of the WHO Regional Office for Europe should include a special entry about financing WHO documentation centres in the countries.
22. WHO liaison offices should use WHO documentation centres as sources of information for implementing WHO and United Nations projects in countries, where this is not already done. WHO should promulgate examples of best practice.
23. WHO documentation centres that do not belong to EAHIL should consider joining. Centres should become active participants in the EAHIL discussion list.

24. WHO and EAHIL should explore the possibilities of establishing twinning projects, training and continuing education programmes, and exchange programmes for the WHO documentation centres. The WHO documentation centres should pass on the fruits of their participation to other libraries in their countries.
25. WHO should encourage countries to support and promote the further development of the technological infrastructure to enable libraries to facilitate the electronic dissemination of information.

Evaluation

26. All WHO documentation centres should evaluate the use of WHO materials annually, reporting to WHO in February of the following year. This will help WHO to develop its policies on documentation, and WHO documentation centres to identify key areas in which more documents can be obtained. The information gained should be fed back to the Health Documentation Services programme at the Regional Office, the Division of Publishing, Language and Library Services at WHO headquarters and other relevant WHO programmes. Evaluation should include, for instance:
 - needs assessment
 - frequency of use
 - frequency of topic or subject use
 - which types of documents and publications are used
 - needs for translation into national languages
 - quality assurance measures
 - which groups are using services.
27. A first evaluation of progress on the recommendations could be made at the meeting of the documentation centres at the 1998 EAHIL Conference.

Marketing/Promotion

28. The capacity of WHO documentation centres to handle audiovisual material should be strengthened and the centres encouraged to promote the use of such material by local mass media, health promotion organizations, health educators and administrators, including policy-makers.
29. The WHO documentation centres should further collaborate with the mass media for the further dissemination of WHO information.
30. WHO and EAHIL should:
 - consult and cooperate in the preparation of their newsletters;
 - use each other's journals and events to announce, promote and cooperate on their work with the WHO documentation centres; and
 - strive to find sponsors for greater participation by people from the CCEE and NIS in EAHIL conferences and meetings.

Annex 1. Working papers

- ADMN050202/6 On the use of WHO generated information at the National Library of Health Sciences, Finland, in 1996 - a report on a survey, by Ms Päivi Pekkarinen, WHO Documentation Centre, Finland
- ADMN050202/7 Promoting the use of WHO literature in the Czech Republic, by Mr Jiri Drbalek, WHO Documentation Centre, Czech Republic
- ADMN050202/8 Impact of WHOLIST on the Internet, by Mr Arne Jakobsson, WHO Documentation Centre, Sweden
- ADMN050202/9 WHO Documentation Centre at the Kaunas Medical Academy, by Ms Meile Kretaviciene, WHO Documentation Centre, Kaunas, Lithuania
- ADMN050202/10 Central cataloging and a union catalog of the WHO documents, by Ms Stefanania Júlíusdóttir, WHO Documentation Centre, Iceland
- ADMN050202/11 Current activities of WHO Documentation Centre in Ukraine, by Professor Anatoly Uvarenko, WHO Documentation Centre, Ukraine
- ADMN050202/12 A recent achievement of the WHO documentation centre, Slovenia, by Professor Tatjana Berger, WHO Documentation Centre, Slovenia
- ADMN050202/13 Brief information on WHO documentation centre in Slovakia, by Mrs Eva Hulínová, WHO Documentation Centre, Slovakia
- ADMN050202/14 Activities of the British Medical Association Library as WHO documentation centre during 1997, by Mr Richard Jones, British Medical Association, WHO Documentation Centre, London, United Kingdom
- ADMN050202/15 One year of activities as WHO documentation centre, by Ms Maria Isabel Evangelista, WHO Documentation Centre, Portugal
- ADMN050202/16 Quelques bases pour élaborer un réseau documentaire, by Mme Yvette Gossiaux, WHO Documentation Centre, Belgium
- ADMN050202/17 Distribution of WHO documents in the Republic of Croatia, by Professor Marina Teuber, WHO Documentation Centre, Croatia
- ADMN050202/18 WHO Documentation Centre in Institute of Public Health: involvement in concerted actions, by Ms Irma Eva Csiki, WHO Documentation Centre, Romania
- ADMN050202/19 The Lithuanian Library of Medicine as WHO documentation centre, by Ms Danute Kazlauskiene, WHO Documentation Centre, Lithuania
- ADMN050202/20 Working Paper on the 197 activities and objectives of the WHO Deposit Library and Documentation Center, by Dr Peter Lepas, WHO Documentation Centre, Hungary
- ADMN050202/21 Recent achievement of National Documentation Centre, by Professor Arif Smajkic, WHO Documentation Centre, Bosnia and Herzegovina

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