



25 Oct 2023, Field visit to the very well-equipped central sterile services department (CSSD) at Zarqa Hospital, Jordan.

The WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region is at a critical juncture to capitalize on the momentum

from the COVID-19 response. Turning temporarily scaled-up capacity in countries and territories into permanent capacities, agendas and networks will strengthen health security and systems for the future.

Infection prevention and control (IPC) is an area in which the Region made substantial gains during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Region has also historically been vulnerable to the emergence and rapid transmission of disease outbreaks and pandemics due to various demographic, environmental and socioeconomic factors. Such outbreaks include Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS), avian influenza A (H5N1), cholera and dengue.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, only 50% of the Region's countries and territories (11 of 22) had established an IPC unit or programme, and just 45% (10 of 22) had developed national IPC guidelines. Since March 2020, 5 more countries have set up a dedicated IPC unit or programme (bringing the total to 16 of 22). By November 2023, 77% of the countries and territories (17 of 22) had devised IPC guidelines.

Prioritizing and sustaining these substantial gains made across most of the Region will enhance IPC implementation and preparedness for future responses. This will ultimately support health system resilience.

To guide such efforts, a 10-day training workshop was organized for national IPC focal points of the ministries of health of 8 fragile, conflict-affected and vulnerable countries: Afghanistan, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Somalia, Syria and Yemen. Fragile, conflict-affected and vulnerable countries face unique challenges such as fragmented or destroyed health infrastructure and lack of safe water, sanitation and hygiene. Strengthening IPC capacities in such settings thus requires a distinct approach.





Figure 2.1: A group of participants and organizers at the WHO EMRO training on building capacity to bridge gaps in implementation in infection prevention and control, 2024. The group is diverse, representing various countries in the Eastern Mediterranean region. The training was held in a professional setting, likely a conference room or a small hall, with a large screen in the background displaying the WHO logo and the title of the training. The participants are dressed in a mix of formal and semi-formal attire, reflecting the professional nature of the event. The group is posed for a formal group photo, with some individuals standing in the back rows and others seated in the front. The overall atmosphere appears to be one of collaboration and learning.