

10 August 2023 – While there has been progress in building laboratory capacity in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, significant challenges remain, such as a lack of national policy and strategic planning for laboratory services, insufficient funding, insufficiently trained laboratory staff, inadequate laboratory infrastructure, old and inadequately serviced equipment, a lack of essential reagents and consumables, weak biosafety and biorisk management and limited quality assurance and quality control implementation. These difficulties are exacerbated by the fact that laboratory service performance is not monitored at the national level, and laboratories are not given adequate attention and recognition in national health systems.

To address these challenges, the WHO regional public health laboratories programme is holding a meeting with key stakeholders, including directors of laboratory services in Member States, WHO collaborating centres, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, African Society for Laboratory Medicine, the US Association of Public Health Laboratories, Médecins Sans Frontières and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria.

The meeting aims to review progress, identify opportunities, and create a path for improving laboratory services in the Region.

The objectives of the meeting are to:

review progress and challenges at the regional and country level in the implementation of the regional “Strategic Framework for Strengthening Health Laboratory Services 2016–2023”.

agree on the way forward for strengthening laboratory services in the Region;

identify the core elements of the next strategy.

At the conclusion of the meeting, attendees will:

provide an update on the progress of implementation of the “Regional Strategic Framework for Strengthening Health Laboratory Services (2016–2023)”;

have identified opportunities and challenges;

developed a road map for strengthening health services in the Region;

provide an outline of the next framework for endorsement by Member States.

The meeting is an essential first step in addressing the difficulties in boosting laboratory capacity. Countries in the Region can improve universal health care delivery and boost pandemic preparation by putting in place an integrated public health laboratory infrastructure that treats numerous diseases. In the face of crises like the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 and Ebola outbreaks, the siloed approach to testing capacity and supportive health systems have shown to be ineffective and constricting. To effectively address all diagnostic system needs, it is crucial to provide optimal, integrated diagnostic networks and services.

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