



*In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful*

**Message from**  
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**WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION**  
**on the**  
**ESTABLISHMENT OF THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGIONAL**  
**OBSERVATORY FOR HUMAN RESOURCES FOR HEALTH**

I am pleased to introduce this important launch of the Regional Human Resources for Health Observatory (EMR HRH Observatory) as a permanent feature of the EMRO web site. We at the Regional Office are working closely with Member States to develop an evidence-based tool for knowledge and evidence generation. The EMR HRH Observatory is an electronic resource with up-to-date data on the health workforce dynamics, including density ratios per population and national parameters to achieve national and global health goals through a sufficient and trained number of health workers. Most importantly, it offers the opportunity for timely health system analysis pertaining to the linkage of health workforce to health care services outcomes and for sharing best practices on scaling up the health workforce throughout the Region. The primary aim of the regional observatory is to make available the latest and most comprehensive human resources for health data to all countries in the Region in order to enhance and sustain the use of evidence-based decision making and rational policy development. Using these data, Member States will be able to tackle the current challenges and constraints concerning the status of and gaps in human resources for health.

The establishment of the EMR HRH Observatory is in line with the theme of World Health Day 2006 and the priority set by WHO for the period of 2006–2015, which is

dedicated to addressing human resources for health development issues. Human resources development, as one of the core functions and building blocks of the health system, is receiving more focus at global, regional and national levels. New challenges are emerging. These include the shortage of different categories of human resources, mal-distribution in both skills mix and in geographic areas, and difficult and expensive pre-service education, production and retention. As well, effective management and development of the health workforce is disrupted by poor planning, poor coordination, migration and other problems. National health systems in all countries need to make the best of the educational institutes in this field to lead as centres of excellence and applied research.

Human resources for health are now widely recognized as the key element for achieving health targets, including those of the Millennium Development Goals and scaling up health interventions. At national level, the health workforce accounts for 2% to 8% of the total labour force and consumes more than 60% of national health care budgets in most countries. Greater capacity for informed decision-making and for monitoring the progress in health workforce development and strengthening health systems are among the key expected benefits of the regional observatory. Precisely, defining and describing human resources for health can help to identify opportunities and constraints for scaling up and improving health interventions and outcomes.

It is also widely acknowledged that an insufficient and imbalanced health workforce will continue to be a major constraint in attaining the health targets. Experience to date has highlighted the need for urgent action to scale up human resources for health, which will require coordinated action of countries and all other partners at all levels. Effective action, both urgent and sustained, requires solid information, reliable analysis and a firm knowledge base. However, data collection, analysis and research on human resources for health and technical expertise are underdeveloped, in part due to chronic underinvestment. National and regional mechanisms must be launched to rapidly build the knowledge base, which is essential for guiding, accelerating and improving action. A culture of science-based knowledge-building must, therefore, be infused into the human resources community.

It is vital that basic information and data are collected by all countries, backed by the Regional Office. Ultimately, the World Health Organization should fulfil its core responsibility for maintaining comprehensive global statistical systems – adopting standard definitions and collecting robust information on human resources. This way, appropriate strategic planning for future human resources for health can be made to provide the right number of workforce personnel with the right skills not only to meet the present health challenges but also to manage the future health needs and trends.

In the Eastern Mediterranean Region, interest in human resources development has been a priority for the past few decades. One of the major obstacles towards improving this development process at national level is the lack of reliable national data on human resources for health. Efforts have been focused on collecting data at global and regional levels. The Regional Office has supported several countries to accomplish comprehensive human resources for health mapping in 2005 as part of data published in the World Health Report 2006. However, only 14 out of the 22 countries completed this exercise. The data collected were uniform as a result of the use of unified WHO templates and tools. The collection and further use of such data in more countries and the establishment of national mechanisms for this purpose will contribute towards the regional observatory for human resources for health as part of an observatory on health system development.

Although the collection of human resources for health data is relatively developed in some countries, analysis, interpretation and presentation of such data are often very weak, leading to a dichotomy between the providers and potential users of information. Information is needed to improve the policy, planning, production and management of human resources for health. Acquiring information is not an end in itself.

The experiences in establishing observatories of health systems development, including human resources for health, in different places worldwide has shown that the observatory is an effective tool to improve information and evidence and to increase advocacy for human resources issues. The regional human resources for health observatory is therefore introduced to support country-level efforts and strategies in order to address the pressing priorities and challenges with regard to the health workforce.

I sincerely hope that the EMR HRH Observatory will be widely utilized as a reliable source for evidence generation and knowledge sharing for better governance of health systems at the country, regional and global levels.