

17 October 2023, Cairo, Egypt – Protracted conflicts, natural disasters and climate change-related disasters are significantly increasing in frequency and magnitude in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. Preparedness and international cooperation are urgently needed to protect lives and health infrastructure amid these and other emergencies.

“In 2023 alone, our Region has confronted a series of disasters, including drought in the Horn of Africa, floods in Libya, earthquakes in Syria, Morocco and Afghanistan, and escalating conflict in Sudan and the occupied Palestinian territory. While we cannot prevent these disasters or their increasing frequency, we can enhance our readiness to mitigate their impact. Member States are encouraged to collaborate on disaster risk reduction efforts,” urged Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean.

WHO plays a vital role in disaster risk reduction by aligning its Health Emergency and Disaster Risk Management Framework (Health EDRM) with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030. The Health EDRM Framework aims to ensure a comprehensive approach across all sectors to reduce health risks and consequences of emergencies.

WHO's emergency preparedness efforts span policies, preparedness strategies, health worker training, public health management, and the setting up of public health emergency operations centres (PHEOCs) for effective management of emergency response. WHO also works to ensure that emergency care systems, hospitals and health facilities are equipped to handle disasters.

In Iraq, Libya, Qatar, Tunisia and Yemen, WHO conducted assessments of the emergency care system and carried out strategic planning – work that led to the identification of priorities for action and the development of an implementation roadmap to enhance system capacities. WHO provided training in emergency care, including triage, to health workers in Egypt, Iraq and Jordan. It also delivered the basic emergency care course in Egypt, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Iraq, to improve health providers' skills in treating the acutely ill and injured.

In Syria, WHO supported the assessment and setting up of a PHEOC, and Lebanon actively worked on establishing its PHEOC to ensure effective coordination, situation analysis and rapid response in emergencies. Similar support was extended to the occupied Palestinian territory, Qatar, Somalia and Sudan to strengthen their emergency preparedness and response capacities through the establishment and enhancement of their PHEOCs.

Jordan Centre for Disease Control and Prevention and the Ministry of Health benefited from a WHO-led webinar on PHEOCs and the incident management system. In Bahrain, a training of trainers programme on simulation exercises equipped several health professionals with advanced skills in disaster preparedness, which they can now cascade to others. The programme used various types of simulation exercises to better prepare participants for realistic emergency scenarios.

WHO also supports countries and territories in risk assessment, preparedness, contingency planning, and the deployment of emergency medical teams (EMTs) for rapid

assistance. Strengthening of risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) capacities is also essential for effective sharing of health information and behaviour change.

To enhance emergency medical response in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, a regional meeting served as a platform for collaboration, knowledge-sharing and strategic planning on efforts to establish and strengthen EMTs. Furthermore, an EMT awareness workshop in Jordan facilitated collaboration among experts and practitioners to shape consensus-based priorities for action, through the EMT surge system questionnaire, driving advances in emergency medical response.

Multiple countries made significant progress in RCCE response for the cholera outbreak, ensuring effective awareness-raising and dissemination of health information. In the aftermath of February's devastating earthquake in Syria, WHO mobilized to provide a robust RCCE response, to ensure that the affected population could access vital information.

Amid the conflict in Sudan, a resilient RCCE response has emerged, with the health care community uniting to provide vital support and information to the affected population.

The WHO strategic tool for assessing risk was used to develop a comprehensive health risk profile for the United Arab Emirates. This profile offers an insightful overview of the country's health risks, enabling informed decision-making and targeted interventions to enhance public health preparedness and response. WHO provided similar support to Afghanistan, Kuwait, Morocco, Pakistan, Qatar, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen.

Amid growing risks and threats, WHO remains dedicated to safeguarding the health and well-being of the Eastern Mediterranean Region. WHO calls upon Member States and communities to work together to build resilience, reduce risks and ensure a safer future for all.

Tuesday 7th of May 2024 06:43:02 PM