

Cairo, 20 December 2021— As 2021 comes to an end, the gap in COVID-19 vaccination coverage between countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region widens alarmingly

As of 14 December 2021, over 500 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been administered in the Region, an average of 65 doses per 100 population. However, high- and upper-middle-income countries have administered about twice the amount of doses (92 to 152 doses/100 population) than low- and low-middle-income countries (39 to 79 doses/100 population).

Nine countries already reached the end of year target and fully vaccinated at least 40% of their populations. However, 6 countries remain under 10% coverage. Vaccine inequity threatens many high-risk and vulnerable populations in the Region.

After initial supply constraints earlier in the year, more doses of COVID-19 vaccines are now becoming available. “As much more vaccine has been delivered now, we need to make sure this vaccine finds its way into the arms of those who need it. This will protect them from severe disease and death and protect the health system,” said Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean.

“As we have much more experience with these vaccines now, more and more people are willing to be vaccinated, we just need to make it simpler and easier for them to receive it,” Dr Al-Mandhari added.

WHO’s Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean continues to support countries in accessing more vaccine doses and addressing delivery challenges. As of 14 December, WHO and partners helped deliver 140 million vaccine doses to 21 countries in the Region through the COVAX mechanism.

COVID-19 vaccines prevent severe disease, hospitalization, and death, even for the recently detected variants. The emergence of omicron is another reason to increase coverage, along with all the other prevention measures.

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