With more than two-thirds of all countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region directly or indirectly affected by political conflict, natural disasters and other public health threats, emergencies is high on this year’s agenda for the 65th session of the Regional Committee.

The region bears a heavy burden: Political conflict, natural disasters, and outbreaks affecting 76 million people -- more than half of all people globally in need -- including 17 million refugees. This leads to lower basic population health indicators, such as more maternal deaths than before, and less life expectancy in many places.

Current and potential hazards threatening populations in the Region include armed conflict, biological, chemical, radiological and nuclear events; vaccine-preventable and waterborne diseases such as measles and cholera; and high-threat pathogen disease such as MERS-CoV
Most concerning of all are the staggering numbers of attacks on health care. This year alone, up to 5 million people have been unable to access medical aid because their doctor has been killed, or their local health facilities attacked. 8.5 million people have also been cut off from health aid because humanitarian access has been denied to them.

WHO’s priorities for emergencies highlight three intended outcomes: country health emergency preparedness is strengthened; the emergence of high-threat infectious hazards is prevented; and health emergencies are rapidly detected and responded to.

Currently, 182 million people in seven countries are protected through early warning and surveillance systems: a key asset for health security. Since member states passed a resolution on National Action Plans for Health Security, 397 million people have been protected through the development of these plans in 13 countries.

But infectious diseases know no borders. No one in this region is protected as long as IHR obligations to notify each event are not fulfilled. Half of all populations in the region remain living in countries that are inadequately prepared to handle emergencies and disasters.

At regional and country level, WHO will ensure that people affected by health emergencies can access life-saving health services; all countries are at reduced risk of high-threat infectious hazards; all countries fill critical gaps in preparedness.
A region engaged to protect its people from the impact of health emergencies, is a region that is...