



Cairo, 11 October 2022 □ In presenting his annual report for 2021, Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, underlined how the COVID-19 pandemic has continued to exact a heavy toll, with a total of 28 million cases confirmed and more than 348 000 deaths reported across the Region by October 2022.

As the pandemic evolved, severely disrupting health services, economies and communities, we became “experts in dealing with multi-hazard emergencies” Dr Al-Mandhari said.

But the disruption brought opportunities, driving largescale investment and innovation as WHO, governments and partners used new technologies and new ways of working to control the spread of infection, distribute life-saving vaccines and keep essential health services running.

“This is a potential paradigm shift. Properly deployed, digital technology can support radical improvements in the accessibility, quality, efficiency and cost-effectiveness of health systems,” he said

Dr Al-Mandhari also drew attention to how the midterm review of the regional vision Health for All by All “brought the WHO workforce, Member States, partners and external experts together to provide a rigorous assessment of progress towards our four regional strategic priorities – expanding universal health coverage, addressing health emergencies, promoting healthier populations and making transformative changes in WHO – and towards the health-related Sustainable Development Goals.”

## **Ticking time-bomb**

In 2021, the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, Member States and partners responded to 10 large-scale humanitarian crises, 31 disease outbreaks and 27 other public health events while all the time working to strengthen health emergency preparedness across the Region.

While some progress has been made in the fight against communicable diseases, Dr Al-Mandhari warned that the Region cannot afford to let down its guard.

“Even before COVID-19 hit, our Region was behind on global communicable disease targets, and the pandemic knocked us further off track,” he said.



“Since 2020, 4.5 million additional children in the Region have not received a single dose of any routine vaccine. That is a ticking time-bomb of potential measles, diphtheria and polio outbreaks. We absolutely must find and vaccinate every zero-dose child.”

Though he also expressed concern over progress in tackling noncommunicable diseases, the cause of 70% of all deaths in the Region, Dr Al-Mandhari said he appreciated the “impressive commitment from countries with very diverse circumstances and resources.”

After covering a wide range of health-related activities, achievements and challenges, Dr Al-Mandhari concluded by expressing confidence in the ability of the Region to overcome the hurdles ahead.

“I am confident we can achieve even more in this new era – if every Member State commits, and if we harness all our energies and talents.”

“We can build strong, resilient health systems in every country. We can get life-saving vaccines to every child. We can beat the powerful vested interests that seek to profit from unhealthy

products. We can create a healthier, sustainable tomorrow. We can achieve our vision of Health for All by All.”

To read the full report, click [here](#) .

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