

## WHO launches regional nutrition strategy to help countries #beatNCDs

12 December 2019 – Malnutrition, in all its forms, is negatively impacting the health, well-being and sustainable development of people of all ages in WHO’s Eastern Mediterranean Region, particularly in those countries affected by conflict in which people are experiencing high levels of food insecurity, undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies. In the Region, nearly 20.2 million children under-5 years of age are stunted by poor nutrition, while half of adult women (50.1%) and more than two in five men (43.8%) are overweight or obese, and over 15% of children and more than half of adolescents are overweight or obese. Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), namely heart attacks and stroke, cancers, diabetes and lung disease, are cutting lives short. NCDs are now responsible for two thirds of deaths in the Region and unhealthy diet is a key contributor to this burden.

WHO is calling on governments to take action to improve nutrition, to reduce the burden of diet-related NCDs, and reduce undernutrition associated with conflict and political instability. In September 2015, the world agreed to eliminate all forms of malnutrition by 2030 when Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its related goals. Addressing malnutrition in all its forms is firmly embedded in SDG 2 – which aims to end hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture – and SDG 3 to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

Today, at the global meeting on NCDs and mental health taking place in Muscat, Oman, and attended by more than 600 participants from different sectors from all around the world, WHO is launching a regional nutrition strategy to help countries meet global nutrition-related targets, achieve food security, end all forms of malnutrition and improve nutrition throughout the life course by 2030. “With just 10 years left, countries need to leverage current momentum to improve nutrition and access to healthy diets as they continue to move through nutrition and epidemiological transitions, and suffer from a high burden of diet-related NCDs, and others experience increases in undernutrition due to conflict and political instability,” said Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean. “This strategy presents a series of recommended priority actions to address malnutrition in all its forms and accelerate progress to meet the global targets, centred around the six key areas of action of the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition for 2016–2025”.

The strategy on nutrition for the Eastern Mediterranean Region 2020–2030 aims to strengthen efforts to ensure universal access to healthy and sustainable diets and implement effective nutrition actions, in order to:

improve nutrition throughout the life-course, including for mothers, infants, children, adolescents and older people;

prevent undernutrition, overweight, obesity and diet-related NCDs; and

support and protect nutrition in emergency situations.

The strategy also recommends priority actions to transform food systems, implement taxes and improve social protection to improve nutrition through adoption of an integrated, multisectoral approach. “Transformation of food systems is critical to improving access to healthy, sustainable diets and civil society have a key role in advocating for action on nutrition, in addition to food industry actors,” said Dr Al-Mandhari.

The WHO Regional Office will work closely with countries to translate the regional strategy into national action and explore ways of working in greater coordination with other key partners and United Nations agencies, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, UNICEF and the World Food Programme, to ensure that nutrition occupies a prominent place in national development plans and that comprehensive, multisectoral support is provided to countries to improve nutrition across the Region. These efforts will also take into account the social, economic and environmental determinants of malnutrition and the impact on the most vulnerable – populations affected by conflict and emergencies, those living in extreme poverty and marginalized and excluded groups – to ensure that as nutrition improves, no one is left behind and everyone’s right to adequate food and nutrition is recognized.

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