



20 June 2022, Cairo—Today is World Refugee Day, which focuses on the right to seek safety, including safe borders, not forcing anyone back if doing so would jeopardize their life or freedom and the right to non-discriminatory, humane treatment.

As we mark World Refugee Day 2022, we remember the sacrifice and courage of millions of people who were forced by conflict or natural disasters to leave their homes and countries to safeguard their families and ensure their survival.

It is our duty to ensure that the world's 26.6 million refugees have access to essential basic services and are treated with respect and dignity.

Refugees leave everything behind, including their livelihoods and professions, and begin a new life in new places, sometimes as close as a few kilometres across the border, where their homeland remains on the horizon, a stark reminder of a home they may never see again.

Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, reminds us that "Today, the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region is still home to 59% of all refugees worldwide. It is our global responsibility to protect them, and to provide them with the essential medical services, including vaccination.

Refugees are among the most vulnerable to health emergencies and other hazards. One of the lessons learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic is that we are not safe until everyone is safe, including our most vulnerable populations. Our Region recorded the second lowest rate of COVID-19 vaccine coverage at 43%. We must do better and we must reach everyone to ensure that our vision of "Health for All by All" is achieved."

A continuum of care must be provided to all refugees, including mental health and psychosocial support. Inclusion of refugees in all aspects of public health, whether during transit or at their destinations, must be viewed as a right by all nations and not a privilege for those who can afford it.

WHO continues to pursue its goal of promoting the health and well-being of refugees and migrants in all settings and throughout every migration route, in keeping with the regional vision of Health for All by All.

As such, WHO Regional Office for Eastern Mediterranean is developing a regional strategy on refugee and migrant health based on four strategic objectives: mainstreaming refugees and migrants into national health policies, strategies and plans; responding promptly and effectively to the needs of refugees and migrants in emergencies; improving the social determinants that affect the health and well-being of refugees and migrants; and strengthening partnerships towards promoting the health of refugees and migrants.

Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari says: "We call on all parties to commemorate World Refugee Day, remembering that in our Region the plight of refugees is longstanding and the defining challenge of our time. Generations have now been brought up in camps and settlements, knowing only this life. Let us collectively take a stand and pledge to make universal health coverage a reality for everyone, citizens and refugees alike."

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