



EMPHNET
The Eastern Mediterranean
Public Health Network

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together for better health

Powered by Communities, Creating Lasting Change



2026

COMMUNITIES AT THE CENTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH ACTION: VISION AND COMMITMENT

At EMPHNET, community engagement is more than a practice; it is a core principle that shapes how we design, implement, and sustain our interventions. We believe that communities are essential partners in improving health outcomes, and that meaningful engagement is built on trust, participation, and shared responsibility.

Our vision is to foster public health systems that are responsive to community needs and driven by the voices and experiences of the people they serve. Through a commitment to equity, inclusion, and community ownership, EMPHNET works to ensure that all individuals, especially those in underserved areas and vulnerable populations, are able to access essential health services and are meaningfully engaged in decisions that shape their health and well-being.

By promoting collaborative partnerships and empowering communities to take an active role in public health action, EMPHNET seeks to create sustainable solutions that are locally relevant, culturally appropriate, and capable of strengthening resilience across the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR). This commitment to community-driven strategies is reflected in EMPHNET's collaboration with ministries of health, local organizations, and other stakeholders. It reflects our belief that lasting public health impact is achieved when communities are engaged not only as beneficiaries, but also as leaders, partners, and agents of change throughout the planning, implementation, and evaluation of health interventions.



OUR CORE OBJECTIVES FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

1

Identify community health needs through inclusive and participatory approaches that reflect local priorities.

2

Empower communities to actively participate in health system strengthening and decision-making processes.

3

Promote community-led solutions that are context-specific, sustainable, and responsive to local challenges.

4

Build trust between communities and health systems through sustained dialogue and collaboration.

5

Strengthen health literacy to enable informed health choices and behaviors.

6

Enhance equitable access to essential health services, particularly for underserved and vulnerable populations.

KEY AREAS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN PUBLIC HEALTH

Community engagement is a key driver of stronger public health systems, enabling more people-centered and context-responsive approaches to health. By fostering collaboration and shared responsibility, it ensures that public health efforts are better aligned with community needs and priorities, leading to more effective and sustainable outcomes across diverse settings. The following areas highlight how community engagement is operationalized in practice and where EMPHNET actively supports and strengthens implementation across public health systems.

Early Detection of Outbreaks and Strengthening of Surveillance Systems



Community engagement plays a key role in strengthening surveillance systems by enabling the early detection and reporting of health events at the community level. Community-Based Surveillance (CBS), including Event-Based Surveillance (EBS) approaches, relies on community participation to complement formal indicator-based systems. This integration improves the timeliness, sensitivity, and accuracy of data, supporting earlier response to public health threats and more effective disease control and prevention.

Enhancing Health Literacy and Combating Infodemics



Community engagement supports access to accurate health information, strengthens health literacy, and helps address misinformation through Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) approaches.

Reaching Marginalized and Hard-to-Reach Populations



Community engagement helps identify and reach underserved groups who often face barriers to accessing health services, contributing to more equitable and inclusive health coverage.

Risk Management and Preparedness



Engaging communities in preparedness activities builds local capacity to respond to health emergencies and strengthens resilience through awareness, planning, and participation.

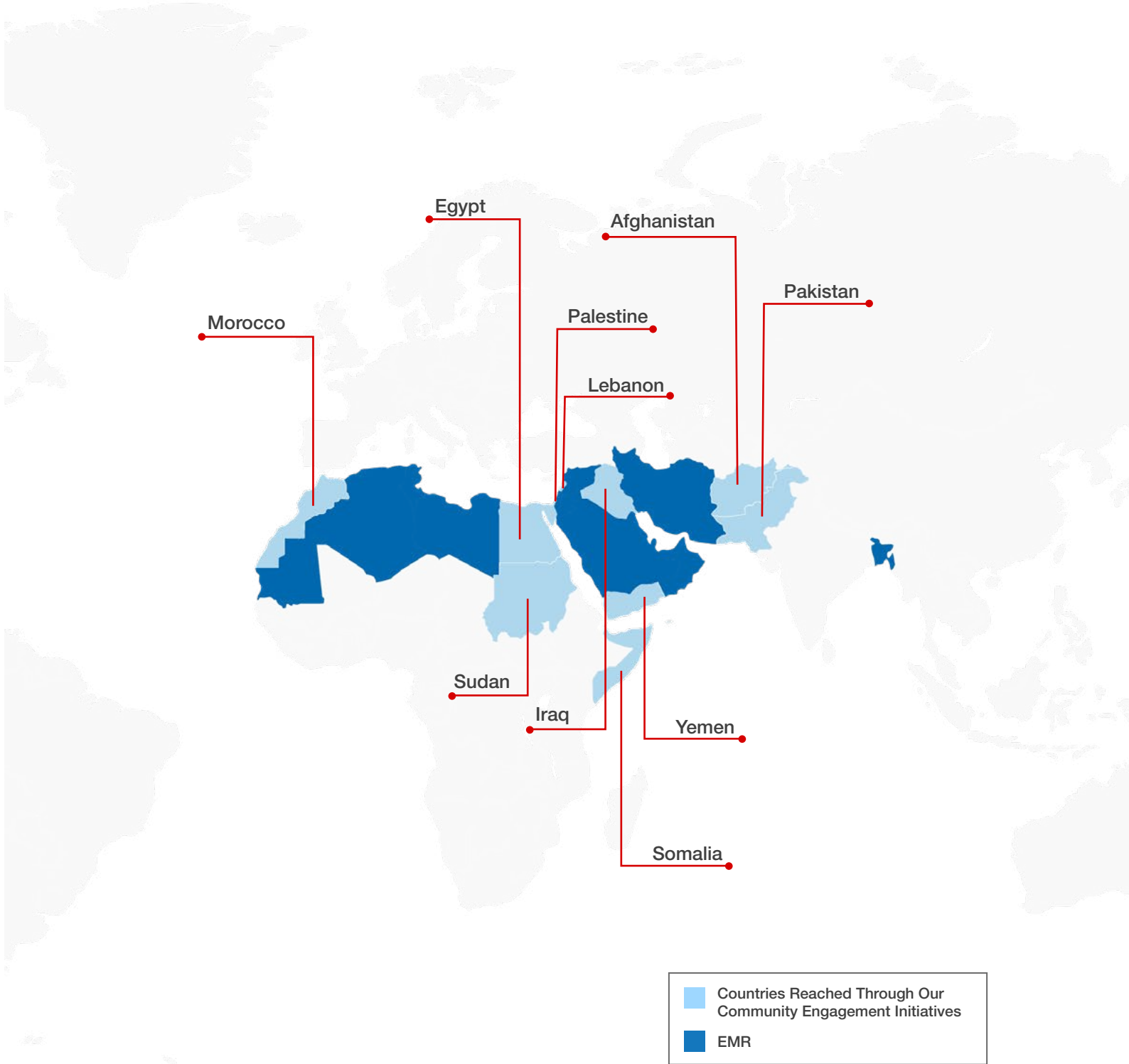
Increasing Public Health Awareness



Through education campaigns, outreach, and peer communication, community engagement improves understanding of health risks and promotes the adoption of preventive health behaviors.

OUR STRATEGIC APPROACHES AND INTERVENTIONS

To integrate community engagement as a core component of its public health work, EMPHNET implements a range of strategic interventions that foster collaboration, build trust, and empower communities to play an active role in improving health outcomes.



Appreciative Inquiry

EMPHNET adopts Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as a community engagement strategy to strengthen local ownership and participation in public health initiatives. Rather than focusing on gaps and challenges, this strategy builds on existing community strengths, successes, and resources to inspire collective action. Through participatory dialogue, shared visioning, and collaborative planning, the approach empowers communities to identify solutions, drive behavioral change, and sustain health improvements.

Country: Iraq

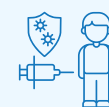


What Was Done?

In 2018, EMPHNET implemented the Appreciative Inquiry approach in Karbala and Babylon provinces to mobilize communities, strengthen stakeholder ownership, and promote behavior change to improve routine immunization coverage. The initiative established full immunization coordination committees, facilitated community visioning sessions, developed locally tailored microplans, and engaged families through coaching and public declarations to encourage timely registration of every newborn for immunization.

Capacity-building workshops also equipped health workers and community leaders with participatory facilitation skills using experiential learning, storytelling, role-playing, and other interactive methods. Regular monthly meetings were conducted to monitor progress, address challenges, and sustain community engagement throughout implementation.

Outcomes



Increased routine immunization coverage across the targeted districts.



Achieved **100%** BCG vaccination coverage following the intervention.



Increased first-dose Hexavalent vaccine coverage to **98.3%**.



Improved measles vaccination coverage to **84.4%**.



Strengthened community ownership and participation in immunization activities.



Established a sustainable, community-led model for improving immunization services through collaborative action.

Integrated Health Services

Integrating health services enables health systems to deliver more comprehensive, efficient, and people-centered care by coordinating multiple health programs and interventions. Through this approach, EMPHNET combines disease surveillance, immunization, maternal and child health, nutrition, and other public health services to maximize resources, strengthen health systems, and improve access to essential services. Throughout this process, EMPHNET integrates community engagement by actively involving communities in identifying needs, shaping interventions, and supporting implementation, ensuring that health services are relevant, accessible, and sustainable.

Country: Egypt



What Was Done?

Between 2018 and 2020, EMPHNET, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP), implemented the Polio Legacy Program in Egypt to leverage the country's existing polio eradication infrastructure in support of broader public health priorities. The project focused on sustaining Egypt's polio-free status, while strengthening routine immunization and accelerating measles and rubella elimination in high-risk areas. It identified populations with low immunization coverage and enhanced the capacity of health workers and community focal persons through targeted training on disease surveillance and immunization. Community engagement was central to implementation, with community focal persons participating in updating risk area maps, supporting surveillance for acute flaccid paralysis (AFP) and fever-and-rash cases, conducting vaccination coverage and micro-surveys, as well as facilitating outreach to underserved populations. These efforts helped ensure that surveillance and immunization activities were responsive to local contexts and effectively reached high-risk communities.

Outcomes



450+ community volunteers were trained to support surveillance and immunization efforts, including strengthening their communication skills for effective engagement with communities.



Improved understanding of how to reach underserved and high-risk populations with routine immunization services.



Identified measles immunity gaps in targeted high-risk governorates, generating evidence to inform public health interventions.



Strengthened community-based surveillance for Vaccine-Preventable Diseases (VPDs) through the active involvement of community focal persons.



Country: Pakistan

What Was Done?

The Lady Health Worker (LHW) Program in Pakistan delivers integrated primary health care services, including family planning, maternal and child health, disease prevention, and nutrition to underserved populations. Building on this community-based platform, EMPHNET supported the integration of LHWs into Pakistan’s Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI) between 2020 and 2022 to address low immunization coverage and improve access to vaccination services. LHWs were trained on vaccine administration, immunization tracking, and community mobilization, enabling them to deliver door-to-door vaccination services, identify zero-dose and under-immunized children, and engage families through health education and awareness activities.

Outcomes

-  Increased community acceptance and trust by enabling female health workers to provide services in households where cultural considerations limited access.
-  Strengthened demand generation through household visits, health education, and efforts to address vaccine hesitancy.
-  Enhanced delivery of integrated health services through LHWs’ contributions to immunization, malaria control, nutrition, and maternal and child health initiatives.

Infodemic Management

Infodemic management recognizes communities as essential partners in identifying, addressing, and preventing the spread of misinformation during health crises. By engaging community members in monitoring information gaps, sharing trusted messages, and communicating local concerns, public health efforts can strengthen trust, improve access to accurate information, and support informed health decisions.



Country: Iraq

EMR

What Was Done?

EMPHNET supported the Iraq Ministry of Health (MoH) to strengthen infodemic management capacities through the development of an infodemic management guideline and the delivery of specialized training for health professionals. The guideline provided healthcare workers with practical approaches to address vaccine misinformation, including social listening, rumor tracking, and community engagement strategies. In 2023, EMPHNET also conducted an infodemic management training in Erbil, equipping EPI managers, media staff, and health promotion officers from different regions with skills in social listening, fact-checking, developing infodemic insights, and engaging communities with accurate health information.

Outcomes



Improved the use of evidence-based approaches to address vaccine misinformation and communication challenges.



Enhanced community engagement approaches by equipping health workers with tools to address rumors, build trust, and promote informed health decisions.

What Was Done?

During the COVID-19 pandemic, EMPHNET monitored social media platforms to identify misinformation trends, understand community concerns and sentiments related to vaccines, and generate insights to guide the dissemination of accurate health information. This approach helped inform communication strategies that addressed community questions and promoted vaccine confidence.

Outcomes



Supported the development of targeted communication approaches to provide communities with accurate and trusted health information.



Strengthened community trust and informed decision-making during the pandemic.

Community Awareness and Health Promotion

Awareness initiatives empower communities with the knowledge needed to understand health risks, adopt preventive behaviors, and access available health services. By engaging communities through clear, relevant, and trusted health communication, these initiatives help address knowledge gaps, dispel misconceptions, strengthen trust, and encourage communities to take an active role in protecting and improving their health. Over the years, EMPHNET has implemented a range of community-focused awareness initiatives across EMR countries, tailored to local contexts and health priorities to strengthen community engagement and improve public health outcomes.

Involving Community Elders in Afghanistan

- Implemented a community awareness initiative to improve immunization equity and coverage in low-coverage areas affected by vaccine hesitancy and low health literacy.
- Engaged approximately **450** religious leaders and **600** community elders through orientation sessions and community dialogues to strengthen their role in promoting immunization.
- Supported community-led awareness activities, including discussions facilitated by religious scholars to address vaccine concerns from a religious perspective.
- Increased community acceptance of immunization, contributing to reduced vaccine hesitancy, higher vaccination uptake, and improved health outcomes in targeted provinces.

Empowering Female Health Workers and Lady Health Supervisors as Community Advocates for Immunization in Pakistan

- Trained Female Health Workers (FHWs) and Lady Health Supervisors (LHSs) to lead locally tailored community awareness sessions that addressed vaccine hesitancy, which improved COVID-19 and routine immunization uptake among priority groups, including young and pregnant women.
- Engaged LHWs and community leaders to develop tailored vaccine education materials and disseminate trusted information addressing vaccine concerns through local channels, including community radio and social media.

Targeting Farmers in Iraq, Pakistan, and Jordan in Combating Brucellosis

- Promoted community-based prevention practices through a One Health approach that connected communities with health and veterinary professionals to strengthen disease control efforts.
- Engaged farmers and community members as key partners in addressing brucellosis through awareness sessions on disease prevention, safe dairy handling, livestock vaccination, and early reporting of suspected cases in humans and animals.

Community-Led Health Awareness and Youth Action in Gaza

What Was Done?

- Delivered community-based health awareness activities across all governorates in Gaza through the Community Health Champion Program (ChampNet), despite the challenging humanitarian context.
- Conducted outreach sessions on priority public health issues, including nutrition, communicable and non-communicable diseases, hygiene, mental health, sexual and reproductive health, as well as emergency preparedness, among others.
- Empowered youth and adolescents to lead community initiatives promoting sexual and reproductive health awareness in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Social Developmental Forum (SDF).

Impact to Date

400

community health workers were trained.

3572

outreach activities were conducted.

255,558

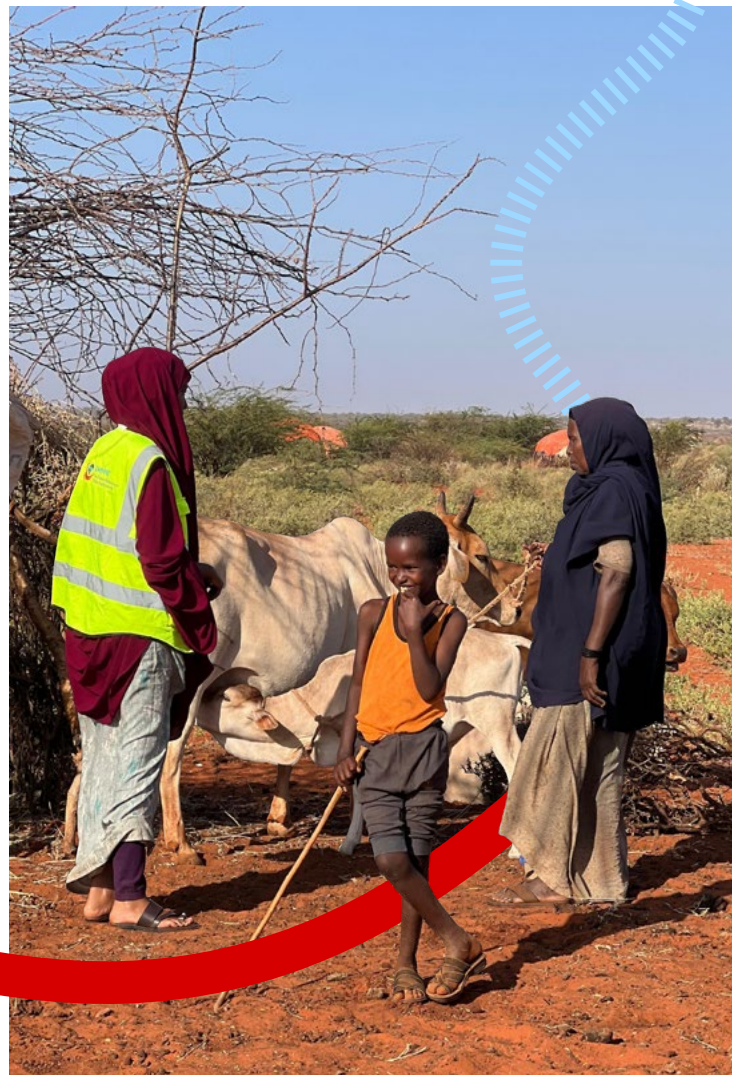
community members were reached across Gaza.

29

youth-led community initiatives on SRH were conducted, reaching adolescents, women, and men.

Community Dynamics and Contexts

Understanding community dynamics enables EMPHNET to design culturally appropriate and effective public health interventions. Through tailored listening channels, including community forums, surveys, and feedback mechanisms, EMPHNET gathers community insights to identify health beliefs, practices, external challenges, and barriers that influence health behaviors and service uptake. These insights help ensure that interventions are responsive to community needs and contribute to sustainable health outcomes.



Addressing Barriers to Immunization Access Among Nomadic Communities in Somalia

What Was Done?

- Improved access to immunization services for children under five in nomadic communities across Somalia by addressing barriers related to mobility and limited access to health services.
- Mapped nomadic settlements and migratory routes to better understand community movement patterns and support the planning of immunization activities.
- Engaged Community Mobilizers (CMs) and Community Health Volunteers (CHVs) to promote health education, mobilize communities, and support the implementation of immunization services.

Outcomes

1,218 outreach sessions were conducted across five districts, reaching **15,967** zero-dose children.

166 community dialogue sessions were conducted, engaging local leaders, mothers, and caregivers.

434 care group mothers, and **274** elderly sessions were conducted, leading to higher acceptance and uptake of health services.

Engaging Communities in Vector Control Efforts in Sudan

2024

In an urgent response to the rising threat of mosquito-borne diseases, EMPHNET, in partnership with Sudan Federal Ministry of Health (FMOH) and the Kassala State MoH has launched the V4V initiative to control mosquito populations through Larval Source Management and a unique model engaging household members to conduct indoor mosquito breeding control within their own homes.

Highlights

- **300** volunteers were trained.
- Volunteer-led indoor control guidelines were developed.
- Digital reporting tool was developed to enable real-time data collection and communication.



2026

Building on the success of the 2024 V4V initiative, EMPHNET, in collaboration with the FMOH, launched a new initiative in 2026 aimed at strengthening and institutionalizing an integrated community-health system approach to reduce mosquito breeding sites, prevent disease outbreaks, and enhance community resilience against mosquito-borne diseases in Kassala State.

Highlights

- Baseline survey was conducted on community knowledge and practices related to mosquito-borne diseases.
- **30** enumerators were trained to support field data collection.
- Evidence-based communication strategy and training package were developed.
- **30** health promoters and community volunteers trained on risk communication and community-based vector control interventions.

Community-Centered Service Delivery

Community-centered service delivery places people and their needs at the heart of public health interventions. By working closely with communities, EMPHNET improves access to essential health services, including immunization, nutrition services, and drug distribution, while promoting trust, participation, and equitable health outcomes.

Establishing and piloting of Community Health Volunteer Networks in Yemen and Sudan.

Community-centered service delivery places people and their needs at the heart of public health interventions. By working closely with communities, EMPHNET improves access to essential health services, including immunization, nutrition services, and drug distribution, while promoting trust, participation, and equitable health outcomes.

Aim: These networks were established to improve access to immunization services by identifying and reaching zero-dose and under-immunized children, addressing vaccine hesitancy and refusal, and enhancing community awareness, with the overall goal of increasing vaccination coverage.



Highlights in Sudan

- Supported the FMoH in developing culturally relevant guidelines, training materials, guidebooks, and monitoring tools tailored to the network's needs and objectives.
- **100** volunteers were trained.
- **207** health awareness and education sessions were conducted.
- **53** zero-dose children and **855** under-immunized children were identified.
- **985** zero dose and under immunized children were referred to health clinics for vaccinations.



Highlights in Yemen

- Supported Yemen's Ministry of Public Health and Population (MoPHP) in the development of a contextually and culturally relevant guidebook on vaccines and VPDs, contributing to improved awareness and increased vaccination coverage.
- **75** volunteers were trained.
- **4,718** health awareness and education sessions were conducted.
- **1,623** zero-dose children and **2,060** under-immunized children were identified.
- **2,181** zero dose and under immunized children were referred to health clinics for vaccinations.
- **941** zero-dose children and under-immunized children were vaccinated.



Delivering Essential Health Services in Gaza

What Was Done?

EMPHNET's ChampNet initiative in Gaza has been supporting communities through the delivery of a range of essential health services, including nutritional support, comprehensive medical care, and immunization-related activities.

Contributions

- Delivered health and nutrition services, including screenings, counseling, supplements, dignity and clean delivery kits, and dental check-ups for vulnerable populations.
- Conducted independent monitoring of polio vaccination campaigns in collaboration with WHO and the MoH to assess coverage, quality, and community awareness.
- Managed EMPHNET's medical point, providing maternal and child health services, primary care, NCD management, mental health support, rehabilitation services, reproductive health care, and patient referrals.

Supporting Onchocerciasis Elimination Through Drug Distribution in Yemen

2021-2023

Between 2021–2023, EMPHNET supported Yemen's MoPHP in Mass Drug Administration (MDA) of Ivermectin across eight governorates. It introduced a new strategy in 2023 shifted to a community engagement model that mobilized people to receive treatment at accredited health facilities.

- Female community volunteers were trained to conduct household outreach and referrals.
- **193,586** households were visited.
- **2.23** million ivermectin tablets were administered.
- **209,261** referral cards were issued.

2025

EMPHNET continued its support to the MoPHP and expanded community-led treatment efforts by implementing a round of MDA of Ivermectin in Taiz governorate.

- **220,000+** residents were treated (aged 5+, excluding pregnant women).
- **700** Community Drug Distributors (CDDs) were mobilized.
- **87** team leaders were mobilized
- **70%** treatment coverage was achieved.

Community-Based Surveillance

Community-Based Surveillance (CBS) is an essential approach that bridges communities with public health systems by engaging local members in the early detection and reporting of health events. As part of its community engagement efforts, EMPHNET has implemented CBS initiatives to strengthen surveillance capacities, enhance early warning mechanisms, and improve public health response at the local level.

Scaling Up CBS Across Different Countries in the EMR

Lebanon

- Expanded CBS in Lebanon from one province serving Syrian refugees in informal settlements to four provinces through the development of a CBS guideline and the delivery of comprehensive training workshops for surveillance officers, NGO coordinators, and supervisors.
- Empowering community informants to identify and report health events, while promoting awareness on the importance of seeking timely care for AFP.
- Improved AFP surveillance performance with increased Non-Polio AFP detection rates between January and December 2023 in four targeted governorates: Mount Lebanon (from 3.1 to 58), Akkar (from 0 to 4.16), Beirut (from 0 to 5.74), and Baalbek-Hermel (from 0 to 10.13), reflecting enhanced community participation and improved surveillance sensitivity.

Morocco

- Supported the integration of CBS within the broader EBS initiative in Morocco to strengthen health surveillance across regions, including Casablanca, Rabat, and Tangier
- Enhanced CBS capacity among MoH staff and community leaders through training on CBS objectives, concepts, procedures, and the effective identification and reporting of health signals.
- Strengthened coordination and sustainability of CBS implementation through the establishment of focal points, bi-weekly follow-up meetings, and monitoring visits to reporting sites to identify challenges and support improvements in surveillance practices.

Sudan

- Supported the integration of CBS with EBS in Sudan since 2016 to strengthen AFP surveillance and the detection of measles and other VPDs through active engagement of health workers and local communities.
- Enhanced timely reporting and response capacity through continuous training, supportive supervision, and sustained engagement of community informants, contributing to a stronger and more responsive surveillance system.
- Amid the ongoing conflict in Sudan, EMPHNET supported efforts to strengthen surveillance sensitivity and early warning functions, particularly in hard-to-reach and conflict-affected areas where routine health information systems have been disrupted. Through CBS, EMPHNET complemented facility-based surveillance, strengthened outbreak alert systems, and supported more timely and effective public health responses across multiple states.

Sudan Key Figures

2019-2020

218 EPI officers, state and locality surveillance officers were trained across **18** targeted states, achieving a **72%** VPD reporting rate.

2024-2025

434 sites in **11** states received supportive supervision, and **278** informants across 7 states were targeted through on-the-job coaching visits.

ON THE GROUND: VOICES FROM OUR VOLUNTEERS

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Amidst conflict and tough circumstances, my volunteering as a health promoter extended beyond delivering health education, it became a journey of discovering the true meaning of humanity. I began my journey as the Women's Health Team Leader with EMPHNET, where I led youth-driven health promotion activities and delivered interactive awareness sessions for displaced communities living in shelters and camps during a humanitarian crisis. Despite insecurity, displacement, and extremely difficult conditions, we remained committed to reaching people wherever they were, addressing urgent and sensitive topics such as hygiene, infectious disease prevention, hypothermia prevention, and menstrual hygiene management, alongside providing psychosocial support. This experience strengthened my leadership skills, enhanced my ability to work collaboratively within a team under pressure, and deepened my empathy and sense of responsibility toward vulnerable populations

Dr. Sondos Skaik, Youth volunteer in Gaza.

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Working with the community has shown me the real impact of our work. Even when communities are difficult to reach, seeing children receive their vaccines gives us motivation to continue. Every child we reach is a success

Mr. Abdirizak Mohamed, Community Volunteer in Somalia.

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When I went to the field with EMPHNET during the displacement in Gaza, I facilitated reproductive and sexual health sessions for adolescents and their families. This experience strengthened my commitment to engaging parents through respectful dialogue and providing age-appropriate education. Despite overcrowded shelters, limited privacy, cultural sensitivities, and scarce resources, building trust with families taught me resilience, empathy, and the power of youth-led initiatives. Sustaining these efforts requires engaging young people in community structures, offering continuous mentorship, and measuring impact to secure long-term support

Dr. Alaa Hassan, Youth volunteer in Gaza.

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I will continue to volunteer in mobilizing my community for immunization activities, especially during Supplemental Immunization Activities (SIAs) and Routine Immunization outreaches. It's a tough task because of our nomadic lifestyle, but it's a calling. Every child, no matter where they live, deserves the chance to be vaccinated and stay healthy

Ms. Abdia Mohamed, Mother Volunteer in Somalia.

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Being a Community Health Volunteer has given me the opportunity to serve my community and contribute to the health and well-being of children and families. One of the most rewarding experiences has been meeting families who were previously hesitant about vaccination due to limited knowledge on vaccines and health in general. Seeing them become supportive after receiving clear and accurate information and making informed decisions for the health of their children makes me proud of the work we are doing as a team to ensure that no one is left behind when it comes to vaccination and that we reach every last child

**Ms. Ebla Macalin Muxumed,
Community Volunteer in Somalia.**

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Some families refused to vaccinate their children when we first visited them. We kept going back, listening to their concerns and talking to them without pressure. When a family that had refused us finally agreed to vaccinate their child, I felt that all our efforts were worth it

**Community Health
Volunteer, Abyan, Yemen.**

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Our engagement with families showed us how trust can make a difference in addressing childhood diseases. When families trust us, they are more open to sharing their concerns, seeking advice, and learning how to protect their children. Seeing their confidence in us and how they turn to us for support has been a valuable part of this experience

**Ms. Huda Othman, Community
Investigator of Childhood
Diseases, Sudan.**

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During our visits, I was surprised by how many children we found who had never received a vaccine. Sometimes the families simply did not know, or they had heard things that made them afraid. Being from the community helped us talk to them in a way they trusted and understood

**Community Health
Volunteer, Abyan, Yemen.**

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One thing I learned is that convincing a family is only part of the job. Some parents wanted to vaccinate their children, but the health facility was too far away. When the vaccination team came with us to the community, we could see the difference immediately. The children we had been talking about for weeks could finally receive their vaccines

**Community Health
Volunteer, Abyan, Yemen.**

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Working as part of the Community Health Promoters Network in Sudan, supported by EMPHNET, has been a highly successful and valuable experience for us. This experience has demonstrated that community health promoters who understand the local context and have established relationships with community leaders can play a critical role in reaching underserved families and children. It also improved our capacity to implement and support activities that require meaningful community participation, particularly activities related to immunization and demand generation. Community dialogues and individual interviews with community leaders, key influencers, and families have also provided effective opportunities to listen to concerns, clarify misconceptions, provide accurate health information, and build trust between communities and health service providers

Mr. Hamdi Adam, Community Health Promoter, Sudan.

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WORKING TOGETHER FOR BETTER HEALTH.



EMPHNET
The Eastern Mediterranean
Public Health Network

JOIN THE CONVERSATION



GHD|EMPHNET: Working Together for Better Health

The Eastern Mediterranean Public Health Network (EMPHNET) is a regional network that focuses on strengthening public health systems in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) and beyond. EMPHNET works in partnership with ministries of health, non-government organizations, international agencies, private sector, and relevant institutions from the region and the globe to promote public health and applied epidemiology. To advance the work of EMPHNET, Global Health Development (GHD) was initiated to build coordination mechanisms with partners and collaborators. Together, GHD|EMPHNET is dedicated to serving the region by supporting efforts to promote public health policies, strategic planning, sustainable financing, resource mobilization, public health programs, and other related areas.