



# GHD|EMPHNET COVID-19 RESPONSE

June 2021

## OVERVIEW

Global Health Development | Eastern Mediterranean Public Health Network (GHD|EMPHNET) continues to work intensely at supporting countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) to strengthen their preparedness and response to the COVID-19 pandemic, building on its extensive experience and connection with the countries as well as the collaboration with sponsors and funders. This support was particularly targeted to countries that have Field Epidemiology Training Programs (FETPs) as these programs constitute a core component of the network and construct the backbone for conducting outbreak investigations and containment, ensuring sustainability of supportive action. GHD|EMPHNET through its Center of Public Health Programs and Excellence for Applied Epidemiology has been providing support to the countries mainly through its Headquarter Office in Amman, Jordan, and through its offices and teams in countries of the EMR. The support included technical and logistical support to countries to strengthen the response to COVID-19.

GHD|EMPHNET remains dedicated to assist EMR countries meet their commitment to ensure better health for their populations and continue exploring ways to leverage support to these countries in their fight against COVID-19 pandemic.

## Situation Update

COVID-19 Situation in the EMR as of 28 March 2021*	
Global	Eastern Mediterranean Region
➤ 180,492,131 cases	➤ 10,887,414 cases (6% of Global Burden)
➤ 3,916,771 deaths	➤ 215,325 deaths
➤ CFR 2.2%	➤ CFR 2%
➤ Top cumulative death toll in the US	➤ 6% of the global burden of COVID-19 deaths Top cumulative death in Iran

\*Source: World Health Organization, COVID-19 Weekly Epidemiological Update Data as received by WHO from national authorities, as of 29 June 2021, 10 am CET

## 1. Public Health Emergency Management Center (PHEMC)

Acting as the coordinating hub to support emergency preparedness and response among GHD|EMPHNET's various public health programs, PHEMC continued to provide its support to countries in the EMR by maximizing their efforts, engagement, and involvement in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. PHEMC continued to support rapid response activities, Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE), information exchange and documentation, field activities such as contact tracing and field investigation, and strengthening event-based surveillance.

Throughout the last quarter, PHEMC has supported the emergency preparedness and response efforts in the EMR through the following activities:

- Supported an "Inter-Country Workshop to Share Lessons Learned from the Undertaken Rapid Response Activities in Yemen and Afghanistan" in which both countries shared experiences related to rapid response deployment activities supported by GHD|EMPHNET during the previous quarter, in addition to best practices and lessons learned.
- As part of the preparatory work to support Morocco's border health activities, PHMEC supported "Rapid Assessment of Point of Entry Capacity (RAPC) Tool orientation session targeting public health personnel from Points of Entry (PoEs) and relevant professionals from Morocco.
- Continuous efforts are taking place such as technical preparatory meetings with CDC Global Border Health Team and along with representatives from countries to support cross-border activity between Tunisia and Libya which are delayed due to the current COVID-19 situation in both countries.
- Ongoing efforts to strengthen partnership with Public Health England to support the development and strengthening of multisector coordination in priority countries in EMR. This new collaboration builds on previous efforts after the success of the multisector coordination workshop and focuses on the learning from and opportunity COVID-19 creates to catalyze development of multisector coordination.
- Continued to provide logistical support to Afghanistan, Libya and Sudan in strengthening their integrated event-based surveillance (EBS) system.
- Ongoing efforts to conduct an assessment of the COVID-19 surveillance systems in humanitarian settings in Iraq. The assessment protocol was developed and reviewed by CDC.

Moreover, GHD|EMPHNET has been highly contributing to supporting AFRICA CDC in training and deployment of 1000 Community Health Workers (CHW) in a number of EMR countries; namely Egypt, Somalia, Sudan, and Morocco. This comes in support of the collaboration of all stakeholders to meet the African Unions' target of deploying 1 million Community Health worker by the end of 2020. Under the partnership for accelerating COVID19 testing (PACT initiative). GHD|EMPHNET worked on high levels of technical and operational coordination with National representatives from the Ministries of Health in targeted countries to conduct training of trainer workshops to selected health staff that will replicate the training to 200 CHW in each country.

The field work of the first phase of the project has been finalized in each of Egypt, Somalia, and Sudan, and the three countries expressed interest in taking to the project to scale by moving into a second phase. All proposals have been submitted jointly with support from GHD|EMPHNET and are currently pending approval from CDC Africa to proceed. Below are some updates from Morocco and Sudan.

- **Morocco**

A total number of 194 CHW from 9 regions were trained and deployed to the field. The deployment will be focused on contact tracing of COVID19 activities and will include community sensitization and awareness sessions to local communities. The CHW are supervised by the previously trained 10 supervisors and progress reports are regularly shared with the National Coordinator from the MOH in Morocco. Below are key updates from the field:

- CHW/Vs were able to conduct 7120 households' visits in Morocco. A total of 13909 suspected cases of COVID-19 were identified and referred to take the COVID-19 PCR tests. 1522 of these cases were confirmed positive COVID-19. These cases were identified through mass screening, active case finding, detection points, and self-declaration.

- The CHW/Vs conducted awareness raising activities and mainly shared information on COVID-19, symptoms, mode of transmission and other various messages which through different channels that are detailed.
- **Sudan**  
GHD|EMPHNET has discussed with the Federal Ministry of Health (FMOH) in Sudan initiating another activity under PACT, which aims to support ongoing COVID-19 surveillance efforts by deploying 10 responders (epidemiologists, IPC experts, laboratory technicians, etc). The FMOH is now working on finalizing the nominated list of experts who will be supporting this activity.

## 2. Polio Eradication and Routine Immunization

During the last quarter, the Polio and RI team has conducted the following in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Iraq:

- GHD|EMPHNET continues working with MoH to finalize the development of health promotional materials to increase population demand for vaccination and to minimize the harmful impact of the COVID-19 emergency on immunization. A progress has been achieved, as the final version of the poster has been approved by MoH and GHD|EMPHNET, and it is on its way for distribution in selected sites. There will be 23 billboard posters to be placed in selected sites in all provinces. Furthermore, a total number of 2000 large posters will be distributed to the main health centers and 4000 small posters will be distributed to private clinics, hospitals and other health units. The posters have been translated into Kurdish language.
- GHD contributed to support the smooth introduction of the COVID-19 vaccine through supporting the conduction of training workshops on the rollout of COVID-19 vaccine in two important sites: Medical city and Ibn Sina Hospitals in Baghdad. A total number of 40 health staff from the two hospitals were trained on COVID-19 vaccine types, targeted age groups, organization of vaccination sessions at the vaccination sites, vaccine storage and handling, vaccine administration, AEFI and reporting, communication with the public, registration on the electronic platform and reporting and medical waste management.

During the last quarter, GHD|EMPHNET contributed to the following COVID-19 related Activities in Afghanistan:

- The GHD country team developed the online daily reporting system in DHIS2 for COVID-19 vaccine coverage. The analytical report of the data is being shared with H.E the Minister of Public Health on a daily basis. In addition, the online dashboard which has visualization in numbers, charts, tables and graphs has been developed for COVID-19 vaccine coverage. Furthermore, the country team has developed the narrative and analytical report and shared it with the top management and media. Moreover, the issue regarding data management of COVID-19 from provincial level has been shared at the national level and appropriate feedback has been provided.
- To improve immunization frontline workers' capabilities in limiting the risk of SARS-CoV-2 transmission during vaccination sessions in Afghanistan, GHD|EMPHNET, in close coordination with MoPH Afghanistan, successfully conducted six batches of Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) training in three provinces and a total of 180 vaccinators were trained on IPC, with these six batches the 10 training batches were completed in Afghanistan.
- GHD|EMPHNET's country team supervised the process of COVID- 19 vaccine implementation.
- During the last quarter GHD|EMPHNET supported 480 supportive supervision missions in Afghanistan to strengthen routine immunization and minimize the risk of COVID-19 transmission to health workers.
- During the reported period, GHD|EMPHNET's country team visited 6 provinces. These missions were not only to provide technical support to the routine immunization but also followed up on the national emergency action plan at the provincial level that was developed during the previous quarter.

As the challenges faced by immunization programs and health systems in general the COVID-19 pandemic created, there is an urgent need to accelerate the pace of integration and coordination between different programs

to reach flexible systems capable of achieving equity in providing services and the optimal use of resources. As a response, GHD|EMPHNET supported many activities to enhance this direction, including:

- Development of a policy brief on Immunization and UHC utilizing the findings of the review conducted at the beginning of the year on the position of immunization on UHC related policies and strategies followed by consultation workshop with concerned stockholders.
- Conduction of regional workshop on” Accelerating Polio Integration within the Context of Polio End Game Strategy in Selected EMR Countries” in Amman Jordan June 27-29. GHD|EMPHNET hosted the workshop in collaboration with US CDC, WHO, UNICEF, Gavi and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Participants were from Afghanistan, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen. The workshop focused on exchanging experiences and lessons learned about building on polio capacities to address other countries’ public health priorities. Experts from the global and regional level provided updates on new strategies related to polio and immunization and the new initiative and insights on building integrated sustainable systems learning from the challenging COVID19 experience. The workshop focused on sharing experiences and best practices in different priority areas and finding potential options for mobilizing the additional resources necessary to support the implementation of the prepared action plans.
- Conduction of the regional workshop on positioning immunization as a backbone for Universal Health Coverage agenda workshop, Amman, Jordan June 30- July 1. the workshop was hosted by GHD|EMPHNET in collaboration with the support of US CDC and participation of WHO and UNICEF. Participants were from Afghanistan, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen. The workshop focused on exchanging experiences and lessons learned about building and ensuring sustainable immunization programs as an integral part of national strategies for universal health coverage, and potential options for system reform, to build synergies between immunization programs and UHC policies and strategies.

During the previous quarter, GHD announced a call for proposals for “EMR Operational Research Studies” mini-grants opportunity. The operational studies mini-grants opportunity announcement targeted researchers, Public Health Empowerment Program (PHEP) and Field Epidemiology Training Program (FETP) residents and graduates and other public health professionals in priority EMR countries. GHD call for proposals for EMR operational research studies” mini-grants opportunity aimed at improving COVID-19 pandemic response in the EMR. Out of the 61 proposals received, GHD and CDC selected 5 operational studies proposals from four countries (namely Pakistan, Egypt, Somalia, and Sudan) to receive mini-grant support to implement their proposals.

However, in previous quarters two studies were dropped out due to lack of necessary approvals from concerned authorities. This brought the total mini grants supported into 3 grants as follows:

- Assessment of personal protective equipment (PPE) related SARS-COV 2 infections among the health care workers in COVID-19 isolation wards of major hospitals in District Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, Pakistan.
- Evaluation of Multisectoral Approach for COVID-19 Pandemic in Sudan: Structure, Management processes, Outcome, and Lesson learnt.
- Evaluating the Impact of COVID-19 in Somalia: Perspective from Health Professionals and Displaced Populations.

During the previous quarter, all initial reports were received for the abovementioned projects, reviewed by GHD technical team, and feedback was sent to all Principal Investigators (PIs) to finalize their reports and submit final drafts during this quarter. Hence, final reports were received and approved during this quarter.

GHD and CDC provided technical support to link the selected recipients / (PIs) with CDC and GHD technical focal persons to work closely together on the methodology as well as follow-up during implementation of the projects and finally ensure dissemination of results.

Finally, as part of GHD’s contribution to the CDC funded EMR Demand assessment, four monitoring field visits were conducted in June to Afghanistan, Jordan, Lebanon, and Pakistan, with the aim to monitor, control and maintain the quality of field data collection conducted by 3 implementing partners in these countries (ORCA in Afghanistan, CRD in Jordan and Lebanon and Gallup in Pakistan). During these visits, extensive monitoring of the quality of data collection activities were conducted for this region-wide study.

Furthermore, and as part of the same regional demand assessment, GHD finalized a social listening activity that focused on assessing the social and behavioral determinants of COVID-19 under-vaccination, with the focus on the role of rumors and misinformation on vaccine hesitancy.

### 3. Research and Policy

The research and policy team has successfully supported the following publications:

Authors	Title	Citation
Ali S, Khalid S, Afridi M, Akhtar S, Khader YS, Akhtar H.	Notes From the Field: The Combined Effects of Tocilizumab and Remdesivir in a Patient With Severe COVID-19 and Cytokine Release Syndrome	JMIR Public Health Surveill. 2021 May 19;7(5):e27609. doi: 10.2196/27609.
Akhtar H, Akhtar S, Rahman FU, Afridi M, Khalid S, Ali S, Akhtar N, Khader YS, Ahmad H, Khan MM.	An Overview of the Treatment Options Used for the Management of COVID-19 in Pakistan: Retrospective Observational Study	JMIR Public Health Surveill. 2021 May 27;7(5):e28594. doi: 10.2196/28594.
Akhtar H, Afridi M, Akhtar S, Ahmad H, Ali S, Khalid S, Awan SM, Jahangiri S, Khader YS.	Pakistan's Response to COVID-19: Overcoming National and International Hypes to Fight the Pandemic	JMIR Public Health Surveill. 2021 May 19;7(5):e28517. doi: 10.2196/28517.
Fahim M, Ghonim H, Roshdy W, Naguib A, Elguindy N, Abdelfatah M, Hassany M, Mohsen A, Afifi A, Eid A	Coinfection With SARS-CoV-2 and Influenza A(H1N1) in a Patient Seen at an Influenza-like Illness Surveillance Site in Egypt: Case Report	JMIR Public Health Surveill 2021;7(4):e27433 DOI: 10.2196/27433
Abu El Sood H; Ali Abu Kamer S; Kamel R; Magdy H; Osman F; Fahim M; Mohsen A; Abdelfatah M; Hassany M; Afifi S; Eid A	The Impact of Implementing the Egypt Pandemic Preparedness Plan for Acute Respiratory Infections in Combating the Early Stage of the COVID-19 Pandemic, February-July 2020: Viewpoint	JMIR Public Health Surveill 2021;7(5):e27412 DOI: 10.2196/27412

### 4. Knowledge Exchange and Networking

The knowledge Exchange and Networking Unit led the activity of the EMPHNET COVID-19 operational Research Symposium, which was attended by over 200 public health professionals from across the region and beyond. The symposium saw the presentation of 16 abstracts over two days of three-hour sessions and hosted two keynote speakers. Two videos were also presented during the symposium, one of which highlighted the work of FETPs during the COVID-19 pandemic. This Symposium was held under the Center of Excellence for Applied Epidemiology and was held on April 7 and 8. 2021.

The Knowledge Exchange and Networking Unit also published Issue Six of the FETP Newsletter in May 2021, in which highlighted the work of FETPs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, the Knowledge Exchange and Networking Unit launched the 'Voices from the Field Writing Contest' for FETPs and Public Health Professionals in the EMR. This contest invites public health professionals as well as FETP residents and graduates to publish entries that reflect their work in the field. Submission was closed on June 20. A total of 31 entries were received from region. These entries are currently being evaluated and the results will be published on July 11.

The knowledge Exchange and Networking Unit is also finalizing production on a video highlighting the work of FETPs during the pandemic, which is expected to be released early July.

## 5. Workforce Capacity

During the last quarter, and in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Workforce Capacity Unit has conducted the Regional Rapid Response Team Management workshop. The workshop was held in Amman, Jordan, over four days between June 7 and 10, 2021, focusing on countries that are affected by or are at high risk of health emergencies and still suffering or recovering from COVID-19. In the workshop, 26 Rapid Response Teams (RRTs) managers from several countries in the EMR: Afghanistan, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Pakistan, and Sudan, were trained on how to develop their country RRT SOPs.

Also, the Workforce Capacity unit has been supporting mobilization of FETP trainees and graduates through regional FETP networks to support COVID-19 response activities nationally (and regionally as allowable and appropriate). So far, investigation to mobilize FETP Residents to South Sinai has been supported to investigate suspected COVID-19 clusters outbreak. Additionally, support was given to Iraq to control the spread of COVID-19 through contact tracing initiatives This has been achieved through the training of health workers at the district level on the basic principle of contact tracing using updated WHO guidelines on the use of PPE, and by collecting data information of people using Kobocollect toolbox who were in contact with COVID -19 by doing a Field visit by the district teams as well as a supervisory visit from the public health department.

Finally, During the period March to June, 290 users were enrolled in the three online courses ("Risk Communication", "Infection Prevention and Control", and "Rapid Response Teams for COVID-19") from different countries around the world. The below charts show the number of enrollees on each of these online courses.

