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**ANNOUNCING THE  
SEVENTH EMPHNET  
REGIONAL  
CONFERENCE  
NOVEMBER  
14 - 18, 2021**

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## Feature Story

### Regional Workshops Accelerate Support for Strengthening Polio Eradication and Routine Immunization

*Countries initiate plans to accelerate integration between polio and routine immunization programs and other public health programs.*

In collaboration with The Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) partners: the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the World Health Organization (WHO), and UNICEF, GHD|EMPHNET held a regional workshop for Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI) managers, primary health care (PHC) directors, and polio/VPDs surveillance officers, from **Afghanistan, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen**. The workshop was held in Amman, Jordan, between June 27 and 29, 2021.

Each country presented its experience with integration, focusing on successes, challenges, and lessons learned: **Afghanistan** on reaching hard-to-reach areas, **Egypt** on transference of polio program assets to support measles/rubella elimination and strengthening routine immunization, **Iraq** on community-based initiatives to enhance demand for vaccination, **Jordan** on field epidemiology support to enhancing EPI functions, **Somalia** on surveillance systems in emergencies, **Sudan** on community-based Surveillance, and **Yemen** on integrated health campaigns and outreach services. Countries also discussed on where integration is needed: vaccination campaigns, routine immunization, community-based initiatives, reaching hard-to-reach and mobile populations, surveillance, and outbreak preparedness and response.

By the end of the workshop, each country drafted an action plan for specific activities to facilitate integration, focusing on activities that are achievable with existing resources. Currently, a focal point from each country is leading and following up on the implementation of their respective plan, with the

The Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) launched the Polio Eradication Strategy 2022–2026 to address emerging challenges. The strategy sets two goals: (1) In endemic countries, interrupt wild poliovirus transmission and (2) In non-endemic countries, stop circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus (cVDPV) transmission and prevent outbreaks. As with the previous strategy, under these two goals, integration remains a priority in service delivery between immunization programs and other public health programs to increase immunity against polio and other vaccine preventable diseases (VPDs), to respond to outbreaks, and to accelerate transition of polio-essential functions for the benefit of national health systems.

GPEI and GHD|EMPHNET providing technical support when needed.

*Countries initiate plans to link immunization to national Universal Health Coverage (UHC) policies and strategies.*

To support the development of action plans for positioning immunization in UHC through PHC service delivery in selected countries from the region, GHD|EMPHNET held a regional workshop between June 30 and July 1 in Amman for EPI managers and PHC directors from **Afghanistan, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen**. The workshop was organized in collaboration with the WHO and UNICEF.

Some of the participating countries shared their experiences on the positioning of immunization in UHC policies and strategies: **Afghanistan** focused on the role of the private sector, **Egypt** on enhancing health information systems, **Iraq** on multi-sectoral influence, and **Sudan** on policy brief development for immunization and UHC. Participants discussed reviews conducted on immunization positioning in UHC-related policies and strategies that were developed by and for **Afghanistan, Iraq, and Sudan**; and recommended developing national plans and identifying needed technical support. By the end of the workshop, all participating countries drafted specific priority activities to support accelerating immunization positioning within their national UHC policies and strategies.

The third target of the Sustainable Development Goal (3) “**Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages**” links immunization to achieving UHC with its emphasis on the provision of safe, effective, quality, and affordable essential vaccines for all. As one of the main services provided at the level of PHC, a cornerstone towards achieving UHC, immunization is also linked to UHC under the Immunization Agenda’s 2030 First Strategic Priority. In the context of the region where there are several health problems attributed to immunization issues, protection of health by immunization remains a priority that must be made available to all under UHC.



## Spotlight on Public Health Experts

### Prof. Ra'eda Al-Qutob

*Over 30 years of experience in the field with contributions to public health teaching and research at the national and regional levels, with focus on maternal and child health.*

*A holder of an MPH and a DrPH in Maternal and Child Health from the Johns Hopkins University, School of Hygiene and Public Health.*

*A physician certified by the Jordan Medical Board in Community Medicine/ Maternal and Child Health.*

Since the late 1980s, Prof. Al-Qutob has been teaching public health at the School of Medicine/ University of Jordan where she was the first woman to be appointed Dean of the School of Medicine. Over the course of her academic career, she supervised MPH and PhD theses, written scientific book chapters, and authored and contributed to research papers that have been published in international journals.

In her home country, Prof. Al-Qutob served in key advisory and administrative positions: advisor to HM Queen Rania Al Abdulla on public health and children, secretary general of the National Council for Family Affairs, and secretary general of the Higher Population Council. Currently, she is a senator in the Jordanian Senate.

Prof. Al-Qutob led several development projects which have had an important impact on women's health in Jordan. Based on her Middle East Award study "Assessment of the Quality of Reproductive Health Care Services in Irbid governorate, Jordan," for which she won the **IDRC/TDR (WHO) Gender and Tropical Diseases Award**, Prof. Al-Qutob led a Regional Reproductive Health Intervention project between 1997-2001 through a grant by the Ford Foundation. The project established a Women's Health Clinic based in the Comprehensive Health Center of Ein Al Basha, an area in the outskirts of Amman and home to lower income communities. This project paved the way for the introduction of women's health services at the central Ministry of Health level as independent from maternal health services.



Regionally and internationally, Prof. Al-Qutob had a prominent role as an elected chair of the Women's Advisory Panel to the Islamic Development Bank Group, a specialized institution supporting the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Representing countries from the Arab World, she also was elected as the vice chair of the Women's Consultative Committee (WCC) of the OIC in which the committee contributed to the development of a gender-based policy that is now considered for adoption by the ministries of social development in OIC member countries.

Prof. Al-Qutob led many national and regional initiatives and bodies as the founding member and vice chair of the Regional Middle East and North Africa Health Policy Forum and a former shareholder and board member of the National Health Care Accreditation Council. She also managed and advised on public health projects as the director of UNICEF's Jordan Country Program Office and as a regional advisor for the World Health Organization on reproductive health and family planning.

With GHD|EMPHNET, Prof. Al-Qutob has been an invaluable technical resource as a member of the International Academy of Public Health (IAPH) advisory board and the technical steering committees of projects focused on maternal, child, and women's health. She is also a member of EMPHNET's Jordan Public Health Forum.



## Public Health Issue in Focus

### Strengthening Regional Rapid Response Management in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

*GHD|EMPHNET is building on its decade-long investment in Rapid Response Teams (RRTs) training which yielded 1200 emergency rapid responders from several countries across the region who contributed to strengthening public health emergency response efforts to many outbreaks in their countries and served as a major cornerstone in rolling out rapid response capacity building to the sub-national level.*

Rapid Response Teams (RRT) Management is an important base for establishing and maintaining an international, regional, and national RRT program because it sets the foundation for the development of sustainable and effective RRTs that are trained and equipped to be rapidly deployed to a public health emergency. Such deployments can be most effective if coordinated within a larger emergency response framework.

At a very crucial time where countries around the world are still facing the COVID-19 pandemic, a regional workshop on RRT management was held focusing on countries that are affected by or are at high risk of public health emergencies and humanitarian crises. Held by GHD|EMPHNET with support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), this regional workshop is a step to further enable managers in developing and deploying RRTs in the region and in coordinating cross-border response to emergencies through effective and efficient RRT frameworks. The workshop's participants were 26 RRT managers from several countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: **Afghanistan, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Pakistan, and Sudan**. The workshop was held in Amman, Jordan, between June 7 and 10, 2021.

The trainees were professionals in decision-making positions relevant to public health emergency response at the national, and subnational levels, such as emergency managers, coordinators, RRT managers, managers of Emergency Operation Centers, and Field Epidemiology Training Programs graduates or directors.

Sessions focused on equipping participants with the knowledge and tools necessary to establish, build, manage, deploy, and evaluate RRTs. The workshop covered the seven main components essential to effective RRT development and management: **Staffing and Rostering, Administrative Considerations, Training, Activation and Pre-Deployment, Deployment, and Post-Deployment and Monitoring, Evaluation and Improvement Planning.**

A session was dedicated to introducing cross-border considerations related to the types of activities that RRTs may encounter at the borders, especially the information that needs to be shared with neighboring countries and needed processes to support RRT activities beyond national borders. Supported by facilitators, each country drafted and presented SOPs that covered the seven main RRT Management components.



## Community Health Workers Support COVID-19 Response in North Africa

The Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention launched the Partnership to Accelerate COVID-19 Testing (PACT) initiative to maximize use of resources for testing, tracing, and treating COVID-19. GHD|EMPHNET supported this initiative in community contract tracing by training and deploying community health workers (CHWs) in northern Africa: Egypt, Morocco, Somalia, and Sudan. Since August 2020, GHD|EMPHNET collaborated with the African Field Epidemiology Network (AFENET) in the identification, orientation, and deployment of CHWs who assisted in contact tracing and raising community awareness.

In these countries and until May of 2021, **200 CHWs** were trained and upon deployment were able to reach a considerable number of households: **68,281 in Egypt, 935 in Morocco, 20,432 in Somalia, and 83,037 in Sudan**. For these, they identified suspected cases and made the needed referrals for PCR testing. In different communal settings from schools to health facilities, cafes, and restaurants, CHWs also conducted awareness-raising campaigns to share information on COVID 19, its symptoms, its mode of transmission, prevention methods, and the importance of the vaccines.

Based on the observed success of these CHW deployments, the PACT initiative will be extended for an additional three months in support of contact tracing and behavioral change in new areas in each of the aforementioned countries.





## News Updates

### Neglected Tropical Diseases

## Mass Drug Administration Conducted to Eliminate Onchocerciasis in Yemen

Throughout June of 2021, GHD|EMPHNET supported the Yemen Ministry of Public Health and Population (MoPHP) in conducting one round of Mass Drug Administration (MDA) campaign to eliminate Onchocerciasis in 29 high endemic districts across 8 governorates. In preparation for the MDA campaign, a training for trainers was conducted for the campaigns' team leaders and drug distributors from the eight targeted governorates: Al Hudaydah, Al Mahwit, Dhamar, Hajjah, Ibb, Raymah, Sana'a, and Taiz. Following this ToT, these trainers trained staff working at the district level who comprised the team directly involved in the MDA campaign.



A neglected tropical disease, Onchocerciasis, commonly known as river blindness, is caused by the parasitic worm *Onchocerca volvulus*. It is transmitted through repeated bites by blackflies of the genus *Simulium*. The disease affects the eyes and the skin, sometimes leading to visual impairment. The blackfly spreads in tropical places in 31 countries in Africa and Asia.



The Ministry of Public health and Population is working with the World Health Organization with support from the World Bank and END Fund to eliminate Onchocerciasis in Yemen by implementing wide drug distribution activities in line with known strategies and policies.



## News Updates

### Polio Eradication and Routine Immunization

## Assessment Explores Improving Immunization Services in Afghanistan Through Public-Private Engagement

Through a for-profit, civil society health service delivery model operating in many provinces across Afghanistan, the Ministry of Public Health is working with Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance under the Partnership with the Private-for-Profit Health Service Providers (PPHSP) project to strengthen routine immunization (RI) in hard-to-reach provinces: Farah, Nuristan, Paktya, and Urozgan. Implemented since 2009, the PPHSP is an example of the engagement of private health providers in RI delivery. This engagement is prioritized in both the Global Vaccine Action Plan's strategic objectives and in Afghanistan's two-year strategic plan for RI strengthening.

To explore means of enhancing public-private sector engagement to improve immunization coverage in hard-to-reach populations, GHD|EMPHNET supported the Ministry in conducting a rapid assessment of the PPHSP.

Containing a set of recommendations, the assessment was carried out in 40 public and private health facilities in Paktya province where conflict makes it more accessible to private rather than public providers. The study combined qualitative and quantitative research methods and used a multi-faceted and participatory method to see perspectives from all stakeholders. The assessed areas were:

1. **Monitoring, capacity building and quality improvement** through key informant interviews at the national and provincial levels.
2. **Health facility status, Facility Health**

**Information System (HMIS), Expanded Program on Immunization cold chain, supplies, supervision, and health workers knowledge assessment** through observation and interviews with the health service providers.

3. **Health service providers satisfaction and patient satisfaction** through exit interviews.

The findings of the assessment were shared in a dissemination meeting that took place in Kabul on May 26, 2021. Over 30 participants attended from the Ministry, the World Health Organization, UNICEF, and other public health stakeholders.

Several recommendations were presented based on this assessment: the need to build capacities of both private and public providers, to strengthen project evaluation and monitoring, and to enhance coordination mechanisms between provincial and national levels. The need for strengthened community role was also one of the recommendations, citing the role of influencers, community elders, mass media, and community health workers in creating and increasing demand. Specific points also related to logistics and equipment.

These recommendations were approved, and it was decided the engagement of private health providers be expanded to other provinces particularly to the insecure ones based on a standard implementation guide to ensure success.



## Egypt's Ministry of Health and Population Works to Strengthen Immunization Services

### *Trainers Ready to Support Goals of Expanded Program on Immunization*

Supported by GHD|EMPHNET, the Ministry of Health and Population is strengthening the capacity of the Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI) workforce with focus on areas that serve of the program's goals of eliminating measles and maintaining the country's polio-free status.

Two training of trainers' (ToT) workshops were conducted in Cairo: one between June 10 and 12, 2021, followed by another between June 13 and 15.

These ToT workshops targeted around 60 EPI staff from managers to officers and trainers and surveillance officers, in addition to other relevant public health professionals.

Training topics covered complications of measles and other Vaccine Preventable Diseases (VPDs), vaccine facts and myths, safety of vaccines, valid and false contraindications, behavioral strategies for immunization uptake, community involvement in immunization, interpersonal communication skills, and immunization strategies for healthcare providers. Other topics covered vaccine storage and handling as well as vaccine administration.

These trainers will now return to their posts and replicate this training to district officers and frontline immunization staff.

### *Microsurveys Conducted in Egypt to Identify Pockets of Low Immunization*

Supported by GHD|EMPHNET, the Egypt Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP) is utilizing the Polio Eradication Program assets to reach targets for measles/rubella elimination and strengthen the routine immunization (RI) program. This is a collaboration that began in 2017 initially targeting Aswan, Matrouh, and Red Sea governorates and expands today to others densely populated with hard-to-reach communities: Cairo, Giza, Qalubia, and Sharkia.

Over 500 Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI) and surveillance officers at district levels and community focal persons were trained on detection and notification of on Acute Flaccid Paralysis (AFP), and fever and rash cases in the four targeted governorates. Training on health education was also provided.

Upon completing training, health staff started conducting microsurveys for children under the age of five, living in areas surrounding reported cases of AFP, and fever and rash. Around 300 micro surveys were conducted over a four-month period from January until April 2021 to identify low immunity pockets with low vaccination coverage and collect relevant data regarding the characteristics of unvaccinated individuals or groups.

Based on the survey results, an action plan is developed and is being implemented to catch up defaulters and unimmunized children to achieve higher coverage rates by performing door-to-door vaccination activities "mopping up," conducting population awareness activities, and developing and updating health facility catchment area micro plans.



## News Updates

### Operational Research

## Countries from the Region Publish Studies on COVID-19 Response and Other Topics

GHD|EMPHNET worked with several countries from the region to support the development and publication of studies that have been recently published in international journals.

1. Pakistan's Response to COVID-19: Overcoming National and International Hypes to Fight the Pandemic
2. Performance of the Neonatal Tetanus Surveillance System (NTSS) in Sana'a, Yemen: Evaluation Study
3. Treatment Options Used for Management of COVID-19 in Pakistan: Timeline, Reality, and Challenges
4. Coinfection With SARS-CoV-2 and Influenza A(H1N1) in a Patient Seen at an Influenza-like Illness Surveillance Site in Egypt: Case Report
5. 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
6. Drug Resistant Typhoid Fever Among Children in Karachi: Case-Control Study
7. Cutaneous Leishmaniasis Outbreak Investigation in Hajjah Governorate, Yemen, in 2018: Case-Control Study
8. Morbidity and Mortality Associated with Typhoid Fever Among Hospitalized Patients in Hyderabad District, Pakistan, 2017-2018: Retrospective Record Review

## Participatory Approach Adopted in Developing Family Planning Intervention for Refugees in Jordan

In partnership with the Jordan University of Science and Technology, GHD|EMPHNET is collaborating with Jordan's Ministry of Health in developing an intervention to encourage the use of family planning services by offering couples' counseling and passing on information using digital technologies. This intervention targets vulnerable communities, including Syrian refugees, in three major governorates - Irbid, Mafraq, and Ramtha. A participatory approach is being adopted in developing this intervention, where co-design workshops have been conducted for both family planning clients and healthcare providers to explore their opinions about the content and delivery modes of the intervention. The first workshop was conducted at Balaama Health Center in Mafraq on April 18, 2021, and the second was conducted at Sarih Health Center in Irbid on April 22, 2021.

Information obtained from these workshops will be used to feed the development of the intervention, ensuring that it is contextualized, evidence-based, and culturally sensitive.

## Studies on Tuberculosis and HIV in Jordan are being Conducted to Increase Public Understanding and Improve Surveillance System

With funding from the International Organization for Migration, GHD|EMPHNET is collaborating with Jordan's Ministry of Health to conduct three operational research studies with the aim of increasing the understanding of tuberculosis (TB) and HIV/AIDS burden in the country and to improve the efficiency of the current surveillance system. The studies target the Amman, Irbid, Mafraq, and Zarqa governorates. The three studies will be in the form of a **Knowledge, Attitude and, Practice (KAP) survey** among general population, refugees, migrants, healthcare providers, and people living with HIV; a **client satisfaction survey**; a **comprehensive assessment of KAP and behavior** regarding TB among refugees, migrants, the host community, patients, and health care providers; and an **assessment of the TB, HIV/AIDS, and sexually transmitted disease surveillance system**.

As part of the project's activities, an orientation training workshop was conducted on April 23, 2021, for research assistants and others involved in data collection for the project.

## News Updates

### With the Partners



### Joining Efforts to Advance Global Field Epidemiology

Alongside global and regional entities, GHD|EMPHNET participated in the launching meeting of the Strategic Leadership Group (SLG) which took place on April 13, 2021. Launched by the Training Programs in Epidemiology and Public Health Interventions Network (TEPHINET) in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO), the SLG is an initiative that will provide high-level commitment and drive progress toward global applied epidemiology capacity by offering action-oriented guidance and recommendations.



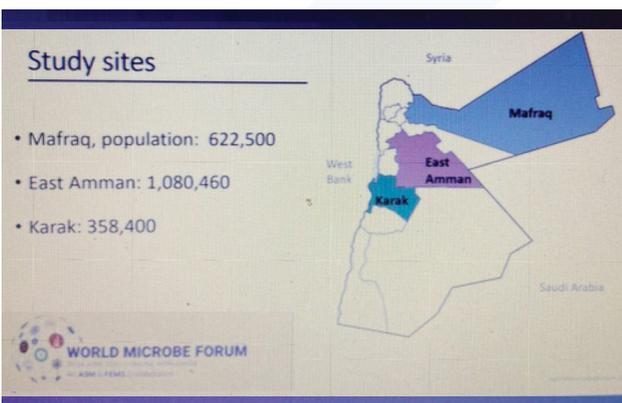
### Welcoming Iraq's Health Attaché in Amman

On June 21, 2021, GHD|EMPHNET's Executive Director Dr. Mohannad Al Nsour welcomed at GHD|EMPHNET's headquarters the Health Attaché at the Iraqi Embassy Dr. Ali Mahmoud in Amman to discuss the latest COVID-19 developments and cooperation with Iraq's Ministry of Health in logistic, technical, and administrative areas.



### Participating in GOARN's 29th Steering Committee Meeting

GHD|EMPHNET represented by its Executive Director Dr. Mohannad Al Nsour participated in the 29th GOARN Steering Committee meeting held between June 21 and 22, 2021. Discussions focused on harnessing GOARN for global preparedness and response by strengthening GOARN strategy with focus strategic partner engagement.



### Participating in the World Microbe Forum

GHD|EMPHNET participated in the World Microbe Forum on June 23, 2021, organized by the American Society of Microbiology (ASM) and the Federation of European Microbiological Societies (FEMS). GHD|EMPHNET's oral presentation "Evaluating the Impact of Enhanced Laboratory-Based Surveillance of Animal and Human Brucellosis in Jordan," covered preliminary results of a research study it is currently conducting to enhance brucellosis surveillance in Jordan.