Global Health Development

Ethical Challenges in Climate-Health Research in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

Project Information

- **Department: Research and Policy**
- **Unit: CEAE**

OBJECTIVE

The primary objective of this project was to identify and prioritize the most pressing ethical challenges in climate-health research in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) through expert consensus, thereby supporting the development of a regional ethical framework.

REGIONS OF WORK

This project was implemented across the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR).

BENEFICIARIES

The project benefits researchers, ethics committees, ministries of health, and funding agencies in the EMR, and the communities most affected by climate change.

PROJECT PHASES

The project involved three phases:

Phase I – Literature review and Round 1 of the Delphi process: qualitative input from 45 experts, producing eight thematic domains.
Phase II – Round 2 of the Delphi process, in which 81 experts rated the importance, urgency, or level of agreement for each item using a five-point Likert scale.

Phase III – Calculating composite scores to rank regional ethical priorities, validating consensus credibility, and producing the close-out report with recommendations for a regional ethical framework.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The 'Ethical Challenges in Climate-Health Research in the Eastern Mediterranean Region' is a one-year project (November 2024 – November 2025) that aimed to identify and prioritize the most pressing ethical challenges in climate-health research in the region through expert consensus, supporting the development of a regional ethical framework that ensures the voices of those most affected by climate change are adequately represented in the research agenda. The project applied a two-round Delphi process with multidisciplinary experts from across the EMR. Round 1 collected qualitative input from 45 experts, producing eight thematic domains: climate-health impacts, vulnerable populations, ethical research conduct, data ethics and governance, funding and priority-setting, community engagement, researcher neutrality versus advocacy, and cross-cutting ethical considerations. Round 2 engaged 81 experts who rated each item on a five-point Likert scale, and composite scores were calculated to rank regional ethical priorities. A validation step ensured consensus credibility and consistency across responses. The findings and recommendations are presented in the project close-out report.

Project Start and End Date	**November 2024 to November 2025**
Funded by	**World Health Organization (WHO)**
Collaborators	**Multidisciplinary experts in public health, climate science, and bioethics from across the EMR (45 in Round 1; 81 in Round 2)**

Currently . . .

Climate change represents the most significant global health threat of the twenty-first century, and its effects are particularly severe in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR). The region's arid climate, political instability, and humanitarian crises amplify climate-sensitive health risks such as heat stress, water scarcity, food insecurity, and population displacement.

Despite these challenges, research on the intersection between climate and health in the EMR remains limited, and there is a lack of ethical guidance to ensure that such research is equitable, culturally appropriate, and aligned with the rights and needs of vulnerable populations. The study found strong regional consensus that heat- and water-related risks are the top climate-health challenges, and that data protection, transparency, fairness, and justice are the most urgent ethical priorities.

What's next . . .

The findings call for a comprehensive regional ethical framework for climate-health research. Recommended next steps include establishing regional ethical guidelines under the leadership of WHO EMRO, national research councils, and ethics committees; building data-governance systems based on consent-based data use; securing sustainable, transparent, and locally led research funding; institutionalizing community engagement; supporting evidence-based advocacy and researcher protection; and creating a regional ethics network or observatory to share case studies and best practices.

GHD|EMPHNET Information: Global Health Development (GHD) and Eastern Mediterranean Public Health Network (EMPHNET) works at achieving its mission by responding to public health needs with deliberate efforts that allow for health promotion and disease prevention.

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