



# QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



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EMPHNET continues to expand regional and global partnerships and collaborations for better public health

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# Feature

## Field Epidemiology Training Programs Expand in Gulf Countries



FETP Board of Directors Meeting in Amman, Jordan 2023

### Oman and Qatar Launch Their First FETPs

### Saudi Arabia's FETP Continues to Contribute to National Health System

As a regional public health network, EMPHNET works with its partners to advance field epidemiology learning in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) and adjacent regions. EMPHNET was established in 2009 to support existing Field Epidemiology Training Programs (FETPs) and to promote the establishment of new FETPs of various modalities in countries where they did not exist.

Relying on its strategy, the network continues to harness the power of FETPs to enhance the capacities of applied epidemiology in the EMR. The numbers show impressive success. New programs were introduced in 15 countries from which hundreds of FETP individuals have graduated and become part of their national public health workforce. These public health workers have been recognized for their contributions in various areas including outbreak investigation and response, disease surveillance, systems evaluation, scientific research, and much more. Their role gained special prominence during COVID-19.

In the last few years, EMPHNET's collaborations with ministries of health and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention culminated the expansion of FETPs in the EMR, more noticeably in the gulf region. Two countries-Oman and Qatar- introduced the program, while Saudi Arabia's FETP, established over thirty years ago, continued to grow in scope and impact.

*Field Epidemiology Training Programs (FETPs)<sup>1</sup> offer public health workers learning and practice in the science of applied epidemiology, a branch of epidemiology that is interventional in nature. FETP residents **learn by doing** how to promptly detect, prevent, and respond to public health emergencies of all scales. FETPs are field oriented, in-service training programs and exist in three levels, known as modalities: the advanced, the intermediate, and the basic. In over 70 countries, FETPs are operated by Ministries of Health with support from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.*



From left to right: Oman, Qatar, Saudi FETPs in field activities



<sup>1</sup> FETPs were launched by the US Centers for Disease Control to model their Epidemic Intelligence Service training program in countries outside the United States.



## Oman<sup>2</sup>

In 2022, Oman launched its FETP in the basic modality, the Public Health Empowerment Program-Basic Field Epidemiology (PHEP-BFE). PHEP-BFE was the ideal modality to establish in the country based on what the Ministry of Health identified as a priority need to enhance and expand the surveillance competencies of frontline workers. This short-term program focuses on the fundamentals of epidemiology and fits the need.



Oman's PHEP-BFE cohort-1 participants during their first workshop 2022

*PHEP-BFE is a three-month in-service training program where participants learn and practice fundamental skills needed to perform efficiently in local surveillance systems, including the use of case definitions, disease detection, and reporting, summarization of data using simple tables and graphs, case investigation, outbreak investigation and response, surveillance monitoring and evaluation, data analysis and interpretation for decision-making, and basics of leadership and management.*

Targeting health inspectors from all over the country as the first line of defense, the first cohort was launched in August 2022. Twenty-three participants successfully completed the program.

The evaluation of Oman's FETP revealed how it had a positive outcome and how it carries a positive potential. This prompted partners to plan for the implementation of more cohorts of the program. As such, a second cohort was launched in June 2023. This time, participants were selected from one province, Dhufar, inspired by the one health approach by welcoming participants from public and animal health sectors. This cohort is expected to contribute to strengthened preparedness for Dhufar's busy autumn season, when it receives thousands of visitors from across the globe.

ANNOUNCEMENT

### Mark your Calendars for EMPHNET's Eighth Regional Conference in October 2023

We are pleased to announce that the Eighth EMPHNET Regional Conference will be held between October 22 and 25, 2023, in Amman, Jordan. With the central theme of the conference being "Advancing Public Health Preparedness and Response: Challenges, Opportunities, and Ways Forward".

[Read More](#)

<sup>2</sup> Countries are arranged alphabetically.

## Qatar

The Qatar Ministry of Public Health established its PHEP-BEF in May 2022 in collaboration with EMPHNET and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This program was established to accelerate the Ministry’s progress toward sustaining a national public health workforce capable of preventing and responding to various public health emergencies. In the context of Qatar, several necessitate the need for a sustainable FETP. The country regularly welcomes a sizable number of expats from over 100 countries, it hosts mass gatherings, and its high NCD burden could make citizens more susceptible to the threat of communicable diseases.

The first cohort was launched, comprising 23 participants who work at frontlines of various departments within the Ministry of Public Health.



*Qatar PHEP-BFE Trainees during their first field activity 2022*

## Saudia Arabia

The first FETP to be established in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, the Saudi FETP, has made important contributions to the national public health system over the last thirty years. The program helped enhance training and education within preventive programs for communicable and non-communicable diseases. The graduates of the program are awarded the Diploma in Field Epidemiology, a postgraduate diploma awarded by King Saud University College of Medicine in Riyadh.

The program is renowned for providing critical epidemiological support during Hajj season, one of the areas of focus of this program. The program has been assisting in the development of a number of national public health programs while working jointly with the Public Health Authority of Saudi Arabia. So far, Saudi Arabia’s FETP launched 31 cohorts in the advanced modality and 1 in the intermediate.



*Saudi FETP residents support health authorities during Hajj 2022*

EMPHNET has been supporting residents and graduates of Saudi’s FETP. Over many years, these participated in training workshops, conferences, symposiums, and other learning activities designed and implemented by EMPHNET.

In the coming years and in reliance on a strategic focus, EMPHNET will build on the success of collaborations with Gulf countries in terms of FETP empowerment not only to continue its support for existing programs but also to expand the FETP community in more countries in this part of the EMR.

# In Focus

## From the World Health Assembly Side Events

### Insights Shared by EMPHNET Executive Director and GOARN SCOM Deputy Chair Dr. Mohannad Al Nsour

As a long-serving member in the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN), EMPHNET has been providing support in outbreak detection, investigation, and response efforts to partners and stakeholders in a range of countries affected by emergencies, more pronouncedly during COVID-19. And to share perspectives from EMPHNET's experience in this regard, Dr. Al Nsour—who serves as the deputy chair of the GOARN's SCOM—recently participated in discussions forming part of events held on the sidelines of the 76<sup>th</sup> World Health Assembly. Dr. Al Nsour conversed with global health leaders about a range of topics that included emergency preparedness and response, resource mobilization, and health financing.



*Dr. Al Nsour speaking to global health leaders on the urgent need for forming a Global Health Emergency Corps*

The first side event was a meeting among global health leaders to discuss the pressing need for a coordinated global response to health emergencies by forming a Global Health Emergency Corps (GHEC) to be led by the WHO. The speakers emphasized the crucial role of a coordinated global response to health emergencies, especially in responding to the need for a global health emergency corps which can be brought about through enhanced regional and global solidarity mechanisms. They underscored the need for the establishment of a well-coordinated and highly skilled global health emergency workforce is of paramount importance.

There, Dr. Al Nsour brought attention to the role of GOARN in supporting the GHEC as a global health emergency workforce in both strategy and practice. He conveyed GOARN's support for the GHEC and emphasized the need for collaboration with member states and partners to shape its future.

*The GHEC is a WHO-led initiative that aims to fill critical gaps in global health emergency response by fostering regional and global solidarity. It seeks to provide countries with access to high-quality surge teams and experts, as well as a platform for national health emergency leaders to collaborate and coordinate responses to global health threats. The GHEC's mission aligns with the collective commitment to global health security and serving vulnerable populations.*



At a high-level roundtable, also held on the sidelines of the WHA, and on the role of **Disease Surveillance Networks in Pandemic Preparedness**, participants engaged in an insightful conversation on the roles of stakeholders in outbreak detection, the creation of streamlined and collaborative responses to emerging data trends, and the coordination among disease surveillance networks like IPSN and others. They highlighted ways to move from integration to impact in disease surveillance networks. They deliberated on strategies to strengthen collaboration and improve the coordinated response of networks like IPSN to emerging trends and discoveries in data. The objective was to enhance the overall effectiveness of these networks in safeguarding public health.



*Participants at the Roundtable “Disease Surveillance Networks in Pandemic Preparedness”*

Dr. Al Nsour played a significant role in this discussion. He highlighted crucial issues related to disease surveillance and the importance of leveraging tools like Go.Data, an innovative outbreak investigation tool developed by the WHO. His insights shed light on the challenges and gaps that still exist in the field of disease surveillance.

Dr. Al Nsour’s participation in high-level engagements was an opportunity to present regional experiences from the volatile context of the EMR and to pave the way for further discussions and opportunities for collaborations among health leaders from across the globe.

# The Experts

## Professor Zohair A. Sebai



*Prof. Sebai is an authority on community medicine in Saudi Arabia, his home country, where he spent over fifty years teaching in the field, advancing community medicine education, and using his articulate abilities to communicate health knowledge to peers and the larger public.*

In his own words, he says, “My goal in life is to be productive and help others be productive.” His long experience attests to the truth of this statement.

He played a key role in the advancement of community medicine in Saudi Arabia. For over twenty years, Prof. Sebai served as a professor of medicine at various universities in Saudi Arabia, including the two oldest, King Saud University and Taif University. He led the foundation of the first department of community medicine at King Saud University and was the founding dean of Abha College of Medicine at King Khalid University.

Apart from academia early on in his career, he assumed executive roles at national entities. He was the director of planning, budgeting, and programming at the Saudi Ministry of Health. He presided over the Saudi Health Promotion Society and the Saudi Society of Family and Community Medicine. He also served at the Consultative Shoura Council for twelve years. At a regional level, he was the president of the Arab Board for Family and Community Medicine and the Arab Development Institute.

Prof. Sebai is also active on the international scene as a member of the International Health Society, the American Public Health Association, the Canadian Public Health Association, the International Epidemiology Association, and the International

Society for Quality Assurance in Health Care. He is an MRCGP member of the Royal College of General Practitioners, a FFPHM Fellow of the Faculty of Public Health medicine, and a MJHUSS lifetime member of Johns Hopkins University Society of Scholars.

Prof. Sebai has over fifty publications centered around Saudi Arabia, mainly epidemiological studies as well as papers on medical education. He authored and co-authored over twenty books, several of which are textbooks and others that use creative storytelling to convey health messages to the public. He presented the longest-running TV show on health Medicine and Life for fifteen years, along with other TV shows, and radio programs, while also writing columns in renowned newspapers.

Today, he contributes his vast knowledge and experience in posts within several entities, including being the co-chair of the Advisory Board at the International Academy of Public Health, EMPHNET’s academic arm.

Prof. Sebai holds an MBBCH from Egypt’s Ain Shams University, a Diploma in Tropical Medicine and Hygiene from Germany’s Bernard Nocht Institute for Tropical Medicine, and an MPH and a Dr.PH from Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health.





Health messaging activity against tobacco in Iraq 2022

## Tobacco Control Campaign Reaches 50 Million in Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Palestine

In 2022, EMPHNET joined forces with the US CDC and Vital Strategies in a regional campaign **Against Tobacco and COVID-19** to raise awareness on the harms of smoking, especially during the pandemic. Together, they worked with ministries of health, NGOs, and academic institutes in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Palestine to develop and disseminate country-tailored and culturally appropriate mass media risk messages to educate the masses about the harms of tobacco and to promote smoking cessation, especially to reduce morbidity and mortality from the corona virus. This health promotion campaign relied on data-driven risk messaging which responds to the region’s need for organized tobacco control efforts.

Based on quantitative and qualitative assessments, the outcome and impact of this wide-ranging campaign has been evaluated. The campaign proved to be a great success, reaching 50 million people across Egypt, Jordan, Iraq and Palestine in the summer and fall of 2022. Key findings of this assessment revealed that the campaign reached an estimated **50 million smokers and nonsmokers** across four countries through TV, digital media, radio, and out-of-home advertising, such as billboards and posters. This estimate included approximately 29 million people in Egypt, 25 million in Iraq, three million in Jordan, and more than 2.5 million in Palestine. Many people across Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Palestine asked for support with quitting smoking.

## Yemen Invests in Community-based Surveillance to Combat Polio Outbreaks

To harness the force of the community in combatting poliovirus outbreaks in war-torn Yemen, the Yemen Ministry of Public Health and Population (MOPH) and EMPHNET launched the Polio Village Volunteers (PVV) project in 2017. Under this collaboration, volunteers from high-risk districts of the country were trained to boost community-based surveillance on acute flaccid paralysis (AFP) and other vaccine-preventable diseases (VPDs) in Yemen.



Training of volunteers on AFP surveillance Sana'a

An evaluation of the project showed that the non-polio AFP rate in children  $\leq 15$  years and the Adequacy Rate have increased in Yemeni districts where the PVVs were trained. To build on this success, EMPHNET is supporting the MOPH to expand this training to an additional 30 priority districts in Yemen of low-performing and high-risk areas.



## NCDs Capacity Assessment and Planning (N-CAP) Process Implemented in Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Pakistan

The Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) Capacity Assessment and Planning (N-CAP) Process was recently developed as a collaborative effort made by the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the International Association of National Public Health Institutes (IANPHI), and the Eastern Mediterranean Public Health Network (EMPHNET).

This process is designed to assist ministries of health and other governmental and nongovernmental stakeholders to assess, prioritize, and plan their efforts to enhance national capacities set for addressing NCDs and to improve population health. The N-CAP serves to encourage multisectoral stakeholder collaboration towards aligning NCD prevention efforts and achieving better impactful progress through partnerships and collaborations.



SWOT analysis training on NCDs Capacity Assessment and Planning Process

Following the successful pilot of the N-CAP in Jordan and Iraq, EMPHNET is currently implementing this effort in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), Pakistan, which is a region with three divisions and ten districts, and a total population of four million most of whom are settled in urban areas.

## Morocco Enhances Surveillance of Acute Flaccid Paralysis

Since 2018, EMPHNET has supported Morocco's efforts toward improvement of Acute Flaccid Paralysis (AFP) surveillance indicators by implementing different interventions since 2018.

With support from EMPHNET, the Ministry of Health was able to significantly improve AFP surveillance indicators, where the non-polio AFP rate (NPAFP) per 100000 population below the age of 15 years reached the regional standard of 2.1 in 2019 in comparison with 1.3 and 0.73 in 2017 and 2015, respectively.

The Ministry, with continued support from EMPHNET, is reinforcing these efforts, especially in the aftermath of the pandemic, and in light of risks of importation from neighboring countries experiencing new cases of polioviruses.

Three-day cascade refresher training workshops on AFP surveillance are planned to be conducted for 400 regional surveillance focal staff in 12 regions. Performance in this endeavor will be gauged by the number of training workshops delivered, whereas the improvement in the NPAFP rate will be the outcome indicator.



Refresher training on AFP surveillance

# With Partners



*During GOARN's visit to EMPHNET's HQ in Amman 2023*

## Regional Meeting Explores Country Experience in Developing Universal Health Coverage Essential Package of Health Services

One way to accelerate progress in achieving UHC is to design and implement an essential package of health services (EPHS). To guide countries in the development and implementation of EPHS as part of their UHC reforms, a multi-year project was launched by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation under the name Disease Control Priorities (DCP). DCP periodically publishes evidence packages under the same name used as starting point for country-specific analysis of priority UHC packages. DCP3, the third edition of these packages, proposes the essential UHC package (EUHC) which are 218 interventions designed for lower middle-income countries, and a subset of 108 interventions, called highest-priority package (HPP) proposed for low-income countries where the fiscal space is more constrained.

To initiate discussions on the EMR country experiences in using DCP3 packages in the development of the EPHS, EMPHNET, WHO-EMRO, and DCP3 co-hosted a high-level regional meeting in Amman in April 2023 that brought together representatives of the countries that are already using the DCP3 , as well as other countries with plans for similar implementation. Country experiences were shared by representatives from Afghanistan, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen. Discussions highlighted the progress made by countries from the region on UHC, challenges in the transition from package design to implementation, and the sustainable reinforcement of technical assistance in these areas.



*Speakers at a high-level regional UHC meeting in Amman*

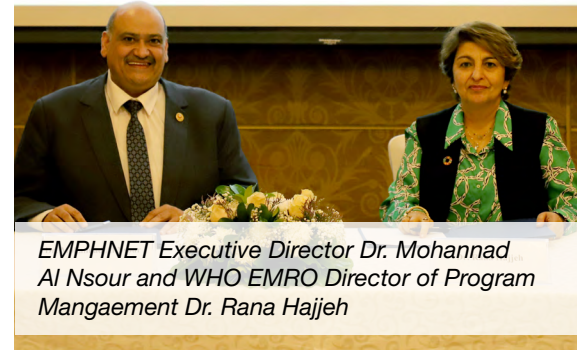


## MOU Signed between EMPHNET and WHO EMRO

On April 30, 2023, EMPHNET and the WHO-EMRO signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to strengthen their collaboration in the field of public health.

The signing ceremony, which took place in Amman, Jordan, was attended by Dr. Mohannad Al-Nsour, Executive Director of EMPHNET, and Dr. Rana Hajjeh, Director of Program Management, along with other officials and stakeholders.

Under this MoU, EMPHNET and WHO-EMRO will work together to support public health programs in the areas of communicable diseases, non-communicable diseases, health protection and promotion, and emergency management. The two entities will collaborate to strengthen both the capacity of public health workforce and institutional development. The organizations will also collaborate on research and development projects by sharing expertise and resources in support of addressing the health needs of the region.



## EMPHNET and WHO-EMRO Discuss Collaborative Strategies to Address NCDs

EMPHNET hosted a meeting with Dr. Asmus Hammerich, Director of UHC/NCDs and Mental Health, and Dr. Lamia Mahmoud, Regional Adviser for NCD Prevention at the WHO-EMRO on May 2, 2023. The focus of the meeting was to explore ways to better align the efforts of WHO and EMPHNET in responding to the rising burden of NCDs in the EMR.

The discussions centered around the importance of prevention, early detection, and management of NCDs. In particular, the meeting highlighted the need to focus on behavioral risk factors such as tobacco use, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, and harmful alcohol use. The participants also emphasized the importance of strengthening health systems in the region to better respond to the NCD burden.





## WHO's Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network Meets in Jordan to Discuss Strategy

The Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN) met to discuss the implementation of its recently launched [strategy 2022-2026](#). The workshop was attended by representatives of the network's members from the different regions and was co-hosted in Jordan between May 8 and 12, 2023 by EMPHNET and the WHO.

These events were held as a result of collective work and efforts made between GOARN, WHO headquarters, WHO Regional Office, WHO country office in Jordan, and EMPHNET.

This workshop is the first of many next steps that the strategy development process will aid. Through this workshop, GOARN and its partners advocated for increased opportunities for partners to engage in delivering key activities for the priorities of this strategy, including collaboration and co-ownership of projects at national, regional, and global levels. The implementation plan and documentation of the resources required will support and guide partners, stakeholders, GOARN, its Operational Support Team, and its Steering Committee in operations, development, and oversight.



GOARN members and guests outside EMPHNET's headquarters in Amman

Following this workshop, GOARN's Steering Committee, which had a core role in developing and monitoring the Strategy for GOARN held its 33rd meeting to focus on how to transition from the discussions at the strategy workshop to decision making and execution by GOARN partners.

Presenting EMPHNET's experience in implementing the blended FETP model at the Asia Pacific Consortium of Veterinary Epidemiology (APCOVE) Workshop on Networking and Future Directions

April 2023



Meeting with the Director General of Iraq's Public Health Directorate to discuss future activities with a focus on training supported by the International Academy of Public Health

April 2023

EMPHNET attended the US CDC's Epidemic Intelligence Service conference where FETP representatives from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia participated with poster presentations

April 2023

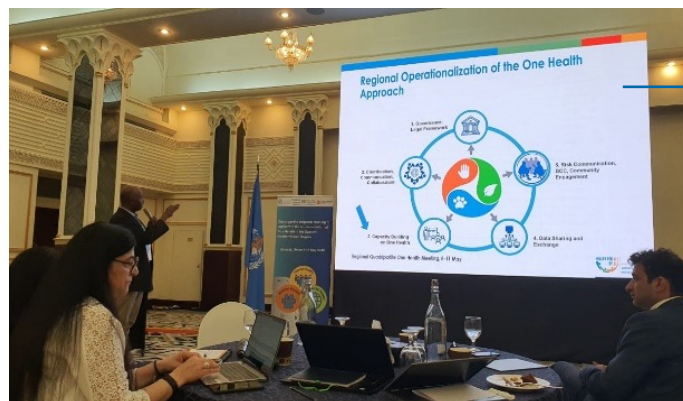


Welcoming stakeholders at a consultative dialogue meeting in Jordan on occupational safety and health (OSH) hosted by EMPHNET to evaluate the current state of OSH and outline areas for improvement

May 2023

Experts from the region and WHO EMRO, the IHR Office, health ministries and other stakeholders took part in these missions, which were conducted by the respective health ministries

June 2023<sup>3</sup>



Presenting EMPHNET's experience at the Quadripartite Regional Meeting to Accelerate the Implementation of One Health in the EMR in Oman

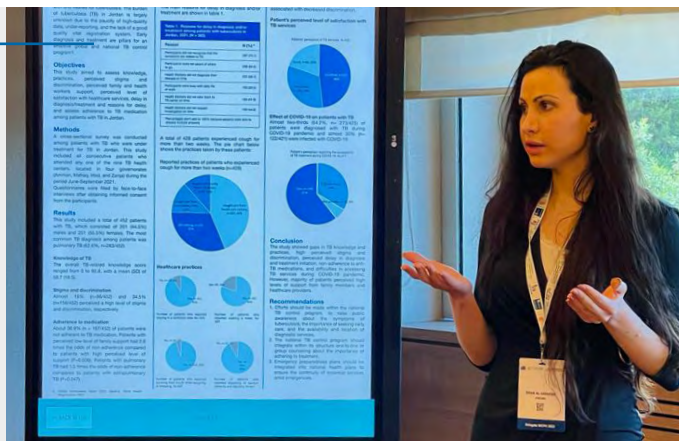
May 2023

<sup>3</sup> Photo is from the mission in Yemen



Presenting a study at the World Congress on Public Health which recommended evidence-based results for interventions to improve the National TB Program and KAP among care providers, patients with TB, and local communities and to develop surveillance, healthcare providers' capacities, and screening, diagnosis, and management of HIV/AIDS

May 2023



Participating in the African Epidemic Services Workshop alongside partners

May 2023

### Interested in partnering with EMPHNET?

To connect with our Partnership and Resource Mobilization Team, you can send an email to Rawan Araj at [raraj@globalhealthdev.org](mailto:raraj@globalhealthdev.org) to introduce your organization, tell us more about your areas of expertise, regions you are present in, and tell us how you would like to partner with us.

#### GHDJEMPHNET: 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, GHDJEMPHNET 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.

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