

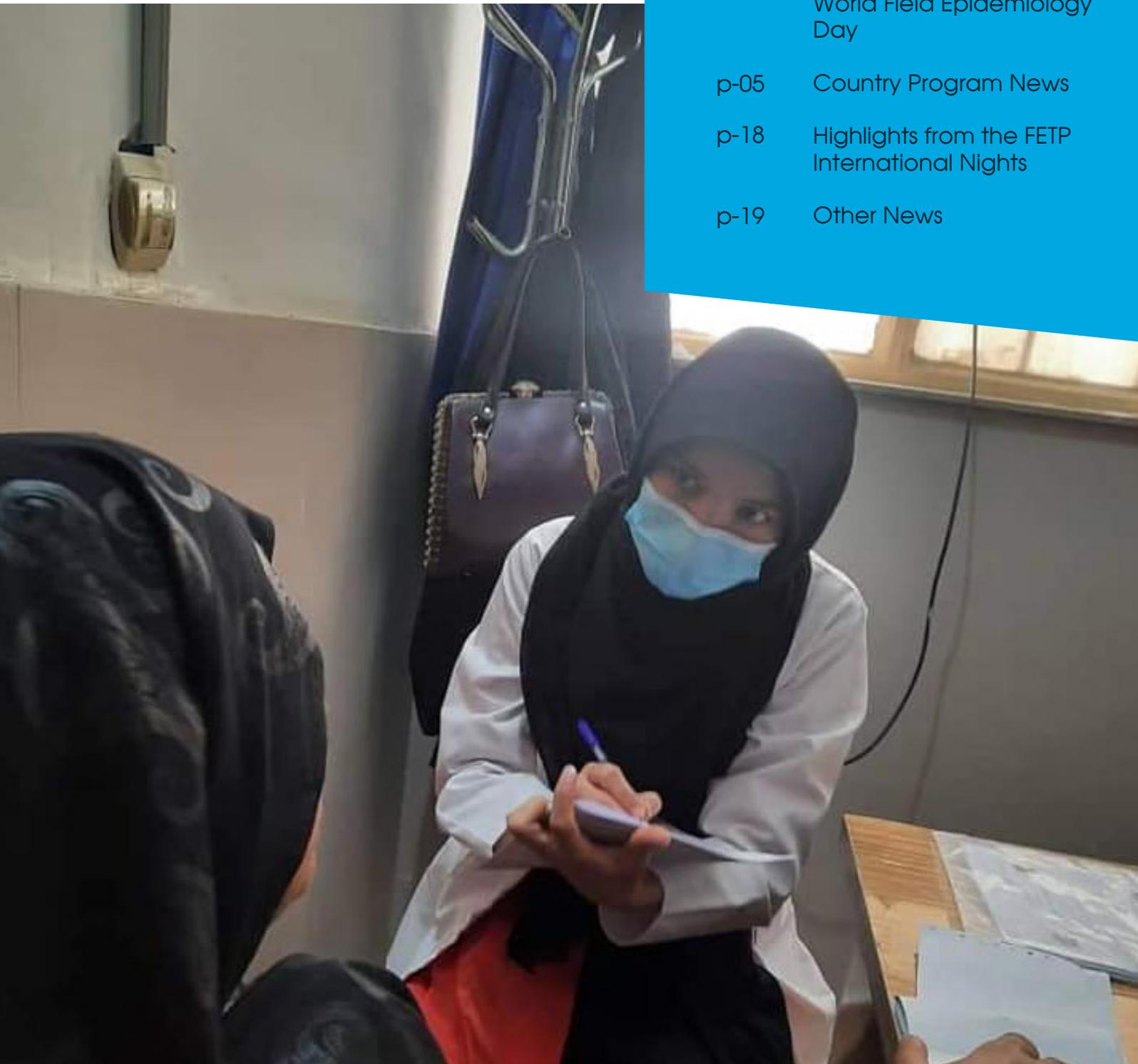
# FETP NEWSLETTER

July – September , 2021

## Eighth Issue

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## Editor's Letter

Dear Readers,

GHD|EMPHNET is pleased to bring you the eighth issue of its Quarterly Field Epidemiology Training Program (FETP) Newsletter. This issue covers FETP news and events from July 1 to September 30, 2021. It features the graduations celebrated and the public health programs launched during this quarter. It also contains sections dedicated to the latest news from different country programs, while highlighting the achievements of several FETPs during the FETP International Nights.

We also included a special section on the first two winners of the Voices from the Field Writing Competition, sharing their stories in this issue. We also shed light on our preparations for EMPHNET's Seventh Regional Conference that will be held in November. These are just a few of the subjects covered in the pages that follow.

The news covered in this issue attests to the region's FETP residents' and graduates' hard work, dedication, and commitment, as well as their valuable contributions to public health in their respective countries.

We hope you find an insightful reading experience in the pages that follow, and that they serve as a source of inspiration for you all.

FETP Newsletter Editorial Team

### EMPHNET is Launching the EMPHNET Electronic Library (EEL)!

EEL is an online portal that contains resources that are of relevance to public health professionals in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR). It meets the research and continuing learning needs of FETP residents, graduates, public health professionals, students of public health, and other individuals interested in expanding his or her knowledge in the area of public health.



**Stay tuned for the launch!**

### Join Our Networking Platform!



**EpiShares is a networking platform designed to join public health professionals and experts in a space where they can express thoughts, address concerns, and discuss issues relevant to public health. It is free and open to everyone to join. In order to interact and communicate with others, users must first sign up.**

**SIGN UP HERE**

## Feature Story

### EMPHNET and the EMR's FETPs Celebrate World Field Epidemiology Day

On September 7, 2021, the world celebrated World Field Epidemiology Day (WFED). The global movement, organized by the Training Programs in Epidemiology and Public Health Interventions Network (TEPHINET), recognizes and raises awareness of the critical role that field epidemiologists play in protecting populations' health and advancing global health security. This movement, which was commemorated for the first time this year, also advocates for increased investment in field epidemiology training, research, and professionals.

The work of field epidemiologists has received unprecedented attention as the world fought COVID-19, but this attention has not always resulted in a better understanding of the importance of field epidemiology, nor in the increased support required to strengthen public health systems around the world to better detect and respond to outbreaks.

In celebration of WFED, the Eastern Mediterranean Public Health Network (EMPHNET) and various Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) Field Epidemiology Training Programs (FETPs) organized and participated in events that focused on action, communication, and advocacy. Through these activities, they made a compelling case for increased support and investment in field epidemiology for global health and security.

#### EMPHNET CELEBRATING WFED

On September 7, 2021, in honor of WFED, EMPHNET conducted a webinar titled "The FETP Enterprise: An EMR Reflection." The session served to shed light on the concept and importance of the FETP enterprise, the FETP roadmap, and the work of the Strategic Leadership Group (SLG).

The webinar brought together experts to discuss the concept and importance of the FETP enterprise, the FETP roadmap, and the work of the FETP Strategic Leadership Group (SLG). Speakers discussed the challenges and opportunities for FETP sustainability during and after the era of the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the webinar introduced the online FETP training model as a way to benefit other regions and countries' programs. You can watch a recording of the session [here](#).



In commemoration of this day, EMPHNET also published a case study eBook titled **“Case Studies in Field Epidemiology, an EMR Experience.”** This book contains a variety of real-life examples of best practices in healthcare settings from different countries across the region, such as Afghanistan, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Yemen. This book is a valuable resource for public health professionals with diverse medical backgrounds, offering valuable information about field epidemiology in the context of the EMR and beyond.

In addition, Executive Director at EMPHNET, Dr. Mohannad Al Nsour participated in a special panel on TEPHINET’s inaugural World Field Epidemiology Day virtual event held on the day. The panel saw participation from several regional network directors who discussed the role of FETP networks in developing healthier regions. Participants also highlighted their networks’ efforts to respond to COVID-19, the most critical training needs for increased field epidemiology capacity building, and their hopes for the future of field epidemiology.



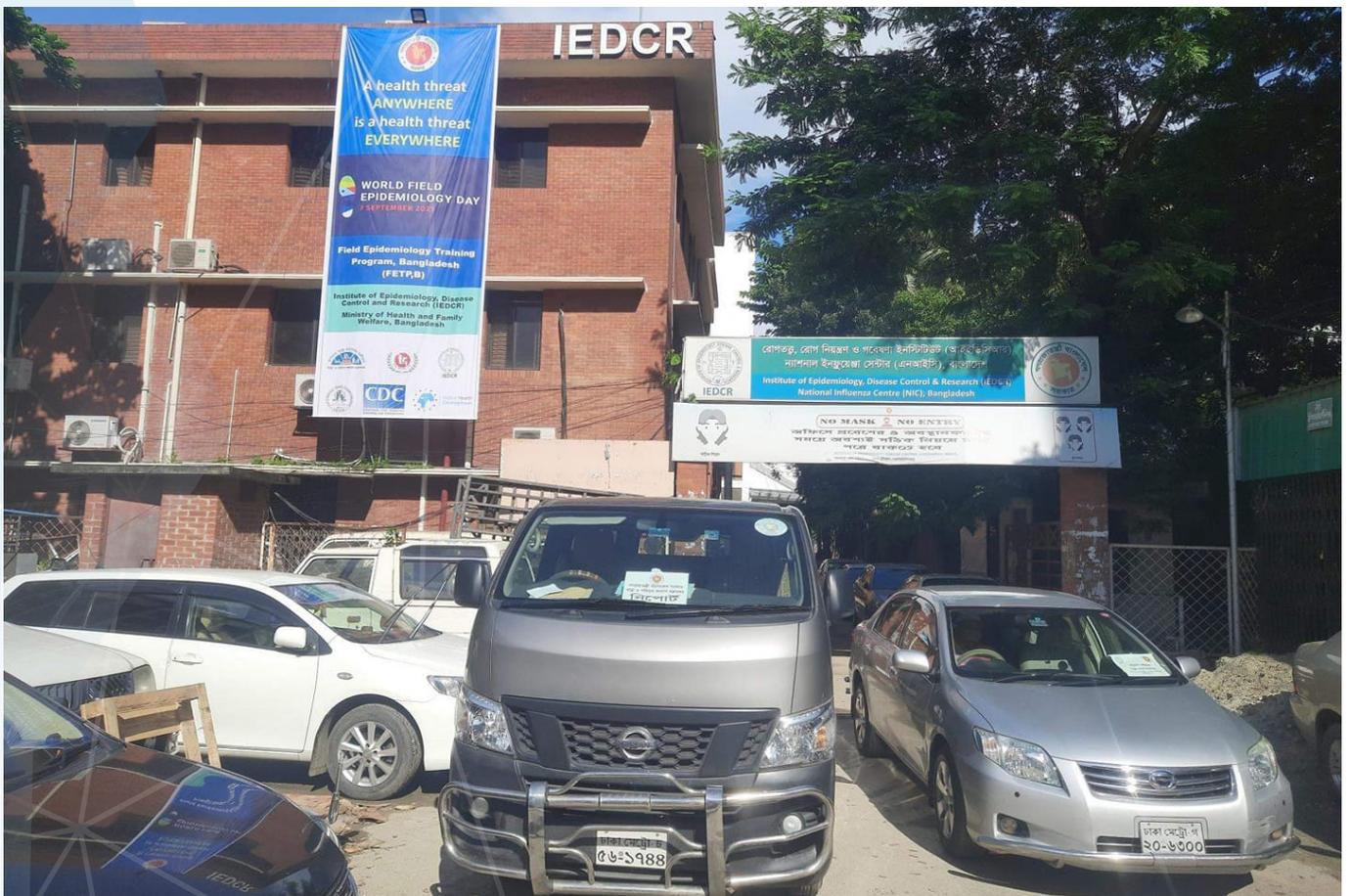
## FETPS ACROSS THE EMR CELEBRATE WFED

Several FETPs from the EMR also joined the celebrations of WFED by organizing and participating in unique events that highlight the importance of field epidemiology in their countries. For example, on September 7, 2021, The Yemen Field Epidemiology Training Program (Yemen FETP) organized a special session to celebrate WFED. Graduates from the four past cohorts and residents of the current fifth cohort attended this session. The event agenda offered a space to highlight the significance of field epidemiology while also providing an opportunity for graduates to share their past experiences.



Sudan Field Epidemiology Training Program (Sudan FETP) also participated in celebrating the WFED by posting a series of videos on its Facebook page. In this video series, several Field Epidemiologists shared their experience while responding to different outbreaks such as Hepatitis E in River Nile State, Chikungunya Outbreak, Cholera Outbreak, and also in assessing surveillance in refugee camps. You can visit Sudan FETP’s [Facebook Page](#) to see more

Other FETPs joined the conversation and participated in celebrating the day on social media and in real life. The Field Epidemiology Training Program for Veterinarians (FETPV) of Bangladesh displayed a poster about WFED on their building to raise awareness of the movement. Furthermore, the Morocco National Association of Field Epidemiology (ANET) published a statement to express their commitment to expanding the field epidemiology workforce in the country. They stated that Morocco is in need of 182 field epidemiology specialists to accommodate the needs entailed by COVID-19.



WFED is merely the first step taken towards raising the importance of field epidemiologists’ work, but it should be an ongoing effort. We hope to see increased initiatives and support for field epidemiology on a regional and global scale.

## FETP Country News:

### AFGHANISTAN

#### AFGHANISTAN FETP RESIDENTS GET INVOLVED IN THE DESIGN OF A CASE CONTROLLED STUDY

Residents from the Field Epidemiology Training Program of Afghanistan (Afghanistan FETP) have been working on a group project involving the design of a case-controlled study on kidney stones within the Nimroz province. The residents are involved in data collection, assessing data quality, and entering their findings into a database.

Data is a crucial component of FETP training, and fieldwork. This is what sets it apart from other public health programs. Furthermore, epidemiologic data is vital for identifying and implementing evidence-based control measures to protect the public's health. Data collected during an epidemiological investigation helps determine the root cause of an urgent public health problem that necessitates intervention. Many steps in conducting a field investigation rely on locating relevant data or collecting new data that address the major investigation objectives.

The challenge in today's information age is not a shortage of data, but rather finding a means to identify the most relevant data for meaningful results. Field Epidemiologists must immediately evaluate whether or not existing data can be analyzed to inform the investigation or whether additional data must be collected. That is why, in general, FETP residents are given data and research data collection training, and why this skill is crucial for their careers.



### EGYPT

#### EGYPT FETP BEGINS IMPLEMENTING A STUDY DESIGN MODULE FOR THE ADVANCED LEVEL

On August 11, 2021, the Advanced Field Epidemiology Training Program of Egypt (Egypt FETP) sat for the study design module as part of their two-year training. The objective of this module is for residents to understand the principles of research design. It is an introductory step taken towards helping them in developing a research proposal for their study projects. Cohort residents also prepared for their group projects by setting objectives and discussing the detailed procedures for conducting these projects.

Research is important in field epidemiology as it supports identifying the distribution of diseases, factors underlying their source and cause, and methods for their control. This requires an understanding of how political, social, and scientific factors intersect to exacerbate disease risk, which makes epidemiology a unique science. Furthermore, field epidemiology relies on research to determine diseases distribution, variables behind their source and causation, and methods for controlling them.



## EGYPT FETP CELEBRATES THE GRADUATION OF THE THIRD PHEP-BFE COHORT

On August 9, 2021, the Field Epidemiology Training Program of Egypt (Egypt FETP) concluded the third workshop for the third cohort of the Public Health Empowerment Program - Basic Field Epidemiology (PHEP-BFE). The cohort consisted of 29 sanitarians who had completed six months of in-service training in various areas of applied epidemiology.

Residents presented their fieldwork during the workshop. The field work comprised outbreak investigation, case investigation, and surveillance evaluation follow-up, including data quality and timeliness of surveillance data. The residents also took the final exam to assess their knowledge and understanding of public health.

The workshop ended with a graduation ceremony which was attended by the Chief of the Preventive Sector within the Egypt Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP), Dr. Alaa Eid; Director-General of the Epidemiology and Surveillance Department, Dr. Hanaa Abu El Sood; and Egypt FETP Director, Dr. Sahar Samy, as well as representatives from MoHP departments, members of FETP Egypt scientific committee, and cohort mentors.

As part of the event's agenda, graduates were recognized for their substantial contributions to the country's detection and response efforts, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The event concluded with a word of appreciation to the members of the FETP scientific committee, cohort mentors, and field supervisors for providing support and guidance to the residents throughout their training.



## EGYPT FETP INTERMEDIATE HOLDS A STUDY DESIGN WORKSHOP

In July 2021, the first cohort of the intermediate level of the Field Epidemiology Training Program of Egypt (Egypt FETP) held its second workshop. The workshop focused on study design, offering a space to review some online sessions that focused on the types of studies, protocol writing, sampling procedures, and sample size calculation.

During the workshop sessions, residents planned for their group projects, and they defined their objectives, and they also discussed the detailed procedures for conducting these projects. This workshop is important for FETP residents because study design plays a major role in determining the scientific value of a research study. The workshop helped residents in understanding basic study design concepts which support them in practicing evidence-based research. From another angle, acquiring study design-related skills would enable the residents to address the research questions they have with minimal ambiguity logically.



## IRAQ

### IRAQ FETP CELEBRATES TWO GRADUATIONS THIS QUARTER

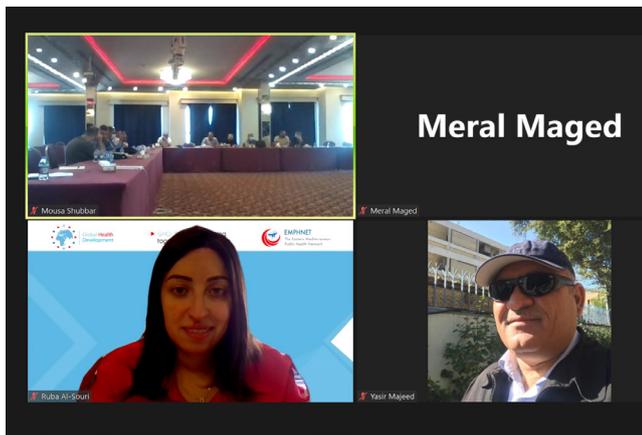
On July 13, 2021, the Field Epidemiology Training Program of Iraq (Iraq FETP) celebrated the graduation of the first cohort of the Public Health Empowerment Program - Basic Field Epidemiology (PHEP-BFE) for the year 2021. Graduates of this cohort are from Missan, Muthanna, and Anbar governorates. The graduation ceremony was attended by the Director General of Public Health Directorates, Dr. Riyadh Alhilfi.

The three-month training included both online teaching and fieldwork, and the program covered topics on data analysis, surveillance, and outbreak investigations. Moreover, the graduates were also mentored by graduates from the Iraq FETP advanced program.



On August 26, 2021, Iraq FETP also celebrated the graduation of the second cohort of the PHEP-BFE for the year 2021 in Irbil. The cohort comprises 21 public health professionals from health departments in the governorates of Nineveh and Salah al-Din. This cohort is also the sixth to complete the PHEP-BFE course requirements in Iraq, from the day the modality was introduced.

During the ceremony, the graduates completed a posttest made up of 20 questions and they received their certificates. Iraq FETP Director, Dr. Yasir Majeed attended the graduation and thanked the graduates and the mentors for their hard work, while members of the EMPHNET Team virtually attended the graduation ceremony as well.



PHEP is gaining more importance now all in light of the current situation that Iraq is facing against COVID-19 and the surge of COVID-19 cases. The program strengthens and improves the basic skills and competencies of front-line teams in areas of surveillance, detection, and outbreak response. The skills gained from this training will build public health professionals' capacities to respond to health threats, at both the provincial and district levels, and it will provide them with the skills they need to manage epidemics and outbreaks at the local level.

## IRAQ FETP HOLDS THE FIRST WORKSHOP FOR ITS SECOND INTERMEDIATE COHORT

The Iraq Field Epidemiology Training Program (Iraq FETP) inaugurated its first workshop for the Second Cohort of the Iraq Intermediate FETP level on July 30, 2021. This workshop is the first in this cohort's one-year training program. The cohort comprises 34 health professionals coming from different directorates across the country. Furthermore, the opening ceremony was attended by the Director General of Public Health Directorates, Dr. Riyadh Alhilfi.



## JORDAN

### JORDAN FETP CONCLUDES INTRODUCTORY COURSE FOR ITS 18TH COHORT

In July, the Field Epidemiology Training Program of Jordan (Jordan FETP) concluded the introductory course for its 18th cohort which comprises 12 residents. The course focused on the basics of epidemiology, outbreak investigation, and disease surveillance. This is the first course taken by the residents as part of their Advanced FETP two-year training program.

The core competencies that the residents learn throughout this course include analyzing surveillance data using epidemiologic methods and conducting field investigations of outbreaks or other potentially serious health problems that require a timely response. In addition, the course also enables residents to design and write protocols while conducting epidemiological studies using analytics. By the end of this course, residents should also be able to write an abstract, develop, and deliver a brief oral or poster presentation at a scientific conference or session.

Other competencies gained during the two-year program include mentoring a field epidemiologist in training, leadership and management, operational research, and the evaluation of public health programs, and surveillance systems. Overall, the program helps residents improve their skills and capacities in order to fight pandemics, improve their countries' health systems, and advance their careers.



## MOROCCO

### MOROCCO FETP CELEBRATES THE GRADUATION OF THE FIRST PHEP-BFE COHORT

With the Director of the National Public School of Health and FETP Morocco Director, Dr. Hassan Chrifi in attendance, the Field Epidemiology Training Program of Morocco (Morocco FETP) celebrated the graduation of the first cohort of the Public Health Empowerment Program - Basic Field Epidemiology (PHEP-BFE) on July 28, 2021. The cohort comprises 18 residents who have successfully completed their graduation requirements after sitting for three-months of online training and field work.

The main objective of the program is to develop the capacity of field epidemiology within the Ministry of Health (MOH), in particular at the operational level. This goal is achieved by strengthening public health surveillance, detection, investigation and response to epidemics. In addition to improving effective communication, and use of data for decision-making, both during normal situations and during times of crisis.

It is anticipated that the graduates will contribute to strengthening the country's surveillance, detection, and outbreak response. The skills they developed will be invaluable in responding to health problems at the provincial and district levels, as well as managing epidemics and outbreaks at the local level.



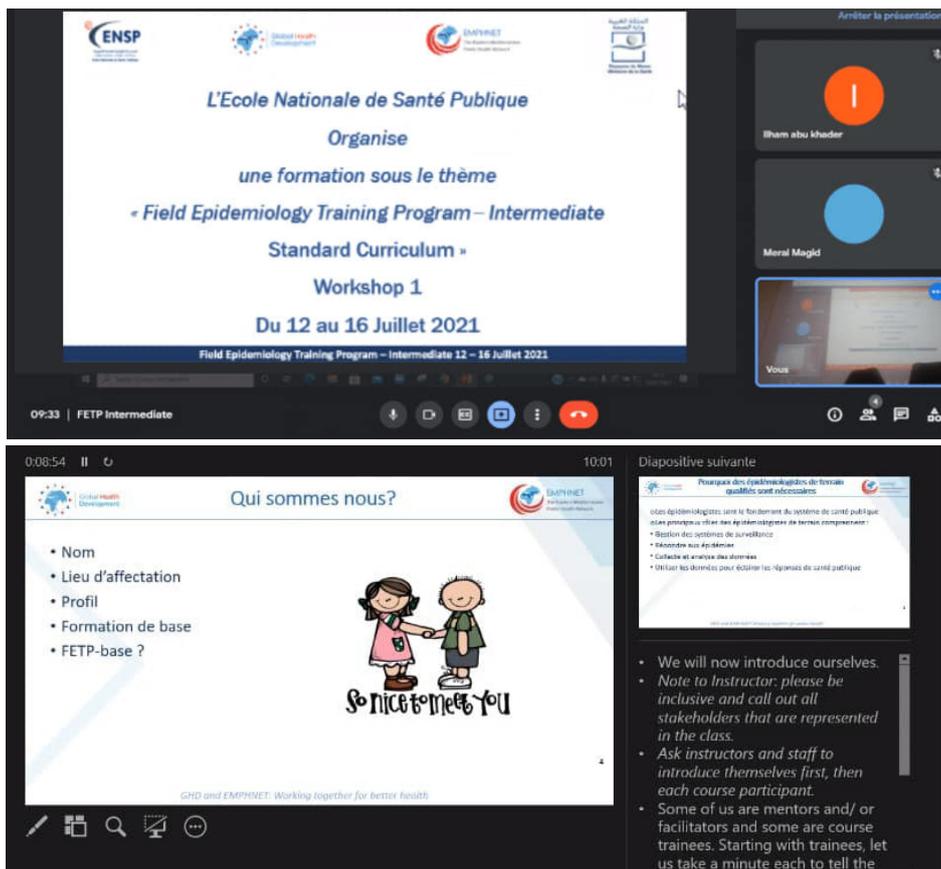
### MOROCCO FETP CELEBRATES THE GRADUATION OF THE FIRST PHEP-BFE COHORT

On July 12, 2021, the Field Epidemiology Training Program of Morocco (Morocco FETP) launched its first planning workshop for the first cohort of its Intermediate program. The cohort consists of 15 residents and ten mentors.

The workshop started on July 12 and concluded on July 16, 2021. During the first day of the workshop, the Director of the National Public School of Health and Morocco FETP Director, Dr. Hassan Chrfi welcomed the participants and introduced them to the FETP Intermediate Program.

Across multiple sessions, the workshop shed light on the steps needed to prepare for fieldwork and mentorship. It also included sessions titled Introduction to Epidemiology, Descriptive Epidemiology, and Ratios, Proportions, and Rate. Furthermore, it covered, Review of Surveillance, Surveillance System Operations, Evaluating a Surveillance System, Summary Statistics, Investigating an Outbreak, and Epidemiologic Study Design.

Finally, residents were also introduced to Epi Info 7 and the Role of Laboratories in Investigating Outbreaks. They also were exposed to Questionnaire Design and Practice and Data Planning, Management, and Quality Control. The workshop is very important because it set the goals and work for the ongoing cohort.



## PAKISTAN

### PAKISTAN FELTP GRADUATES ITS 12TH COHORT

On August 12, 2021, the Field Epidemiology and Laboratory Training Program of Pakistan (Pakistan FELTP) celebrated the graduation of its 12th cohort. This cohort comprises 30 graduates all of whom completed the advanced two-year program.

The majority of FELTP residents' two-year training is spent working in the field. Field activities include conducting epidemiologic investigations and field surveys, evaluating surveillance systems, and communicating findings to decision- and policymakers. Residents also conduct projects which focus on topic areas that address specific country needs. FELTPs offer a tremendous opportunity to enhance public health expertise at the country level.



### PAKISTAN FELTP DISSEMINATES INFORMATION

Provincial Technical Officers and residents of the Pakistan FELTP assigned at the Disease Surveillance, Response Units (DSRU's) are working with provincial, and district health authorities on event-based disease surveillance and outbreak response.

On a weekly basis during this semester, DSRUs have been sharing the disease surveillance data, outbreak reports, and FELTP residents' activities with the Federal Disease Surveillance and Response Unit (FDSRU), Islamabad.

These reports and data are compiled into a Weekly Field Epidemiology Report. You can check the latest report [here](#).

## SAUDI ARABIA

### SAUDI ARABIA CELEBRATES THE GRADUATION OF ITS FIRST FRONTLINE COHORT

In early July, the Field Epidemiology Training Program of Saudi Arabia (Saudi FETP) celebrated the graduation of its first Frontline cohort. This cohort was launched in Hafar AlBatin in April 2021.

Following this achievement, these graduates will continue to develop their epidemiological capabilities and capacities in areas such as surveillance and outbreak investigation. They will continue to serve the Saudi Ministry of Health and other sectors. Below are some scenes from the graduation ceremony.



## SAUDI ARABIA FETP DISSEMINATES INFORMATION

The Field Epidemiology Training Program (FETP) of Saudi Arabia published two Monthly Epidemiology Reports during this quarter. The reports highlighted disease distribution by region, disease distribution by demographics (gender, age, and nationality), and national surveillance data trends with disease rates.

You can check these reports [here](#).

## SUDAN

### SUDAN FETP RESIDENTS INTERNING AT WHO EMRO OFFICE

Three residents from the second cohort of the advanced level Field Epidemiology Training Program of Sudan (Sudan FETP) had the opportunity to intern at the WHO EMRO Office in Cairo, Egypt.

The residents are Medical Doctors serving at the Federal Ministry of Health in Khartoum, Dr. Dina Alabgari; Public Health Officer at the River Nile State, Manahil Dahab; and Public Health Officer at the Blue Nile State, Eaitimad Kamal. On September 1, 2021, the residents travelled to join the Health Emergency Information and Risk Assessment office (WHE/HIM) at EMRO.

The activity is designed to count towards the resident's field requirements; however, it also offers the additional training benefit of exploring and addressing public health threats at a regional level. The residents are expected to learn a set of new skills. Furthermore, they were distributed into three units; COVID-19 Data Management, Public Health Intelligence, and Response Monitoring. They will have some tasks assigned to them in addition to a training plan the includes, but is not limited to, data analysis using Excel, introduction to Rapid Risk Assessment, and Grading of Public Health Emergencies, among others.

The residents are expected to serve at WHO EMRO for four months before returning to Sudan to continue their program activities. This event marks Sudan FETP's first training collaboration with WHO EMRO which involves the placement of residents in regional workforces outside of Sudan.



### SUDAN FETP PARTICIPATES IN ONE HEALTH ZONOTIC DISEASE PRIORITIZATION WORKSHOP

The Field Epidemiology Training Program of Sudan (Sudan FETP) participated in a workshop titled "One Health Zoonotic Disease Prioritization for Sudan" held between August 24 and August 26 in Khartoum. The workshop was organized by the Zoonotic Diseases Department at the Sudan Federal Ministry of Health in collaboration with WHO offices in Sudan and the EMRO region.

The US Center for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) One Health Disease Prioritization process was used during the workshop. The process brings together representatives from human, animal, and environmental health sectors, as well as other relevant partners, to prioritize zoonotic diseases of greatest concern in need for a multi-sectoral One Health collaboration.

The workshop successfully identified eight priority diseases requiring the one health approach and all three sectors agreed on a plan for the way forward in addressing these disease priorities.



### **SUDAN FETP ATTENDS A FOUR-DAY VIRTUAL EPI INFO WORKSHOP**

In July, the Field Epidemiology Training Program of Sudan (Sudan FETP) residents participated in a four-day virtual Epi Info workshop conducted by EMPHNET's Public Health Specialist, Ms. Ilham Abu Khader. The workshop provided a hands-on experience with Epi Info 7, and was attended by eight residents making up the current FETP Advanced Cohort.

The workshop's objective is to develop FETP residents' skills and competencies in using the Epi Info 7 program for data collection and management in surveys and health research. Furthermore, Epi Info is a statistical software designed for the global community of public health practitioners, epidemiologists, and researchers.

It offers a platform for easy data entry and database construction, as well as a customized data entry and data analysis using epidemiology statistics, maps, and graphs. It is therefore useful in the management of epidemiology databases of different diseases, infection factors, vaccination, and others.



## **TUNISIA**

### **TUNISIA FETP CELEBRATES THE GRADUATION OF ITS FIRST PHEP COHORT**

On September 30, the Field Epidemiology Training Program of Tunisia (Tunisia FETP) celebrated the graduation of its first cohort of the Public Health Empowerment Program - Basic Field Epidemiology (PHEP-BFE). The cohort consisted of 18 residents, who fulfilled the requirements of their three-month training program.

This program is a three-month in-service training designed to support national, regional, and local capacities in the areas of early detection, investigation, and rapid response to epidemics and health risks. The ceremony was attended by Tunisia's Minister of Health, Dr. Ali Mrabit, as well as other distinguished figures.

Dr. Mrabit inaugurated the event with a welcoming address in which he emphasized the significance of this cohort's graduation to the country's healthcare system. He concluded his speech by wishing the participants success on their new journey and thanking the partners for supporting this program.

EMPHNET's Executive Director, Dr. Mohannad Al Nsour delivered a speech congratulating the graduates. During his address, he highlighted the importance of enabling workers to acquire skills in the field in order to fight epidemics.

After that, Tunisia FETP Coordinator, Hajar Al Najjar presented an overview of the cohort and its graduates, shedding light on the program's objectives. She added that 36 field projects were conducted successfully.

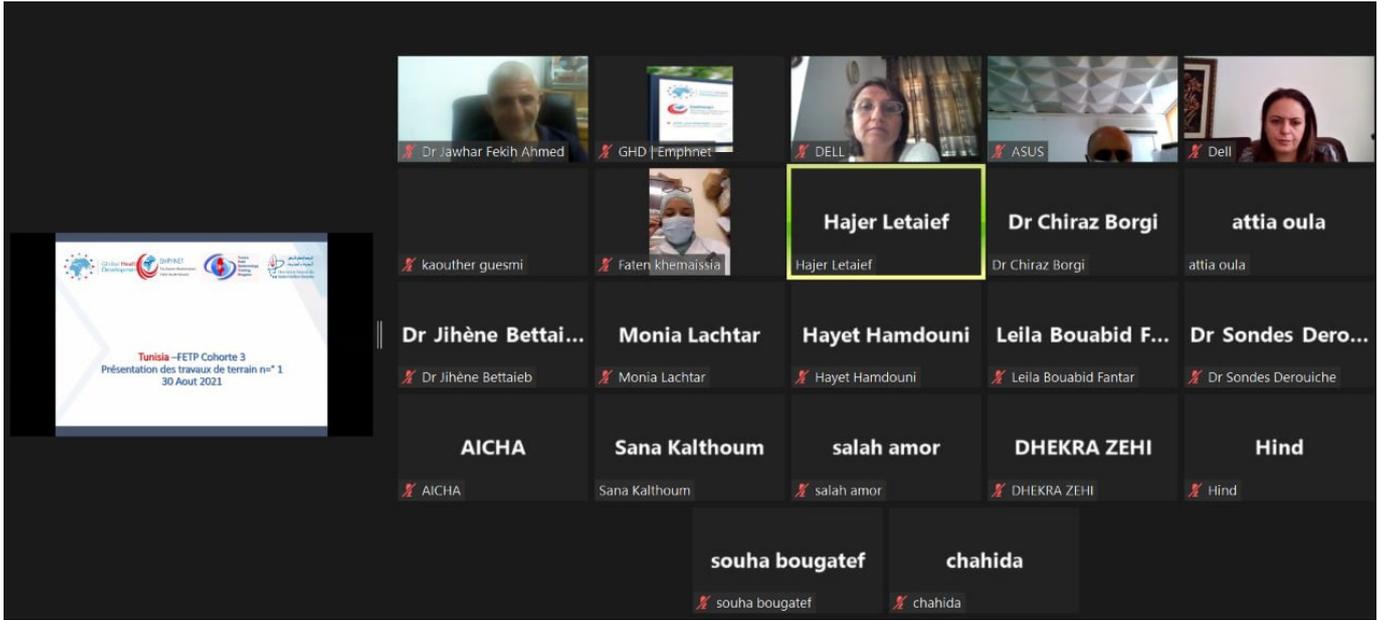
This event is considered a milestone for Tunisia FETP because the graduates will be an invaluable asset in responding to the country's health problems.



## TUNISIA FETP RESUMES TRAINING OF THE THIRD COHORT FOR ITS INTERMEDIATE LEVEL

On August 30, 2021, the Field Epidemiology Training Program of Tunisia (Tunisia FETP) resumed training of the third cohort of the Intermediate level, with the conduction of the second workshop.

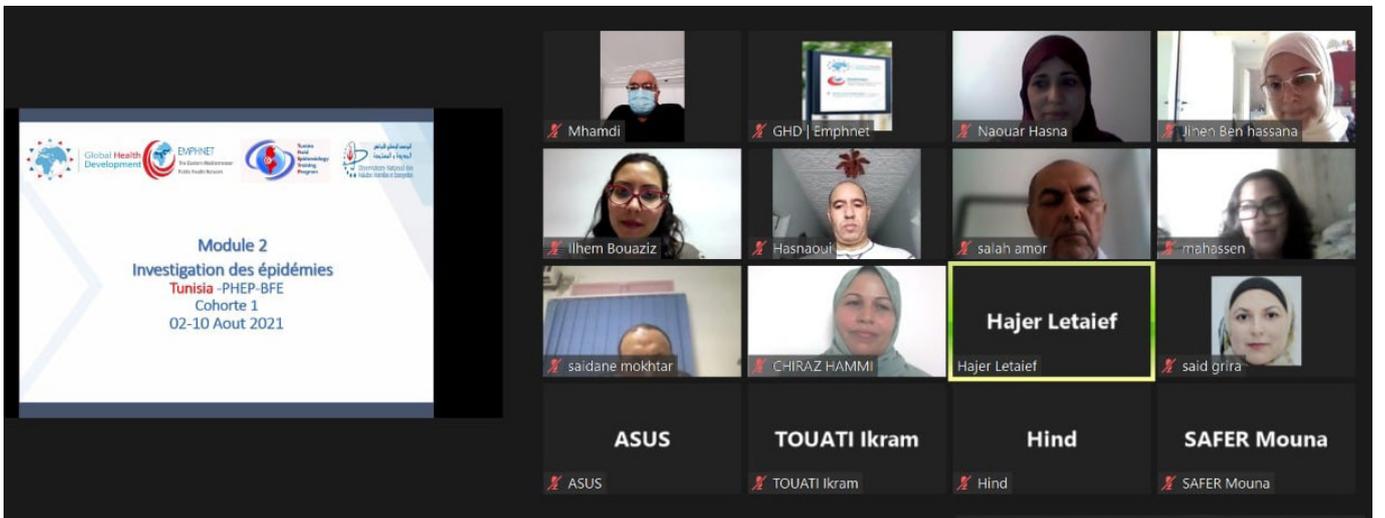
This cohort comprises six physicians and five veterinarians working in regional epidemiological surveillance units. During the workshop, residents presented their findings from their round of first fieldwork. The topics covered included surveillance data analysis, surveillance systems evaluation, and data quality assessment of surveillance systems.



### TUNISIA FETP HOLDS A SECOND WORKSHOP FOR ITS FIRST COHORT OF PHEP-BFE

In August 2021, The Field Epidemiology Training Program of Tunisia’s (Tunisia FETP) first cohort of the Public Health Empowerment Program (PHEP-BFE) conducted its second workshop on Outbreak Investigation.

The presentation of the findings of the participant’s first fieldwork kicked off this virtual workshop. The field work focused on surveillance data and data quality evaluation. The workshop provided participants with the basic skills to early detect, investigate, and respond to outbreaks and public health emergencies, especially in the context of the COVID-19 Pandemic.



Q1 : I e , I ne et RR pour chaque repas (poisson, bœuf et poulet)  
 Q2 : I du fièvre typhoïde = 3/67= 4% (taux d'attaque global)  
 Q3 : étude cohorte  
 Q4 :

	Consommateurs			Non consommateurs			Risque relatif
	Total	M+	I e (%)	Total	M+	I ne	RR = I e / I ne
Poisson	24	1	4,1	30	2	6,6	0,62 = 1
Bœuf	25	1	4	27	2	7,4	0,54 = 1
Poulet	4	2	50	51	1	1,9	26,31 > 1

## YEMEN

### YEMEN FETP PUBLISHES TWO STUDIES

During this quarter, the Field Epidemiology Training Program of Yemen (Yemen FETP), supported by EMPHNET, published three studies.

The first study is on [“Incidence, Trend, and Mortality of Human Exposure to Rabies in Yemen, 2011-2017: Observational Study.”](#) This study aims to describe the epidemiology of rabies exposure, its trend, and its geographical distribution in Yemen.

The second study is titled [“The Rotavirus Surveillance System in Yemen: Evaluation Study.”](#) This study determines the usefulness of the Rotavirus Surveillance System, assesses its performance, and identifies the strengths and weaknesses of its implementation.

The third is a case-control study that describes the cutaneous leishmaniasis outbreak in the governorate of Hajjah in Yemen and determines its risk factors. The study is titled [“Cutaneous Leishmaniasis Outbreak Investigation in Hajjah Governorate, Yemen, in 2018: Case-Control Study”](#).

### YEMEN FETP RESIDENT DR. EHAB AL-SAKKAF SPEAKS ABOUT HIS EXPERIENCE IN PUBLISHING

To respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, the scientific community used all available resources to shed light on the virus’s characteristics, transmission mechanisms, clinical aspects, as well as preventative and management strategies. A great number of papers were published in response to this information crisis. Field Epidemiology Training Programs (FETPs) graduates and residents also contributed to this cause by publishing relevant papers.

To this effect, Yemen FETP Fifth Cohort Resident, Dr. Ehab Al-Sakkaf published a paper titled “First COVID-19 cases with high secondary infection among health workers, Sana’a capital, April 2020: Lessons learned and future opportunities.” With this achievement, Dr. Al-Sakkaf gained recognition as the youngest and fastest FETP resident to publish a paper before graduating. He worked on the manuscript and other requirements in just one month.



Speaking about his experience, Dr. Al Sakkaf stated that this is his first article. The article was published in the International Journal of Infectious Diseases, with sponsorship by TEPHINET. Walking us through the process, he said that TEPHINET made a call to all FETPs around the world, inviting them to participate in a conference through which 12 abstracts were chosen to be published in prestigious journals. Dr. Al-Sakkaf was the Eastern Mediterranean Region’s (EMR) sole FETP participant. Furthermore, he and colleagues from Kenya and Brazil were chosen to participate in the first World Field Epidemiology Day (WFED) in a webinar session titled: **“Celebrating Our Public Health “Disease Detectives”** by TEPHINET.

Talking about the challenges he faced during the process, Dr. Al-Sakkaf said that he had to work on the manuscript while also attending to other requirements such as surveillance analysis, and project evaluation, all within a short amount of time. He also stated that the Yemen Ministry of Public Health and Population (MOPHP) formed a committee to review the report and manuscript and to ensure that nothing would provoke the public’s fear.

Dr. Al-Sakkaf added that fear, stigma, and rumors were spreading within the public during the outbreak investigation. Such rumors included that health centers were giving sick individuals mercy shots to kill them instead of treating them. He also said that the involvement of the national security authorities had a negative impact on the public’s perception towards the pandemic and seeking treatment.

In addition, Dr. Al-Sakkaf mentioned that as the disease was new, there was a lot of information and updates to pay attention to. While he was updating the references for his paper, he discovered that the case definition issued by WHO in April was updated more than four times.

He said that he faced these challenges with perseverance, tenacity, and hard work. “It was a mission-impossible kind of task,” he said, further adding that the assistance and support he had from the Yemen FETP administration, Dr. Abdulwahed Al Serouri, and Dr. Mohammad AL Emad, Dr. Yasser Ghaleb, and others was invaluable.

When asked what inspired him to publish the paper, he said that the research itself was important to him. He explained that the paper investigated the country’s first two COVID-19 cases and the report shed light on the effects of this disease on healthcare workers, as well as the high risk of secondary infection among HCWs compared to the case’s contacts.

He was also inspired by the fact that his grandmother became ill with COVID-19, and she passed away during the second wave in Yemen. He stated that during the first few months of COVID-19, a lot of rumors circulated, thus discouraging people from going to the hospital. In response to this fact, he set up a semi-intensive care unit and treated her at home.

In addition, he said that many people were infected with COVID-19, and he felt he had to publish the paper to raise awareness about the disease and its risks. “The MOH reread my report and concluded that my report wouldn’t provoke public terror as it only discusses the first two cases and their contacts,” he explained. He was also inspired by the words of the Yemen FETP Technical Advisor, Dr. Al Serouri who was also his mentor, as he always used to say, “Publish or Perish.”

After publishing his paper, his fellow residents were happy for him and were eager to publish their papers as well. Yemen FETP administration congratulated him and shared his paper with graduates and different stakeholders. Since his paper shed light on the most affected group from COVID-19, which is the HCWs, authorities paid greater attention to them and even started paying them danger pay. International organizations like WHO, MSF, and UNICEF supported HCWs too by providing them with vaccinations. Internationally, Dr. Al-Sakkaf also received several invites from international organizations to participate and present at their conferences.

When asked how the FETP benefited him, Dr. Al-Sakkaf explained that he had been working as a health specialist, program manager, and officer for the last three years with different organizations. This work gave him expertise in the areas of management, clinical, and administrative aspects but no real fieldwork. During his two years of study in the program, he developed his teamwork and outbreak investigation skills. He also benefited from the program in terms of surveillance analysis, program evaluation, among other areas.

Talking about his goals, he stated that he wants to obtain a PhD and use his skills and expertise to serve as a first responder in the events of an epidemic or a pandemic. Sharing advice for his fellow residents he said, “Publishing is difficult, especially in developing countries with no basic infrastructure, but don’t give up, even if you face many challenges.”



## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE FETP INTERNATIONAL NIGHTS

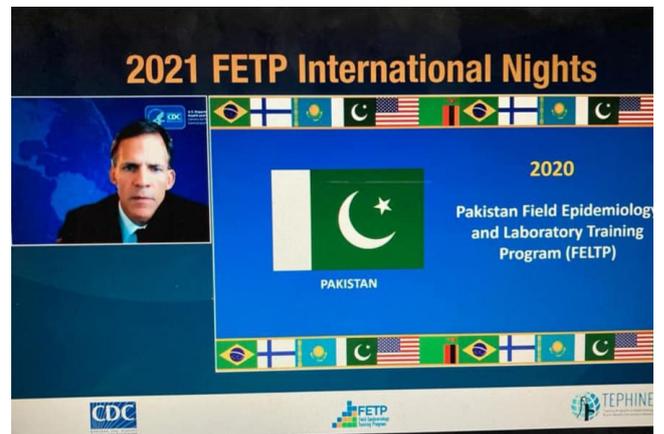
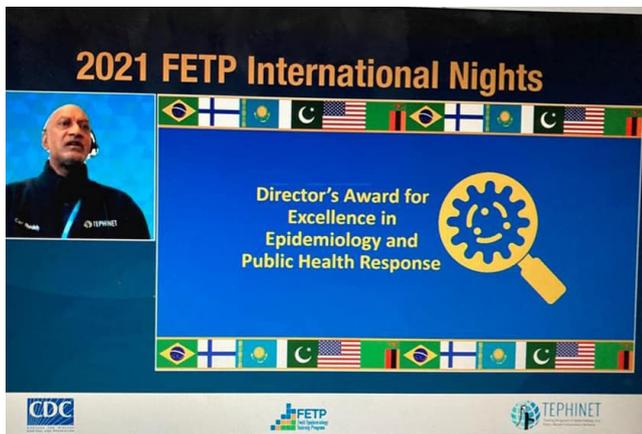
This year's FETP International Nights was organized by TEPHINET and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This event is generally conducted during the annual Epidemic Intelligence Service (EIS) Conference in Atlanta. Following the cancellation of the 2021 Epidemic Intelligence Service (EIS) Conference, the two organizations decided to hold the FETP International Nights as a separate, virtual event.

Over the last two decades, the yearly event has become a highly anticipated venue for the global Field Epidemiology Training Program (FETP) community, providing a chance for FETP trainees and graduates to discuss their work with the scientific community.

On Wednesday, July 14, FETP Team Lead at CDC, Dr. Seymour Williams welcomed attendees from around the globe to the two-day virtual conference. Due to the cancellation of the 2020 EIS Conference, this year's event had an overwhelming number of excellent abstracts for review, resulting in an increase in the number of accepted posters from 20 to 40. In addition, seven abstracts from the region's FETPs have been accepted, including one oral presentation abstract from Pakistan, and six poster presentation abstracts from Egypt, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen.

### PAKISTAN FELTP GETS AN AWARD DURING THE FETP INTERNATIONAL NIGHTS OF 2021

During the FETP International Nights of 2021, the Field Epidemiology and Laboratory Training Program (FELTP) of Pakistan was awarded the Director's Award for Excellence in Epidemiology and Public Health Response. This award is presented in recognition of the significant contributions toward successful responses to public health emergencies (natural and manmade disasters, disease outbreaks, etc.). The award is also to recognize excellence in epidemiologic practice or research and contributions that address a public health issue of major importance by applying epidemiologic principles and methods.



### AFGHANISTAN AND YEMEN FETPS WIN IN THE 2021 FETP INTERNATIONAL NIGHTS PHOTO CONTEST

Each year, TEPHINET and the CDC organize a photo contest to showcase the visual communication of field epidemiological work. A panel of judges from TEPHINET and the CDC selected the top three winners, and TEPHINET also posted the photos to its Facebook page for a vote from its followers. Yemen FETP won third place and Afghanistan FETP won fourth place (Facebook Vote Winner).



Third place: Ehab Al-Sakkaf (Yemen)



Fourth place: Abdul Shakour Karimi (Afghanistan)

## OTHER NEWS:

### BANGLADESH INTERMEDIATE FETP HOLDS A TRAINING NEEDS ASSESSMENT DISSEMINATION WORKSHOP

On September 8, 2021, the Field Epidemiology Training Program (FETP) of Bangladesh held a training needs assessment dissemination workshop. The session included a presentation of the findings of the Bangladesh Intermediate FETP Training Needs Assessment.

During the session, the blended learning approach was also advocated for in order to accommodate the reality brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Discussions were also held on how training plans will be implemented in light of the pandemic, all in order to finalize the Intermediate FETP curriculum that will be implemented in Bangladesh.

This is a crucial step to be taken with the launch of any FETP since it ensures that programs are meeting specific country needs. Furthermore, the workshop was attended by Implementation Stakeholders of the Bangladesh Intermediate FETP, CDC Country representatives, and team members from EMPHNET.



### VOICES FROM THE FIELD WINNERS

Earlier this year, EMPHNET launched its Voices from the Field Writing Contest, in which it asked FETP residents, graduates, and other public health professionals to share their stories and experiences responding to the COVID-19 pandemic in the field. The winners of the Voices from the Field Writing Contest for the year 2021 are Dr. Nadine Haddad from Lebanon, Dr. Sawsan Jarallah Hasan Naji from Yemen, Dr. Hiba Abdalrahim Osman Omer from Sudan, Dr. Samreen Ashraf Qureshi from Pakistan, and Dr. Aamir Hussain from Pakistan.

We share with you this quarter two of the stories that got the first and second place.

**First Place – Dr. Nadine Haddad from Lebanon**

**“Never Prepared Enough”**

“I have never seen so many deaths in such a short period of time, throughout my professional career, I just can’t take it anymore”, confessed the Infectious Diseases (ID) specialist who was treating COVID-19 cases despite her infection.

Back in January 2020, I was not really worried about COVID-19 becoming the next pandemic. In fact, I was convinced that - after almost a decade of efforts implementing the International Health Regulations, developing preparedness plans, and executing thousands of simulation exercises - most of the countries including Lebanon would be prepared to face another outbreak of a respiratory virus. At least, this is what I genuinely believed in; but I was wrong!



When the first case was detected in Lebanon, I was thrilled to be finally employing the expertise gained from the H1N1 pandemic and all the field training I had undergone. But, the succeeding chain of real-life events was not like anything I was ever trained for. None of the previous practices I took part in taught me how to handle midnight calls from medical personnel, nor had they guided me towards responding to questions about handling suspected cases. I was faced with confronting the fears of a patient fearing to lose his life against the disease as I also had to learn how to trace contacts while explaining their critical role in containing the transmission. I was forced to guide outraged community leaders through the implementation of response measures while fighting discrimination and negligence. There were no guidelines to prepare me for this; I just had to learn it by daily practice amidst escalating outrage and rising cases.

After months of lockdown successfully delaying the outbreak peak in the country, convincing people that “the battle is not over yet” was another challenge. The epidemiological modelling exercise in which I contributed was clear: “an inevitable forecasted peak” amidst loosened distancing measures....

“I can’t let my patients die alone; they need someone to hold their hands while they take their last breath”, continues the ID. “I was not prepared for this number of deaths”.

More than a year in the pandemic, and we – as health professionals and authorities worldwide - are still not prepared! Why? Despite all extraneous efforts, public health was far from being the priority of any national development agenda. As this won’t be the last pandemic, we are all called to prioritize public health with its all-basic pillars: Epidemiology, Health management and – most importantly – Health communication.

**Second Place – Dr. Sawsan Jarallah Hasan Naji from Yemen**

**“Messages from COVID-19”**



While the world was buzzing about the number of cases and increased mortality rates associated with COVID-19, I was concerned with the vulnerability of those developed countries with mature economies and technologically advanced infrastructure, as they were facing challenges while responding to the pandemic.

I thought to myself that if COVID-19 cases first appeared in our region we would really be at a loss, as our region lacks basic infrastructure. I wondered how I was to face all those fears that I am having day after day, and how was I to reassure others who saw me as a safety valve and a means of survival for them.

One day, a friend messaged me, saying he had returned from Sudan, and that he was experiencing COVID-19 symptoms. He said that he was in El-Rawda, Taiz. He was self-quarantined in his home, scared, and seeking advice on what to do next. I tried to reassure him by telling him he would be okay. I also advised him to go to Safwa hospital the next day for a PCR test, and to eat healthy food, and to avoid social media and the news.

I didn't expect that COVID-19 cases would spread so quickly in Yemen, I thought that the war was enough for us. I told my colleagues that if a case was reported in Yemen, I would stay isolated until the pandemic was over. But soon enough, I received a call from our area's investigation team saying that we will be involved in case investigations in Salla the next day. Upon hearing the news, I tried to pull together all my strengths. According to the leader of the Outbreak Investigation Team, the area has a high number of marginalized people who are not interested in taking precautions or practicing personal hygiene. I felt that he was subtly telling me to brace myself for the worst.

My feelings of fear soon changed, as suddenly, I became more excited about this challenge. I felt that it would help me break through the barrier of fears that I had put up since the beginning of the pandemic. The next day, we began working in the field. We moved between the mountainous houses of Hasanat, and the remnants of the war in the archaeological Thabat and Al-Jamaliah towns.

On the last day of the fieldwork, we were in Al-Mahwa, a marginalized community that was cleaner than the residential neighborhoods we visited the previous days. Yet, we still held concerns, believing that marginalized people would be reckless and that they would deny all information circulating about COVID-19. We completed our work successfully, but I discovered that my younger sister soon became infected and that the infection has spread to my other sister, then to my younger brother, then to my other brother, who is years older, and then my mother.

Indeed, the pandemic had spread throughout the neighborhood, and everyone had refused to go to hospitals and health centers. They believed that the health services were poor, and they spread rumors that doctors in hospitals gave patients suffering from these symptoms what is known as a mercy dose in order to eliminate the sick. Soon enough, the symptoms started creeping into my body, which was already exhausted by the news.

Dr. Abdel Hakim, one of my colleagues, knew I was tired and assured me that my immunity would remain strong as long as there was no anxiety. Days passed, and the airports were reopened, and Dr. Abdel Hakim was among those who returned to the homeland. Then, the second wave of the pandemic occurred at the beginning of the year 2021.

I was surprised one day when my sister, who works in a hospital, told me that Dr. Abdel Hakim was sick and was in the intensive care unit. It was only days until we heard the news of his death with COVID-19, and we and all his colleagues were sad and sorrowful at first because we lost a man who was larger than life. We were also sad because we did not stand by him as he did by us. We stood idly not saying anything, but we were confident in his courage and strength to overcome crises. However, this time he shattered all our expectations.

We thank everyone who participated in the contest; all entries were insightful and motivating. Keep checking our upcoming issues for more Voices from the Field stories.

## PREPARATIONS FOR EMPHNET'S SEVENTH REGIONAL CONFERENCE

The Eastern Mediterranean Public Health Network (EMPHNET) announced its Seventh Regional Conference, which will take place in Amman, Jordan, between November 14 and 18, 2021. It aims to promote knowledge exchange among countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) and enhance collaboration in the field of public health.

"Towards Public Health Resilience in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: Breaking Barriers" is the theme of this year's conference. Within this theme, conference sessions will focus on exploring ways to achieve public health resilience in the EMR. The conference will shed light on the latest scientific findings, important lessons learned, and discussions on ways in which current barriers can be broken down through coordination and collaboration.

The conference objectives are to:

1. Engage public health experts and national, regional, and international entities in a discussion of public health challenges and their contribution to the SDGs.
2. Facilitate experience exchange and knowledge sharing among public health professionals and entities to encourage regional coordination.
3. Analyze, demonstrate, and share local, regional and global public health lessons and expertise.
4. Assess efficiency in the translation of evidence-based science into action.
5. Present the accomplishments of public health professionals from the region.

Abstracts submission was open from August 3 to September 30, 2021. Residents and graduates of FETPs, as well as public health professionals from the region, were welcome to submit abstracts. Abstracts focused on topics in line with the Conference theme of "Towards Public Health Resilience in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: Breaking Barriers." Registration for the conference is open from September 12 to October 15, 2021. You can register [here](#).

You can visit the [website](#) for any further details.



## Mark Your Calendar for The Seventh EMPHNET Regional Conference

**It is our pleasure to announce that the Seventh EMPHNET Regional Conference will be held between November 14 and 18, 2021. To accommodate for the current epidemiological situation affecting both the region and the world at large, and to ensure that the conference sessions will be accessible to the region's public health community and beyond, we are excited to announce that this edition of our bi-annual event will be held in a hybrid manner.**

**Check out the conference's website for more details here.**