



NOVEMBER 2024

THE EIGHTH EMPHNET REGIONAL CONFERENCE

THE THEME

The Eighth EMPHNET Regional Conference came to a close on September 18, 2024, while leaving a great impact on the region's public health status. In keeping with its theme **"Advancing Public Health Preparedness and Response: Challenges, Opportunities,**

and Ways Forward", it played a pivotal role in spearheading discussions that brought together officials and subject matter experts in a space that allowed for fruitful discussions pertaining to pressing public health challenges.

WHY IT WAS IMPORTANT?

The varied participation seen in EMPHNET's Eighth Regional Conference presented an opportunity to bring subject matter experts in one place to discuss pressing public health issues, especially at a time when the EMR is suffering the aftermath of pandemics, and the effects of manmade emergencies, as well as

natural disasters. The conference created a true opportunity to explore ambitious and innovative solutions that can be implemented within a multi-sectorial context. Discussions empowered multinational partners to break down existing and anticipated barriers, paving the way to building healthier communities.

THE CONFERENCE OBJECTIVES

The conference was designed to engage public health experts and national, regional, and international entities in a discussion about the opportunities, and ways forward towards achieving public health preparedness in the region and beyond. It was set to facilitate spaces for experience exchange

and knowledge sharing among public health professionals and entities with aims to encourage coordination.

Finally, It also offered a space to present the accomplishments of public health professionals from the region.

THE SPECIFICS

The conference was held between September 15 and 18, 2024 in Amman, Jordan, and was hosted at the Landmark hotel. However, this conference is not an isolated event but rather a staple in EMPHNET’s schedule. This conference was the eighth in a series of conferences EMPHNET holds biennially. To date it has held eight conferences as listed below

Third EMPHNET Regional Conference, Marrakech, Morocco, 2013

Fifth EMPHNET Regional Conference, Marrakech, Morocco, 2016

Second EMPHNET Regional Conference, Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, 2011

First EMPHNET Regional Conference, Amman, Jordan, 2009

Fourth EMPHNET Regional Conference, Aqaba, Jordan, 2015

Sixth EMPHNET Regional Conference, Amman, Jordan, 2018

Seventh EMPHNET Regional Conference, Amman, Jordan, 2021

Eighth EMPHNET Regional Conference, Amman, Jordan, 2024

IN NUMBERS



300
Public Health Professionals



67
Oral Presentation



8
Conference Roundtables



25+
Countries Represented



20
Posters



3
Panel Discussions



520
Abstracts Received



5
Conference Workshops



2
Public Health Forums



THE GRAND OPENING

Convening at a time of escalating global health challenges, the Eighth EMPHNET Regional Conference's four-day agenda commenced with an opening ceremony held on the evening of September 15, 2024, at the Landmark Hotel in Amman, Jordan. The ceremony was attended by Public Health Experts, and High Officials including Ministers, Ambassadors, and high delegates.

In his opening address, EMPHNET's Executive Director, Dr. Mohannad Al Nsour, placed emphasis

on the urgent need for regional and international efforts to be made towards building health systems capable of confronting increasing challenges, while Jordan's Minister of Health, H.E. Dr. Firas Al Hawari, stressed Jordan's prioritization of public health and its strategic outlook to address global health challenges. H.E. Dr. Al Hawari was also speaking on Behalf of HRH Princess Muna Al Hussein, Patron to the Eight EMPHNET Regional Conference.

RECOGNIZING SUPPORT AND ACHIEVEMENT

At the close of the Opening Ceremony, H.E. Egypt's Former Minister of Health and Population Professor Dr. Maha El Rabbat received the coveted EMPHNET award.

WHAT IS THE EMPHNET AWARD?

The EMPHNET Award is given to public health leaders, experts, and professional in recognition of their remarkable commitment to the advancement of public health as a discipline, career, and profession. It was launched to recognize past and current relevant efforts, and to continue encouraging achievements in Public Health and Field Epidemiology in the EMR.



MEET PROFESSOR DR. MAHA EL RABBAT

H.E. Professor Dr. Maha El Rabbat held high-level political, academic, and leadership positions and has accumulated more than 35 years of public health teaching, strategic leadership, policy, advocacy, and operational expertise. She has also worked closely with national, regional, and international organizations as a public health expert on a wide range of public health issues. She works to strengthen regional public health, health systems resilience and governance for human development, particularly in middle and lower-income countries, in fragile settings, deprived areas, and among vulnerable groups through evidence-based public health, capacity building, policy, knowledge exchange, and networking.



PROFESSOR HENRY WALKE GIVES INSIGHTFUL KEYNOTE ADDRESS

From his end, keynote speaker CDC Director for Office of the Director, Office of Readiness and Response (ORR), Dr. Henry Walke gave a keynote address that fell in line with the conference's theme '**Advancing Public Health Preparedness and Response: Challenges, Opportunities, and Ways Forward**'.

In his presentation titled "**Emerging Threats: Are We Ready?**" he shed light on the status of global workforce development, where he said that it is imperative that we train people to gain more expertise in lab, healthcare, epidemiology, and emergency to detect and respond to new and emerging threats. He alluded to the work done through FETPs, Global Laboratory Leadership Programs, and Public Health Emergency Management Programs, while reflecting on his past experiences and the work done by the CDC. Finally, he spoke about the importance of addressing the way health threats are responded to today in order to increase public health preparedness for tomorrow.



A POOLSIDE RECEPTION

With Professor Henry's Walke's address, the conference was announced officially launched. Conference participants and invited guests spent the rest of the evening networking by the pool over snacks and good conversation.





EMPHNET
The Eastern Mediterranean Public Health Network
المنظمة الإقليمية للصحة العامة
The Eighth EMPHNET Regional Conference
"Advancing Public Health Preparedness and Resilience: Challenges, Opportunities, and Ways Forward"
November 15 - 18, 2024 | Amman, Jordan

A DIVERSE AGENDA OF WORKSHOPS, ROUNDTABLES, AND FORUMS

FIVE WORKSHOPS

Play me

The first day of the Eighth EMPHNET Regional Conference saw five impactful workshops addressing critical public health challenges in the region. These workshops brought together experts to share insights, exchange best

practices, and develop actionable strategies for improving health outcomes across the region. Here's a summary of each workshop and its key takeaways.

1 OPTIMIZING PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE FOR cVDPV OUTBREAKS WITH A PARTICULAR FOCUS ON cVDPV2

This workshop focused on the epidemiological context of **circulating Vaccine-Derived Polio Virus (cVDPV)**, particularly cVDPV2, and the challenges faced in the EMR. Experts discussed the gaps in national immunization systems, surveillance, and response activities, especially after the pandemic's strain on health systems.

Outcome

Countries in the region need to **strengthen cVDPV2 outbreak response plans** by conducting simulation exercises, improving routine immunization coverage, and addressing surveillance gaps, especially at subnational levels.



2 FROM SIGNALS TO ACTION: ENHANCING RESPIRATORY DISEASE SURVEILLANCE WITH EVENT-BASED METHODS

Participants explored the role of **Event-Based Surveillance (EBS)** in respiratory disease monitoring, sharing experiences from different countries. The session highlighted the challenges of integrating EBS into existing systems, including the need for better data collection, analysis, and multisectoral communication.

Outcome

To improve respiratory disease surveillance, countries should establish **multidisciplinary technical working groups (TWGs)** to integrate EBS into their surveillance systems and enhance multisectoral coordination.



3 UTILIZING TOBACCO CONTROL EVIDENCE TO INFORM POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

This workshop underscored the importance of **evidence-based tobacco control interventions** in combating the tobacco epidemic in the region. Discussions centered on the use of national tobacco data to inform policy changes, the MPOWER package, and overcoming barriers to data-driven policy implementation.

Outcome

Countries must **prioritize tobacco control efforts** by utilizing data to advocate for policy changes and focusing on the MPOWER package through targeted campaigns and stakeholder engagement.



4 BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS FOR A SUSTAINABLE FETP

Addressing the need for **sustainable Field Epidemiology Training Programs (FETPs)** in the region, this workshop emphasized the role of partnerships at national, regional, and global levels. It outlined a conceptual framework for partnerships and created an actionable plan to ensure the sustainability of FETPs.

Outcome

To ensure **FETPs sustainability**, programs should diversify funding sources and strengthen partnerships, while enhancing collaboration to address the existing human resource gap in the region.



5 MENMAP IN THE REGION: ADVANCING MENINGITIS SURVEILLANCE AND LABORATORY CAPACITIES

This workshop, hosted by the **Meningitis and Septicemia Mapping Network (MenMap)**, focused on **enhancing meningitis surveillance and laboratory capacities**. Experts discussed the implementation of advanced diagnostic tools, such as real-time PCR testing, to improve the detection of invasive bacterial infections and achieve the WHO goal of “Defeating meningitis by 2030.”

Outcome

Efforts to **enhance meningitis surveillance** should focus on improving laboratory diagnostics and delivering targeted training to health workers to strengthen detection and response capabilities.



EIGHT ROUNDTABLES

Throughout the conference, several thought-provoking roundtables were conducted, engaging global, regional, and national experts on pressing health challenges in the region. These discussions offered a collaborative

platform for exchanging knowledge, sharing best practices, and developing action plans. Here's a summary of the roundtables and their key outcomes.

1 STRENGTHENING MULTISECTORAL COORDINATION AND CAPACITY: FROM STRATEGIES TO ACTIONS

This roundtable focused on **the institutionalization of Multisectoral Coordination (MSC)** in the EMR. Experts shared their experiences and discussed the principles and challenges of strengthening coordination among various sectors, including non-governmental organizations.

Outcome

To institutionalize MSC within national structures, it is a must to **promote cross-border coordination** and **empowering grassroots-level leadership** for a resilient health system.



2 INNOVATIVE AND SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS TO REDUCE ZERO-DOSE, WHAT CAN THE REGION DO?

This session examined strategies to improve **routine immunization for zero-dose children in the EMR**. Discussions centered on advocacy, data use, and improving vaccine coverage through innovative solutions.

Outcome

To reach zero-dose children, countries should **strengthen subnational service delivery**, **improve data systems for micro-planning**, and **use digital solutions to track underserved communities**.



3 ONE HEALTH APPROACH IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION: INITIATIVES AND THE WAY FORWARD

This roundtable explored the **One Health approach**, which integrates human, animal, and environmental health. It aimed to advance collaboration and foster region-specific recommendations to address zoonotic diseases and environmental challenges.

Outcome

To implement the One Health approach, stakeholders should **develop region-specific plans that emphasize cross-sectoral collaboration, joint training, and data-sharing.**



4 COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTING OF NCD 'BEST BUYS'

This session discussed implementing **WHO's "Best Buys" for Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) in the EMR and Africa**, highlighting opportunities for collaboration and overcoming implementation barriers.

Outcome

To scale up NCDs "Best Buys", countries should **foster cross-regional collaborations and mobilize resources** to implement effective interventions.



5 ANTIMICROBIAL RESISTANCE IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION: EXPERIENCES, CHALLENGES, AND PERSPECTIVES

This discussion highlighted the importance of multisectoral collaboration to address **Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)**. The session explored national action plans and strategies to combat AMR.

Outcome

To address AMR, countries should **strengthen multisectoral coordination, secure external support, and enforce stricter regulations on antibiotic use.**



6 A BLUEPRINT FOR SUSTAINABILITY: BUILDING FORMALIZED RAPID RESPONSE PROGRAMS

In this roundtable, experts discussed the need for sustainable rapid response systems to public health events, focusing on integrating **Rapid Response Teams (RRTs)** into national frameworks.

Outcome

To institutionalize RRTs, countries should **integrate multisectoral rapid response teams into national emergency frameworks**, with strong leadership, budget allocation, and political commitment.



7 PROFESSIONALIZING PUBLIC HEALTH EDUCATION

Focusing on **advancing public health education**, this roundtable emphasized the need for a competency-based model that addresses workforce challenges and integrates lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Outcome

To advance public health education, a **competency-driven training model should be developed**, incorporating pandemic preparedness to enhance the effectiveness of public health programs.



8 PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE ADAPTING LESSONS FOR TOMORROW

This session focused on **lessons learned from past pandemics** and how they can inform future preparedness. Participants discussed strategies for building resilience and improving response capacities.

Outcome

To strengthen pandemic preparedness, countries should **integrate lessons from past pandemics into actionable strategies**, emphasizing community engagement and multisectoral collaboration.



The workshops and roundtables at the Eighth EMPHNET Regional Conference showcased a collaborative spirit, with experts from across the globe coming together to **address key public health challenges in region**. These sessions not only provided insights into pressing issues such as vaccine-derived polio, zero-dose children, and antimicrobial resistance but also offered actionable solutions focused on strengthening multisectoral coordination, advancing public health education, and implementing innovative strategies for disease surveillance and response. By fostering partnerships, encouraging data-driven policies, and enhancing preparedness capacities, the conference reinforced the region's commitment to building resilient health systems that can better tackle both current and future health threats.

GAZA AND SUDAN FORUMS AND SESSIONS

The EMPHNET Regional Conference dedicated significant attention to **addressing the public health crises in Gaza and Sudan**. Through two forums and two focused

sessions, stakeholders explored the pressing health challenges in both Sudan and Gaza and developed strategies for both immediate recovery and long-term resilience.

GAZA

→ Public Health in Gaza Forum – Priorities and Solutions

This forum presented an **in-depth analysis of Gaza’s public health sector**, emphasizing the immense destruction caused by ongoing conflict. Discussions centered on **rebuilding the health system**, with a focus on communicable diseases, non-communicable diseases, mental health, and workforce capacity development. The forum called for collaboration among stakeholders to **mobilize resources** and **create actionable strategies** for rebuilding and resilience.

→ The War on Gaza Session– Challenges and Opportunities for the Health Sector

This session highlighted the **unprecedented health emergency in Gaza**, caused by the Israeli attacks and human-made famine. Palestinian leaders provided insights into the public health challenges and stressed the **need for advocacy and immediate solutions** to ensure the rapid recovery of Gaza’s health system.

Outcome

The forum and session **collectively underscored the need to mobilize resources and foster collaboration to rebuild Gaza’s health infrastructure**. A **comprehensive recovery plan** focusing on workforce development, infrastructure rehabilitation, and safe access to humanitarian aid was recommended, along with strategies to ensure long-term resilience in the healthcare sector.



SUDAN

→ Public Health in Sudan Forum – Priorities and Solutions

This forum addressed **Sudan's health crisis**, raising international awareness and advocating for urgent support. The discussions aimed at **developing strategies for both immediate relief and the long-term rebuilding** of Sudan's healthcare system, with a strong focus on international and regional collaboration to strengthen resilience.

→ The Health System in Sudan, from Fragility to Resilience Session – The Impact of Conflict

This session explored the **current state of Sudan's health system** amidst ongoing conflict, discussing the **short- and long-term effects on healthcare delivery**. Key stakeholders emphasized the role of advocacy, international support, and community-led initiatives in rebuilding Sudan's health system.

Outcome

The discussions emphasized the need for **strategic governance, international support, and community-led initiatives** to rebuild Sudan's health system. Strengthening the system's resilience through long-term planning and sustained humanitarian efforts was highlighted as essential for its recovery.



The forums and sessions on Gaza and Sudan shed light on the **devastating health impacts of conflict in these regions**. Through **collaboration, resource mobilization, and strategic planning**, both Gaza and Sudan can work towards rebuilding their healthcare systems, **ensuring resilience, and addressing future challenges**. The conference called for sustained global and regional support to achieve these goals, emphasizing the need for immediate action paired with long-term commitment.

THE GRAND FINALE

After four insightful days of knowledge sharing, the Eighth EMPHNET Regional Conference came to a close in a celebratory closing ceremony, marking the notable milestones and achievements the conference days saw.

Addresses were given by Chairperson of the EMPHNET FETP Board of Directors, Prof. Nissaf Bouafif Ben Alaya and Head of the Conference Scientific Committee, Director of EMPHNET's Center of Excellence for Applied Epidemiology, Prof. Yousef Khader, who respectively spoke about the scientific value that the last four days provided.

Scientific achievements were further recognized during the ceremony, with the Best Abstract Award presented to Yemen FETP's Dr. Fatima Belhmer for her work on environmental surveillance for poliovirus, and the Best Poster Award presented to Bangladesh FETP's Dr. Imran Monju for his research on vaccine safety monitoring.

Closing remarks were then given by EMPHNET Deputy Director and Conference Chair Dr. Magid Al Gunaid, who thanked organizers, speakers, contributors, and participants for contributing to the conference's success.

Thank you

On behalf of the Conference Steering and Organizing Committees' members we want to sincerely thank everyone who had contributed to the success of the Eighth EMPHNET Regional Conference. This achievement is only the result of the heartfelt dedication and commitment of each individual who had participated in organizing the event, whether in the event itself, or behind the scenes.

This positive outcome is a result of the steadfast vision of EMPHNET's management team who continue to make the regional conference a staple in the organization's calendar.

A special thank you goes out to EMPHNET's Deputy Director Dr. Magid Al Gunaid who oversaw all conference preparations as Chair of the Conference Steering Committee, as well as

EMPHNET's Executive Director Dr. Mohannad Al Nsour who continues to endorse and believe in this event over the years.

But let us not forget that no event is complete without active participation, so most importantly we thank each and every participant who attended our conference, whether as a speaker, a keynote speaker, an abstract presenter, or an attendee. Each question asked, each comment made, each presentation given, and each speech delivered contributed to enriching the conference's agenda. Last but not least, we thank our partners, as **EMPHNET is not an organization that works in isolation**. We won't be where we are today without our partners' support and contributions.

Thank you all for making this vision a reality!